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## PEDAGOGICAL PROBLEMS IN TEACHING MIXED GROUPS

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**Abstract:** Language is the complex phenomenon. It is not a just means of communication. Language is thought also. Language and thought are inseparable. India is a land of many languages and many languages are spoken in our country. While teaching the target language English, the teacher must understand the multilingual scenario and consider it an advantage rather than a handicap. He/ She must respect various languages spoken by the learners and provide space for each linguistic community in the English classroom. Instead of teaching English Grammar mechanically and boringly, the English teacher may think of comparing and contrasting the structure of English Language with those of the different languages spoken by the learners. At the same time the size of the class affect the teaching, and therefore, the teacher is required to adopt a suitable technique in order to teach a particular language item. Group work is considered as an effective means of solving problems of large class.

Just as the size of the class entails problems in teaching, the nature of the class too has its own problems. In this paper we are going to discuss the problems involved in teaching the mixed groups.

**Keywords:** Pedagogical, Mixed groups, Target language, Multilingual, Group work

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### **Introduction:**

**Classroom Implications:** Research studies show that multilingualism helps language proficiency of the learners. The learners in a class constitute a group since they have common interests and objectives which happen to be learning English language- as far as English classroom is concerned. But in the present context of mixed group, the class involves learners from two or more different races, castes, religion, sex and ages. A class that may contain learners from any of these assortments is called a mixed group in the pedagogic sense. The other term in use for the mixed group is heterogeneous class. Even this class consists of learners speaking different languages.

Since multilingualism promotes scholastic achievement and cognitive growth and social tolerance, multilingualism should be taken as advantage rather than a handicap in teaching the target language, English. Languages flourish in one another's company and they die if they are frozen in textbooks, dictionaries and grammar books. Hence the teacher should make use of the strategies of translation, paraphrase, code mixing and code switching very effectively and consider multilingualism a great resource for him / her in teaching the target language. A resourceful teacher can easily devise classroom activities in such a way that the learners speaking different languages participate in them and learn vocabulary and structure of other language besides learning the target language. It is really an interesting and challenging task for the teacher to amalgamate the multiplicity of languages and cultural practices and ethos.

**Mixed Groups and Pedagogic Problems:** A mixed group class may have different types of problems. A

learner not belonging to the dominant group may suffer from socio-cultural problems like loneliness and alienation. Because of these problems, the learner may not adjust himself / herself with the others in the class. These problems do not come under the preview of the present topic. However, apart from these problems; the minority learner may face pedagogic problems in understanding a particular item of language. Similarly, a teacher too may face difficulty in teaching English to the learners in a group. Therefore, the teacher may be required to change the methods, approaches and techniques of teaching. Let us now discuss the specific problems of teaching English to mixed groups and the workable teaching strategies as solutions.

**Different Language Background:** The migration of the people from one state to another, one country to another requires the parents to admit their children in one of the educational institutions available in the region. Majority of the learners in the said institutions happen to speak the first language of the region. As far as teaching English is concerned, pedagogic problems arise when the teacher requires using mother tongue for teaching a particular language item. Since the mixed group in the present context, contains learners whose first language is not necessarily the same. In mixed group of multilingual context, the use of mother tongue poses a problem. The problem is more intensive especially when the teacher adopts the *Grammar Translation* method. In this method the language of the classroom is essentially the first language of the dominant group. Even in communicative language teaching a judicious use of first language in the classroom is recommended. But, the problem is; when the teacher uses the first language of the dominant group, the

other learners who cannot understand it are likely to be at a disadvantage.

**Strategy:** In the context of the multi-lingual media group, what strategy can a teacher take recourse to? The grammar-translation method, which is very commonly adopted in the Indian classrooms, proves disastrous to the learners of other language speakers. In this method, it is teacher who speaks mostly the mother tongue throughout the period. Instead the teacher may adopt the method of allowing more time to the learners for the activities and speech in English. This approach gives equal opportunities to the learners of different language-background.

**Caste, class and religious differences:** This is another area of problems. Indian classroom consists of learners who belong to castes and religions. Differences in castes and religions among the learners are likely to have implications for teaching. For instance, learners belonging to upper caste have the advantage of educational atmosphere at home. They get learning opportunities at home as well. Therefore they are likely to be the fast learners in the class. Same is the case with the learners of rich class. Learners belonging to the lower castes and poor class depend only on the classroom teaching. In respect of religious difference too, the learners belonging to the minority religious are once again at a disadvantage. The teaching materials and the teachers themselves invariably take recourse the anecdotes and examples from the mainstream religion. Resultantly, the learners belonging to the other religions, at times, may not involve themselves in the learning activities.

**Strategy:** In fact there are no readymade pedagogic strategies that help to overcome the problems which arise because of caste, class and religious differences. In other words there can be no predetermined methodologies to overcome the problems like these. The slow learners, a result of caste and class differences, need to be paid special attention. In respect of religious minorities, the teachers are best advised to avoid religion-specific anecdotes and examples.

**Other Differences:** Apart from major differences that we have discussed, several other differences persist among the learners. These include, among others, differences in sex (male or female), differences in age-levels, differences in experiences and differences in thinking styles. Because of these differences, every class, in a way, is heterogeneous. A class is only a microcosm of the society which will have differences in a large scale. All these differences need to be attended to. A teacher's challenge, therefore, lies in overcoming problems by changing and adopting the pedagogic strategies.

**Some assumptions and facts**

**English can be taught only through the medium**

**of English:** Most teachers, parents and some highly educated people think that English can be taught well and acquired only through the medium of English. But it is not true. Most of the English scholars and professors have regional medium background. In fact to acquire a language, there is no need of more input but comprehensible input is necessary. Comprehensible input is like a balanced diet which makes a person healthy and active. If the input provided by the teacher is comprehensible to the learner in the mother-tongue, the output becomes infinite and incredible. In the initial stages the teacher can use of code-switching strategy to provide comprehensible input to the learner.

**It is not easy to teach English in a multilingual context:** Most teachers in general and English teachers in particular are of the misconception that teaching English in a multilingual context like in India is a rather difficult task. But, to the contrary, that multilingualism can be well utilised as a great resource to teach English. The teachers need to be patient, resourceful and innovative to make multilingualism an aid rather than a hindrance in teaching of English. Then teaching English in a multilingual context becomes a more enjoyable experience for a teacher than in a bilingual or a mono-lingual context.

**Learners belonging to tribal areas and backward areas can't acquire English easily:** It is really surprising and shocking to know that some teachers even now believe that learners belonging to tribal areas, rural and backward areas can't acquire English easily. This is really a misconception and totally based on pre-conceived and prejudiced opinion. Anybody can learn any language depending on his / her need and motivation to learn the language. No language is superior to or more difficult to other language. English is no exception to this rule. The fact that it is the most popular language in ht world is a historical accident rather than its linguistic superiority.

**Conclusion:** Multilingualism is more an advantage than a handicap in the teaching of target language, English. Any learner can acquire English if comprehensible input is provided to it. The variety or the mixed group has its own merits and demerits. The

Socio, cultural, religious and linguistic differences among the learners lead to pedagogic problems. At the same time, the Same variety or mixed character of the class contributes to peer-learning. For instance, when the mother tongue of the learners is not the same, they may inevitably use English as an effective link-language among themselves. Thus, what are understood to be the problems can also facilitate to

the learners to some extent.

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