

K. Elango

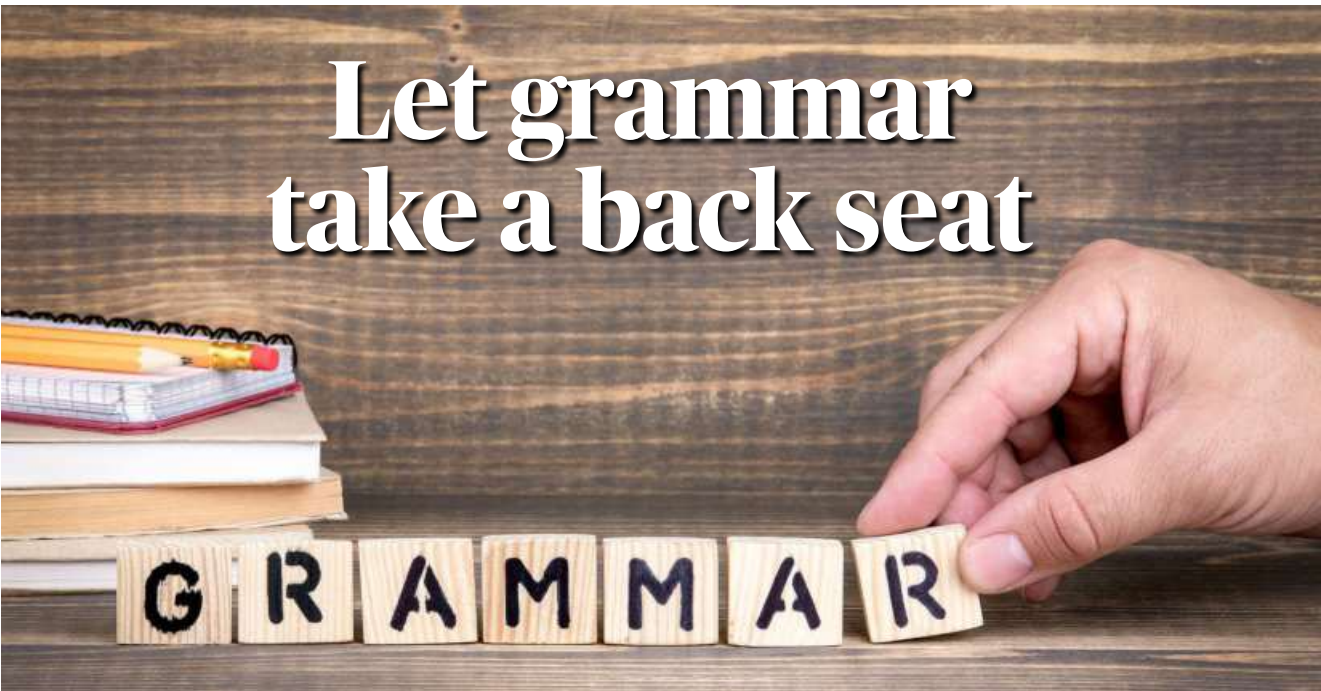
A revolutionary shift is required in the realm of English language teaching to empower learners in acquiring linguistic competence. The current approaches, methods, strategies, and techniques in practice have not yielded the desired results. English remains an aspirational language, despite our country's centuries-long acquaintance with it.

The theories and practices of the English language were predominately shaped by the British, especially the monolinguals who did not have much grip over the bi/tri/multilinguals' styles of acquiring languages. They laid undue emphasis on the peripherals of the language such as grammar and pronunciation and insisted on achieving a 'native-like fluency and accuracy'.

Obstacles to learning

Let us examine how the grammar of English is an obstacle to learning the language, grounded on the experiences of numerous teachers and learners, but which remain unarticulated, as we are treated as non-native speakers.

Drawing upon our experiential knowledge of mother tongues, we could affirm that we acquire them in 'immersive' contexts by watching, listening, imitating, and producing. The initial stages involve articulating sounds, gradually progressing to individual words, then expanding to chunks of words and ultimately maturing to produce simple sentences. Notably,



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The undue emphasis given to grammatical rules when teaching English inhibits students from gaining linguistic competence

bly, grammar hardly figures in the scheme of learning. Polyglots vouch for this, as they constantly keep their antenna alive to pick up expressions from all possible sources and are least concerned about the grammatical correctness of their acquisition. A parallel can be drawn from migrant labourers, who focus on the 'survival language' in their place of residence and work. Even those who never stepped into schools can absorb the necessary language, unaware of their grammaticality.

In informal settings such as homes or any non-institutionalised contexts, grammar takes a back seat, facilitating smoother and quicker language

acquisition. The insistence on grammar, particularly in institutionalised settings, reveals a distortion in the cognitive process, be it the mother tongue or other tongues. Recognising this, educational curriculums introduce the grammar of the mother tongue at a later stage; even then, learners are averse to its components.

In our pedagogy, contrary to real-life ecosystems, the introduction of the language and grammar of English occur almost simultaneously, as if learners could acquire the language through grammar. This ignores the truth that grammar is about the language, not the language.

Another misplacement of

significance lies in attributing equal weightage to all four skills – Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing (LSRW) – disregarding the natural order of acquisition. Speaking and listening inherently take precedence over the other two. Therefore, prioritising speaking over the other skills, particularly in the initial

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An often overlooked, yet crucial, distinction lies in the differences between the spoken and written forms. While written language adheres strictly to grammatical rules, spoken language provides leeway; a single word, a phrase, or an unfinished utterance can effectively convey the intended message. The additional advantage of the non-verbal elements such as gestures, postures, visual cues, and tonal variations can amplify meanings and keep the listeners captivated. Further, the spoken form could be imbued with emotions to sway the audience, but the written mode consistently maintains a formal

tone, follows a linear progression, and 'distanced' from readers.

Regrettably, the grammar of written language is imposed onto the spoken mode, which acts as a stumbling block to gain speaking competence. Nevertheless, a liberating development is the acceptance of non-traditional grammar usage on social media, where code switching, and code mixing are liberally employed and embraced by all.

Reading helps

The most practical approach to gain grammatical sense is predominantly by reading, and this unconscious cognitive process seamlessly embeds grammar into long-term memory. In contrast, the conscious teaching of grammatical items may enable learners to comprehend, store, and recall but incapacitate them in application, serving little purpose. Learning can occur consciously, subconsciously, and unconsciously, and for grammar sub/unconscious learning through reading may prove far more effective than conscious drilling.

Applied linguists emphatically state that the grammar of a language can be learnt without knowing the language and, conversely, a language can be learnt without knowing its grammar. For spoken communication grammar is not an absolute necessity; hence, we must cease to insist on it for the effective acquisition of English.

The writer is a retired Professor of English and National Secretary of English Language Teachers Association of India (ELTAI).

SCHOLARSHIPS

France Excellence Charpak Master's Programme

An opportunity offered by Campus France, India, (a government agency that operates under the French Ministry of External Affairs and the Ministry of Higher Education and Research).

Eligibility: Open to Indian nationals or an Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) card holder not older than 30 years and is enrolled or has studied in an Indian Institution of higher learning, and has applied for admission to a French institution. **Rewards:** €860 per month and other benefits. **Deadline:** March 20 **Application:** Online www.b4s.in/edge/CMPII

Inlaks Shivdasani Scholarships

A merit-based opportunity offered by the Inlaks Shivdasani Foundation. **Eligibility:** Open to an Indian passport holders, pursuing postgraduate studies in universities in the U.K, the U.S and Europe who have a

first-class or equivalent degree from recognised Indian universities and have scored 65% in Arts-related subjects and 70% in subjects related to Maths and Science. Applicants must be proficient in English and must have received a valid deferred offer letter for the current academic year. **Rewards:** \$1 lakh and other benefits (one-time) **Application:** Online **Deadline:** March 22 www.b4s.in/edge/INLAKSI

NICE Foundation's National Information Technology Exam

A national exam conducted by the NICE Foundation. **Eligibility:** Open to students from Class 5 up to degree or diploma level in a recognised institution. **Rewards:** Participation certificate and prizes **Application:** Online **Deadline:** March 31 www.b4s.in/edge/NITEI

Courtesy: Buddy4study.com



OFF THE EDGE
Nandini Raman

I am in class 12 (Commerce stream with Maths). I want to become a lawyer and work abroad. What are my options? Aneena

Hi Aneena,

An LLB after Class 12 will help you reach your goal. To study in India, you must take entrance exams such as CLAT, AILET, LSAT, MH-CET, DU-LLB for admission into the specific law colleges. To study abroad, check the courses, curriculum, visa and documents required. In some cases, one can enter a law programme after high school, while in others you may need an undergraduate degree. The U.K., Australia, and Canada offer undergraduate programmes leading to a LLB degree. In the U.S., Canada, and some other countries, law is pursued via a Juris Doctor (JD) programme, which takes three years after completing a Bachelor's degree in any field. Some countries and institutions may require you to take specific entrance exams. Ensure that your law degree is recognised internationally. During your course, focus on areas of law that are in demand internationally. Gain relevant experience via internships, part-time jobs, or volunteering at law firms, legal aid clinics, and NGOs. You can also do a PG LLM from a reputed university abroad.

I love writing: creative, academic, or technical. But how does one make a lucrative and stable career out of writing in India, or globally? I have a degree in literature and law, with good grades. My writing has always taken a back seat because I come from a middle-class family where the idea of a dream/ stable job, is a bank, SSC and so on. But I feel I could do more. Is this attitude immature or impractical? Snehil

Dear Snehil,

Your passion for writing, along with your educational background can provide a strong foundation for a career in writing. It's not immature or impractical

Career choices

Uncertain about your career options? Low on self-confidence? This career counselling column may help

but may require strategic planning and perseverance, as it is an unconventional career path that may not feel stable till you get discovered or famous. Continue writing when you get inspired or find time but pursue a stable job. Identify your niche in writing; is it creative writing (fiction, poetry), academic writing (research papers, essays), technical writing (content creation, manuals), legal writing, or a combination? Once you do that, you can create a portfolio showcasing your best work via blogs, websites, and local publications to gain visibility. Consider being a freelance writer on online platforms like Upwork, Freelancer, and Fiverr. You could also network and market yourself on these platforms. Explore opportunities in content creation for businesses and industries for their websites, social media, marketing materials, and so on.

If you enjoy creative writing, consider getting your work published. Self-publishing is not hard today. Have you considered certifications in creative writing, journalism, or technical writing? This could enhance your skills and credibility. Connect with other writers, editors, publishers, and professionals to land opportunities, collaborations, mentorship, and potential job offers.

Be patient, persistent, open to learning from setbacks or rejections and steer clear of naysayers!

I am a B.com graduate and want to pursue an MBA specialising in Financial Management. What are the career opportunities? Any additional skills I should develop? Guru Raj

Dear Guru,

A specialisation in Financial Management offers career opportunities in Corporate Finance, Investment Banking, Asset Management, Financial Analysis, Risk Management, and Consulting. Consider pursuing certifications like Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA), Financial

Risk Manager (FRM), or Certified Management Accountant (CMA) to enhance your skills and credibility. Gain practical experience through internships in finance-related roles. Network with professionals by attending industry events, and seeking mentorships.

I'm currently pursuing an M.A. in General History and want to get the UGC JRF to support my research endeavours in either public universities or foreign institutions. How do I go about this? Salman

Dear Salman,

You need at least 55% marks in your PG degree first. For the UGC-JRF, you need to register for the UGC-NET exam and clear the history paper. Keep an eye on the official website of the National Testing Agency (NTA) for notifications about the exam. You will have to submit the relevant documents to the UGC and, if you get the award, it will support your research in public universities or institutions in India. For research abroad, the JRF can add weight to your applications.

Explore foreign universities or research institutions that offer opportunities in your field of history. Check for fellowships, grants, or specific research projects. Prepare a strong research proposal, highlight your academic achievements, and showcase your potential.

Look for scholarships or funding opportunities offered by international organisations, governments, or universities that support research in history or related fields.

Collaborations with professors, academicians or researchers in your field will demonstrate and showcase a clear agenda to secure research opportunities and positions in foreign institutions. **Disclaimer: This column is merely a guiding voice and provides advice and suggestions on education and careers.**

The writer is a practising counsellor and a trainer. Send your questions to eduplus.thehindu@gmail.com with the subject line Off the Edge

Teach them to innovate

Being innovative is essential to being a good scientist and an engineer. Our teaching of STEM subjects should integrate teaching innovation for all students.

Hemant Kanakia

A teacher stands in front of a classroom and draws formulae or sketches a solution to a problem on a whiteboard. Students are either scribbling notes or listening to the teacher. This is the most common teaching method in our schools and colleges. What is wrong with it?

The problem is that there are more effective ways of teaching Science, Engineering, and Maths. Many have observed that most students taught this way forget memorised formulae soon after the exam is over and grades are assigned. In an interconnected, globalised world, a web-based search or AI application such as ChatGPT4 can supply the solution, provided one asks the correct queries. However, the students fail when deeper theoretical foundations are needed to solve challenging problems, particularly those with multiple possible solutions and where trade-offs are needed to choose, considering the proper context.

Learning by doing

Recent advances in learning Science have shown that a classroom-based lecture-and-examination teaching model is the worst form of learning. An alternative method – learning by doing – makes students absorb new knowledge deeper, and use it more effectively. This method asks students to observe or do an experiment. Then they are asked questions to get them to



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think critically about why things work the way they do.

Consider how students will learn about the nature of light and the laws of optics through this method. A teacher will begin by showing an experiment whereby one observes that objects underneath water seem nearer than they are. This is because the light rays bend their paths when entering the water from the air. A teacher could lead students to ask questions about this phenomenon, making them think about why these light rays bend, how much they bend, why different colours of light rays have different bending angles, why they do not bend smoothly but change path abruptly, as they enter the water and what property of the medium determines

how much bending would occur. Making students think and search proactively for answers to such questions leads to a deep understanding of the nature of light.

Similarly, an experiment with floating objects in water could be used to explain Archimedes' law of floating objects. Critical thinking about that will lead to understanding the viscosity of fluid and surface tension.

Skills required

Skills learned to innovate are closely linked with this highly effective method of teaching STEM subjects. To innovate, one begins by observing a product, a process, or how products get used and must think critically about the observations and ask "what-if" questions. These habits of observa-

tion, curiosity, critical thinking, and generating alternatives are what students learn by doing in STEM education. Being innovative is essential to being a good scientist and an engineer. Our teaching of STEM subjects would be more firmly grounded if it also integrated teaching innovation for all students.

A facility like an innovation lab or hub can be used to teach the art of innovation to students. A typical facility would include space that allows small groups to meet and brainstorm ideas and mechanical and electronic equipment for building prototypes. A useful innovation frequently emerges from interdisciplinary work, thereby fostering teamwork. Many successful innovation labs provide for student visits to factories, urban

surroundings, and rural areas, where they are likely to encounter real problems that need solutions.

Innovation hubs also end up being incubators for innovative start-ups. Currently, most of our start-ups tend to copy a business model or a product that has worked well abroad. The only innovation that is pursued is to indigenise it to suit local tastes or to reduce costs. Start-ups that emerge from innovation hubs are observed to be more innovative.

IIT-Bombay and IIT-Madras both have vibrant innovation hubs that have led to the building of several deep-tech start-ups and unicorns. With the help of alumni support, engineering institutes such many of the IITs and BITS Pilani have created innovation hubs that typically include Tinkers' Labs, which are open to all students 24x7 and managed by students; courses teaching prototype building; courses using active learning methods; and classrooms that support those courses. Empirical evidence collected at these facilities supports the idea that a vibrant innovation ecosystem developed at these institutions has led to an increased number of innovative start-ups. Independent measurements of outcomes conducted over the years at these institutes also show the effectiveness of such programmes in imparting better education to students in STEM disciplines.

The writer is the Founder, Maker Bhavan Foundation

