

## The challenges faced by English language learners in different educational contexts

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**Abstract:** English language teaching in the international context faces several challenges. One challenge is the need for a change in pedagogy to adapt to emergency remote teaching, as seen during the pandemic. Another challenge is the increasing diversity within classrooms due to the rise of students whose first language is not English. Additionally, language teachers' perceptions of challenges evolve over time, with experience playing a role in their perceptions of task difficulty.

**Keywords:** Challenges, Teaching, Learners, English Language, Context.

**Introduction.** Nowadays English is an international language used by almost half of the world's populations. English is used in oral and written communication in various formal and non-formal activities. For that purpose, a person needs to master skills of English including listening, reading, writing and speaking skills. These skills are obtained through the learning process. Learning English is conducted according to learning needs and goals including the ability to communicate with native speakers, the ability to use English in written communication, passing exams, and English as a prerequisite to continue to higher education. Teachers of foreign languages face various challenges in their profession. These challenges include curriculum-related issues, such as the pressure from curriculum demands inhibiting creative and innovative language teaching. Teachers also encounter challenges in instructional methods, assessment and evaluation, motivation, and environmental strategies. Additionally, language teachers may struggle with their own language abilities and the emotional struggles of their learners. Other challenges include dealing with varied levels of proficiency within the classroom, difficulties associated with intercultural aspects of teaching, and the need for training programs to enhance teachers' skills. Furthermore, teachers in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context teaching in an English as a Second Language (ESL) context face challenges related to curriculum, lesson planning, language proficiency, and cultural differences. These challenges highlight the importance of addressing the needs of language teachers and integrating multiculturalism into teacher education programs.

International students face various challenges during their studies. These challenges include linguistic barriers, academic difficulties, social and cultural adjustments, financial issues, and homesickness. Language proficiency and analytical skills are areas where international students may struggle. Cultural shock and adaptation to a new cultural environment can also be challenging. Financial issues such as high tuition fees and high rents are common challenges faced by international students. Additionally, homesickness, loneliness, and depression can affect the mental well-being of international students. Overall, these challenges can impact the successful integration and educational outcomes of international students.

English language learners face many obstacles when reading literature in English. Most literature is culture bound. We expect students to have prior knowledge of literary genres such as fairy tales, myths, legends, and tall tales. If the teacher has not activated prior knowledge or built background information, knowing the vocabulary will not solve the problem. ELLs may be able to read the words but it doesn't mean they will understand the text. They are not aware of information that the author left unsaid; the information that "everyone knows."

Here are some specific challenges that ELLs (English language learners) face when learning to read material in English:

- an abundance of idioms and figurative language in English texts
- density of unfamiliar vocabulary
- use of homonyms and synonyms
- grammar usage especially the "exceptions to the rules"
- word order, sentence structure and syntax
- difficult text structure with a topic sentence, supporting details and conclusion
- unfamiliarity with the connotative and denotative meanings of words
- ELLs may not have practice in expressing an opinion about text
- use of regional U.S. dialects
- fear of participation and interaction with mainstream students
- story themes and endings can be inexplicable
- literary terms for story development are not understood
- unfamiliarity with drawing conclusions, analyzing characters and predicting outcomes
- imagery and symbolism in text are difficult

#### **Challenges that ELLs face when studying science:**

- The vocabulary of science presents a huge difficulty. There are a special set of terms for the student to learn. Even simple words that the student may know, could have another meaning in science.
- Material is covered very fast
- Directions are often multistep and difficult.
- There are too many concepts explained on each page of a science text.
- Cooperative learning may not fit in with students experiences in learning.
- Visuals may be confusing and difficult to understand.
- Sentence structure is complex and the passive voice is used in textbooks.
- What was taught in class does not always match the assessment.
- ELLs are not used to science labs or equipment
- Students lack background in scientific method
- There is no standard form of delivery of information
  - of ethics and morality.

**Literature review:** Different experts proposed different ways of language learning theory. According to behaviorism, language learning is essentially the formation of habit through repeated reinforcement. It proposed three stages of learning which were known as presentation, practice and production (Thornbury, 2005:38).

This process is aimed at developing automatic habits, structuring the language skills including speaking through classroom practice and interaction, modeling, and repetition. On the other hand, cognitivist views learning as a complex skill. The application of behaviorism is considered as the first stage to reach the autonomy. The cognitivist model prioritizes mental function over the social one. Learning is mediated through social and cultural activity, and to achieve autonomy in a skill, the learners first need to experience "other regulation", that is, parent, peer or teacher ((Thornbury, *ibid*).

Different theory of language learning doesn't become a problem for language learners as it is seen as the initial stage to facilitate language learning. It then ought to know learning strategies that are effectively implemented to enhance the learners learning achievement. Oxford (1990 in Richard and Renandya, 2002:121) differentiates learning strategies into some categories: cognitive strategy. It involves the identification, retention, and retrieval of language elements. In learning a language, students use a memory that makes them easy to remember and comprehend the language they are

learning. It usually uses the “key word method” to help them remember new words.

Metacognitive strategy. It deals with planning, monitoring, and evaluation of language learning activities. It can be undertaken by language teachers or students themselves by monitoring the progression of their learning achievement and comparing to the course goals outlined in the curriculum. Affective strategy. It is undergone by those who serve to regulate motivation, emotion and attitudes when learning a language. Affection is put forward to enhance the learners intention to learn a language. Learning a language is aimed at being able to speak the target language, and the strategies mentioned help learners facilitate learning achievement. However, speaking a language is especially difficult for foreign language learners because effective oral communication requires the ability to use the language appropriately in social interaction.

In the process of learning to speak, Richard and Renandya (2002:205) stated some factors affecting learners’ oral communication ability; age or maturational constraints. Age is one of the determinant factors of success or failure in learning English. There is a great differences of retrieving language proficiency between a child and an adult. It is affirmed by Krashen, et.al (1982) in Richard and Renandy (ibid), those who begin learning a second and a foreign language in early childhood through natural exposure gain better proficiency than those begin learning at adult phase. Many adults fail to achieve language proficiency. This proves that learners’ age affect the ability of pronouncing the target language fluently and naturally.

Sociocultural factor is one the factors affecting learners’ oral communication ability. Pragmatic perspective defines that since linguistic communication occurs in structured social context, language seen as a form of social action. Thus, to speak a language, one must know how the language is used in certain social context. In addition, the oral communication applied, involves a nonverbal communication system, which sometimes contradicts the message conveyed through verbal listening channel.

The affective factor is 4 also affecting the learners’ oral communication ability. It is related to emotion, self-esteem, empathy, anxiety, attitude, and motivation. Brown (1994) in Richard and Renandy (ibid) states that learning a second or a foreign language is a complex task. It is associated with feeling of uneasiness, frustration, self-doubt, and apprehension.

English as an international language is spoken in many countries both as native language and as a second or a foreign language. It is taught in schools in almost every country on earth. It is a living and vibrant language spoken by over three hundred million people as a native language. Millions more speak it as an additional language. (Bowen J. 1979) Secondary schools in Kenya enroll students of varying Nationalities and social backgrounds (Okwara et al, 2009).

Okwara et al further says that besides adding to the diversity of learners population, their social cultural settings expose them to varied experiences and values that positively or negatively impact on learning. Teaching methods refer to a broad set of teaching styles, approaches, strategies or procedures used by teachers to facilitate learning (Curzon, 1990).

**Conclusion.** In summary, although students have applied various leaning strategies and teachers have strived to conduct effective and interesting teaching method to achieve speaking capability, they keep facing obstacles in learning to speak English. It seems that the obstacles are mostly intrinsically. The problems are coming from the students themselves. Having lack of learning motivation and interest, lack of basic knowledge and vocabulary mastery, and lack of self-confident to speak. Having lack of learning interest and motivation is caused by the unavailability of good facilities, supporting learning circumstances, interesting materials that fit learners need, beside putting forward negative concept of learning to speak English. Having lack of basic knowledge and vocabulary mastery makes the students find difficulties to understand the materials studied, meanwhile having lack of self-confident to speak makes the students fear to involve in practice with their interlocutors.

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