

A Study on the Challenges in English Language Teaching at the Secondary Level in Kerala

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Abstract: *An international language' is a logical requirement in an era of worldwide information sharing and commercial exchange. Today's world considers English as a global language because there has never been a language so widely spread or spoken by so many people as English. The importance of the English language in educational field is clear from the fact that many countries have made English as an official language. Consequently, the English language teaching (ELT) has become one of the major growth industries around the world in the recent years. All over the world today the study of English is part of the secondary education, and all over there is more failure than success in the learning of English. This failure is not confined to school children alone, but also dogs the efforts of adults who seek to make up for their own deficiencies through extra study later. The enormous waste of time, effort and money has naturally prompted inquiry into the challenges at the secondary level in Kerala*

Keywords: English Language Teaching, Secondary Level

1. Introduction

English is a global language and an essential skill for academic and professional success. In Kerala, the teaching of English at the secondary level plays a crucial role in equipping students with the necessary communication skills. However, there are several challenges in effectively teaching English in the state. This study aims to investigate the key problems encountered in teaching English at the secondary level in Kerala and provide recommendations for overcoming these challenges.

English is considered as an international language due to its importance, which is felt at all levels of education. This study is significant as it provides the data about the prevailing conditions in secondary schools regarding the teaching of English. The findings of study may also be useful for planners, educators and researchers. This study will also be useful for the administration and for the supervisors in making appropriate and relevant arguments for teaching English at the secondary level, with the use of teaching aids helpful in teaching English. In this era where English language learning being indispensable and the role of English as a powerful tool in the future pursuits, and the failure of the present system in realising the objectives of teaching English, the need for a study of this type needs no further mention.

2. Objectives of the Study

- To identify the main challenges faced by teachers in teaching English.
- To assess the availability of resources and infrastructure for English language teaching.
- To propose strategies for improving the quality of English language education.

3. Methodology

- 1) **Research Design:** The study uses a mixed - method approach combining qualitative and quantitative data collection.

- 2) **Sampling:** A purposive sampling method was used to select 50 secondary school English teachers of Kerala.
- 3) **Data Collection Tools:**
 - **Surveys:** Structured questionnaires for teachers to assess their experiences, challenges, and perceptions.
 - **Interviews:** Semi - structured interviews with teachers
- 4) **Data Analysis:** Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were analysed thematically to identify recurring patterns and insights.

4. Analysis and Interpretation

The study identified several key challenges in the teaching of English at the secondary level in Kerala:

Teacher - Related Problems

- **Insufficient Proficiency:** Majority of English teachers, especially in rural areas, lack fluency in the language, which hinders effective teaching. Teachers often rely on Malayalam or regional languages during instruction, further limiting English exposure.
- **Inadequate Training:** about 60% of teachers reported limited access to continuous professional development programs. Many felt that they were not adequately trained in modern, communicative approaches to language teaching.

Curriculum and Pedagogy Issues

- **Outdated Teaching Methods:** Majority of teachers 80% reported that the teaching of English is largely based on traditional methods, such as rote learning and the grammar - translation method, with minimal emphasis on developing communicative competence.
- **Exam - Centric Focus:** About 74% of teachers opined that the curriculum prioritizes exam performance, focusing heavily on reading and writing skills, with little attention to speaking and listening. This leads to students having limited practical language use skills.
- **Lack of Contextual Learning:** About 60% of teachers were of the view that lessons are not contextualized to the

real - world needs of students, which leads to a gap between what is taught and the practical application of English in everyday life.

Infrastructural Constraints

- **Lack of Technology and Resources:** 50% of teachers reported that many schools, particularly in rural areas, lack access to basic technological tools such as language labs, audio - visual aids, and online resources. This limits teachers' ability to incorporate interactive and multimedia resources into their lessons.
- **Overcrowded Classrooms:** They were also of the view that the large class sizes make it difficult for teachers to give personalized attention to students or create an interactive classroom environment that fosters language acquisition.

Socio - Cultural and Linguistic Barriers

- **Regional Language Dominance:** Majority of teachers 80% reported that the widespread use of Malayalam in the state creates an environment where English is seldom spoken outside the classroom. This lack of exposure and practice in everyday settings reduces students' confidence and fluency.
- **Student Attitudes and Motivation:** Teachers also reported that many students view English as a subject to be memorized for exams, rather than as a skill to be used for communication. This exam - driven mentality diminishes their interest in developing language skills for real - world purposes.
- **Assessment and Evaluation**
- **Limited Focus on Speaking and Listening:** Majority of teachers 78% reported that the current assessments emphasize writing and grammar at the expense of listening and speaking skills. Oral communication skills are often neglected, which leaves students ill - prepared for real - world interactions in English.
- **Uniform Assessment Methods:** Teachers (48%) were of the view that the same evaluation standards are applied across schools, irrespective of their varied linguistic and socio - economic backgrounds, which can disadvantage students from non - English - speaking homes.

5. Discussion

The findings suggest that the teaching of English in Kerala's secondary schools faces significant challenges, particularly in terms of teacher proficiency, curriculum design, and resource availability. The traditional focus on exam preparation and grammar - heavy instruction has hindered the development of practical language skills among students.

Additionally, socio - cultural factors, such as the dominance of Malayalam and a lack of exposure to English outside the classroom, have contributed to students' low confidence in using the language. The lack of infrastructure, particularly in rural schools, further exacerbates these issues.

6. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Implement continuous professional development programs focused on modern language teaching methodologies, particularly communicative language teaching.
- Provide teachers with opportunities for English language immersion programs to improve their own proficiency.
- Revise the English curriculum to prioritize speaking and listening skills alongside reading and writing.
- Integrate more communicative activities, such as role - plays, group discussions, and real - life simulations, to make learning more practical and engaging.
- Reduce the emphasis on rote learning and exam - oriented teaching.
- Promote the use of digital tools and online resources for both teachers and students.
- Establish English clubs and debate forums in schools where students can practice speaking in English in a non - judgmental environment.
- Encourage the use of English in school assemblies, events, and extracurricular activities to increase exposure.
- Develop assessment tools that evaluate students' speaking and listening skills, in addition to reading and writing.
- Use continuous assessment methods, such as project work and presentations, to gauge language proficiency beyond written exams.

7. Conclusion

The study highlights the multifaceted challenges in teaching English at the secondary level in Kerala, from teacher - related issues to infrastructural limitations and curriculum shortcomings. Addressing these problems requires a holistic approach that combines teacher training, curriculum reform, technological investment, and the creation of a supportive English - learning environment. By implementing these recommendations, the quality of English language education in Kerala can be significantly improved, better preparing students for academic and professional success.

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