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Teaching English in the Rural Indian Society: Problems Pestering and Solutions for Addressing the Issue

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Abstract

English language was started in India long ago for the different purposes. In the beginning the language was treated as a foreign language and a section of the people formed a kind of opinion that it was imposed on the Indians. It was a fact that the contemporary Indian scenario was brought into the limelight by means of the very language. Due to the educational reforms introduced by the British rulers, the momentum in the language development got flourished. Many Indians were successful in not only communicating in the language but also delivering their great works in it. After the independence, English has cemented its position as leaps and bounds. From the status of a foreign language, English is taught as the first, second and third languages in the different educational hierarchies. On account of the changes taking place in different wings of knowledge, English has penetrated into many other spheres and the divergent areas were also influenced by the language itself. Still, the teaching of English in rural Indian society is facing a crisis due to psychological, sociological, institutional, linguistic and infrastructural reasons. In this paper, the cited reasons are discussed and a clear thought process is done to find out the solutions to eliminate the existential drawbacks that create inefficiency, confusion in learning and impediments for the effective use of the language. It further concentrates on suggesting the suitable situations and conditions belonging to the natural ways of learning the language. This paper also analyses how the rural students can concentrate on the development of their own techniques for the improvement and effective use of the language.

Keywords: Rural learners, English language teaching, challenges, solutions, innovative methods, learner-centred approach, communicative techniques

Introduction:

English in our country was the result of the Charter Acts implemented in the years of 1813 and 1835 by the British Rulers. T.B. Macaulay introduced English literature in Indian Education so to get the language learnt by the Indians. Since then, English has played a vital role in the flourishing of different sectors in India Viz. Education, IT, Banking, Medicine, Hospitality and Research. In all the areas of development, the language has its contribution. It has been the carrier of opportunities for every aspiring young mind. Besides, English has become a Lingua Franca in our country too. Some states in our country have been treating the language as the official language.

Still, the situation in rural areas hasn't improved and the learners haven't reached the optimum and desired level of competency. This is because of various conditions that have been uncongenial as far as the English abilities of the rural students are concerned. Of all the reasons, the prominent are Fear towards English, Incompetent Teachers, Parents' Illiteracy and Ignorance, Not having the required Ecosystem, Lacking Motivation, attitude of getting Pass Marks etc. This paper elucidates the reasons that make the rural students as marginalized as far as English ability is concerned and suggest some trajectories to inculcate and improve the level of language efficacy such as using the mother tongue as a means of language developing tool, storytelling and speaking based on the story, giving study projects, writing conversations, organizing speaking activities etc.

Literature Review:

Teaching English in rural India is difficult due to students' socio-cultural background, lack of exposure to English and absence of an English-speaking environment. Dependence on the mother tongue affects pronunciation, grammar and fluency, while confined practice leads to weak vocabulary and low confidence. The problem is worsened by the shortage of competent English teachers and exam-oriented, memorization-based teaching methods that fail to develop real language skills. Effective English teaching in rural areas requires trained and committed teachers, learner-friendly methods, equal focus on all four language skills, and government support to improve students' confidence and proficiency in English. Teaching English in rural and backward areas should begin with an integrated approach rather than separating the language into four different skills. Rural students rarely get opportunities to practise English outside the classroom and therefore depend entirely on their teachers for learning the language. Teaching English as a whole helps students develop a natural understanding of the language. It is beneficial if a single teacher teaches all four language skills to one class so that students' overall progress can be effectively monitored. The choice of teaching methodology should be flexible and based on

the needs and level of the students rather than rigidly following a single method. The main goal of teaching should be language learning, not merely the use of a particular methodology. For rural learners, greater emphasis should initially be given to reading and writing skills, as these skills help students to recognize words and sentence structures. Once students learn to read properly, they gradually develop confidence in writing and speaking. Listening and speaking skills also improve naturally when students become familiar with written language. Above all, successful English teaching in rural areas requires patient, competent, and dedicated teachers who understand students' psychology and learning difficulties. (Ameer Anisaa, S., and D. M. M. Sahul Hameed, vol. 4, no. 7, 2016.)

It is looked into the challenges and potential strategies for teaching and learning English as a Second Language (ESL) at the secondary school level in rural areas of Andhra Pradesh, with a special focus on Chittoor District. It identifies several obstacles that affect students' language acquisition, including inadequate school infrastructure, shortage of trained English teachers, and limited exposure to English outside the classroom, large class sizes and the dominance of the regional language. Socio-economic factors, such as first-generation learners, limited parental support, and low awareness of the importance of English, further hinder students' motivation and confidence in using the language. The study also emphasizes the possibilities for improving ESL learning through learner-centred and communicative teaching methods, activity-based learning and the integration of audio-visual and digital resources. Regular teacher training programs and workshops are suggested to enhance instructional quality. It is very important to create an English-rich environment in schools and promoting positive attitudes toward language learning among students. The study concludes that with systematic reforms, innovative pedagogical practices and supportive policies, the teaching and learning of English in rural secondary schools can be significantly enhanced, thereby contributing to improved academic performance and broader language proficiency among rural students. (Moorthy, V. Narayana, and G. M. Sundaravalli vol. 13, no. 1, 2021)

Teaching English as a second language in India, especially in rural and semi-urban areas, faces multiple challenges. Classes are often large and of mixed abilities, making individual attention difficult. Most students in rural areas learn in their mother tongue, while English is required for higher education and employment, sometimes as the second or even third language. Limited exposure to English outside the classroom, lack of trained teachers, and insufficient teaching resources further hinder learning. Traditional methods, such as the grammar-translation and bilingual approaches, focus more on the native language than on practical English skills. Socioeconomic factors and psychological

barriers, like fear and lack of confidence, worsen the situation. Effective English teaching requires a shift toward communicative, skill-based methods to help students acquire listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities. (Singh, Madhu D, vol. 57, no. 2, 2015, pp. 22–26. Sowmiya, L. M.)

Teaching English in rural India faces multiple challenges, including large, mixed-ability classes, a shortage of trained teachers, and limited exposure to the language. Many students learn English as a second or third language, and traditional methods like grammar-translation and bilingual teaching emphasize the mother tongue over practical skills. Socioeconomic factors, lack of resources and psychological barriers such as fear and low confidence further hinder learning. To overcome these issues, a student-centred, skill-based approach is essential. Teachers should promote active learning through recitation; group discussions, loud reading, and practical use of English, while helping students develop vocabulary through both receptive and productive practice. Motivating students to think and communicate in English fosters fluency, confidence, and effective communication. Enthusiastic, imaginative and trained teachers play a key role in inspiring students and systematic efforts from educators, policymakers, and communities are necessary to bridge the urban-rural divide and improve English education in India (Subramanian, Lakshmi vol. 3, no. 6.)

Some more issues that cause language inability among the rural students are different. In some areas students who are in upper primary and high schools don't even know the basic knowledge in English. The graveness of the issue is they are supposed to learn some advanced topics in these classes but their lacking in basics creates hindrances in their learning. In addition to the issue, common fear of the students towards English, inadequate infrastructural needs, additional work burden to the teachers and incompetent teachers, the scarcity of language exposure, mother tongue influence, encouraging rote memory to get through the exams, not being motivated to learn the language, apathy of the parents towards the learning of the children are major causes. To undermine the specified reasons, the needful trainings should be conducted for improving the levels of teachers. Additional work burden should be removed from the duties of the teachers. Using creative methods is also very important. Mother tongue influence should be nullified by using their mother tongue to develop the knowledge of English structures and vocabulary. This is because the rural students are not so exposed to language alike their urban counterparts. So that they can be inducted into the task of learning the language. Besides, they have to be brought to the availability of the much needed infrastructural facilities.

Findings and Discussion:

1. **Influence of Mother Tongue Vs Using Mother Tongue for the Foundation:** It is a common phenomenon that the students of rural areas are not as good as their urban counterparts in language efficiency. They view English as an alien and they are quite comfortable with their mother tongues. As it is prevalent, mother tongue of the students is very useful in developing the structural knowledge among the rural students. By providing some structures and illustration of the same in the local language provides some basic knowledge among the students.
2. **Removing Fear towards Language through Story Telling:** By encouraging the students to narrate stories and incidents, teaching English to them will be easy and interesting. As stories capture the attention of the students, they take place in the activity. Even if they are scared, they should be motivated to participate in it. This gradually enhances the students to take part in the activity and it paves a way to edit their errors. So, the conduct of storytelling can bring a change in the learning attitude of the students.
3. **Instilling Motivation to Learn Language:** Students in the rural areas are not motivated to learn the language. By showing some increments in the form giving prizes, they should be motivated to speak or learn different language functions.
4. **Language learning through Games:** So as to participate the students in learning language, some games related to language are needed to design. As they are naturally interested in games, language games can help them learn the language.
5. **Removal of Additional Burden to Language Teachers and Providing Independence to the Teachers:** Additional burden that is given to the language teachers should get removed. When they are free from the additional burden, they feel pleasure in designing some more techniques for the better learning of the students.
6. **Parental Care:** In general situation, many parents are not concentrated on the education of their children owing to their poverty, illiteracy and ignorance. When parents are meticulous about the education of the children, their learning levels are increased.
7. **Improvement of Infrastructure Develops the English Skill among the Students:** When schools are equipped with modern language labs and internet connectivity in the rural areas, the learning levels of the students are increased. The sources available on internet are different and they have relevance to the level of student understanding.
8. **Addressing the Language Needs of the Students:** English is treated as a foreign language in many rural areas. It is spoken nowhere except in the language class room. Therefore, the language teachers need to observe the language progress of the students beyond their timelines. Though it is a difficult task, they should make it possible somehow. By spending some three or four hours additionally per week, students' language progress has to be monitored.

9. Activities for Conversation: When students are introduced to the activities like Role plays, explaining self and giving topics for descriptions, they actively participate in the activities. Therefore, they can improve their learning levels in spoken English.

10. Language Speaking Ecosystem: English atmosphere helps to learn the language effectively. This is a process where students converse with their peers in English. Because of this consistent way of speaking, they improve their communication ability; reduce their errors, fluency levels of language and confidence. The experience of the practice reflects in the classroom when they learn the language. When the class has the students who participate in such activities, the teachers feel at home while teaching English.

Conclusion:

As English is a part and parcel in Indian language arena, it is the duty of every student to learn it. When we observe how English has played predominant role in creating enlightenment and empowerment in the Indian society, we cannot say that this is a foreign language. Officially, this is the first language of some states in India. In fact this is the link language in our country alongside Hindi and more than Hindi. Though, English was introduced more than 150 years ago, it has some hurdles to teach effectively, mainly, in rural areas. The reasons taken for the discussions are some of the most prevalent and ever found. By considering the reasons intensively and creating solutions for the problems through innovation, the impediments can be eliminated greatly. Above all, the tendency of treating English as a subject rather than a language should be rooted out. The teachers and students should leave the notion that they want 40 or 50 marks to get through the exam. Since English is a language like many others, everyone must strive to learn the language for the purposes of life in lively conditions through real life techniques. And it is discussed in the article regarding the obstinate issues in connection with language for ages. By implementing the innovative methods and techniques formed through personal experiences either from gaining outwardly or implementing in situations, the mission of successful teaching and learning English in rural setting needed to be possible as the areas are not exposed and evolved for the English language ecosystem.

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