

CHALLENGES IN RURAL ENGLISH EDUCATION

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Introduction:

Language is a unique characteristic of human beings; it is created by man himself. It is mainly a system of vocal sounds coupled with gestures, signs which are shared by a nation, people or race. It is a versatile code, which is used to communicate thoughts, desires and experience to others. As language is used to communicate social needs, its uses are varied. English language is also a highly organized system which operates within three systems viz.,

1. The system of sounds- Phonology
2. The system of word order-syntax,
3. The system of meaning- Semantics.

Today English is a language that has spread across the world. There is no country in this world which does not use English for some purpose or the other. The English language has been the cause of death of minor languages. It is because of this reason that some guidelines prefer to call it a “Bulldozer”. But this should not worry us for we are learning it for our own benefit and use.

English is a major second language in our country. In different parts of the country, it is introduced at different levels or classes, depending on the policies of the state. In the last few years, attempts have been made to introduce English from very early stages of school life. In most states, it is introduced in the first year, while some states still maintain it either class three or five. Whatever be the case, the fact remains that the child has acquired the mother tongue fairly competently before it is introduced to the new language called English.

One of the major problems of learning English especially in rural areas lies with their own mindsets. They believe that English is difficult language for them to learn and somehow make their children believe in this. When rural children enter the college and are introduced to English with some fear. That causes the first challenge.

Second problem or a challenge lies in comparing English with mother tongue. Teachers, in their anxiety to help the students understand the lesson, teachers translate every word and sentence into their mother tongue in rural areas. In this process, a lot of Meaning is lost, and often the student looks at the contrast than the similarity. This further distances them from believing that English is a language as natural as their mother tongue.

A teacher needs to instill confidence in the child that learning English is not difficult, and other English language can perform exactly the same functions as many other Indian languages can. We can use English to make requests , give directions, make friendships, quarrel, narrate a story, sing a song and whatever else that we can do in mother tongue. Many rural schools and colleges can not engage trained English teachers. And moreover in rural areas teachers handle more subjects and this reduces the quality of teaching ability. Students hear rarely English outside the classroom .This causes a great problem in learning the English Language. Rural schools and colleges lack libraries, labs, audio-visual aids and updated textbooks. Fear of making mistakes and lack of motivation is another challenge.

Poor background and illiteracy of parents and struggle to earn livelihood lessens the quality is another challenge in learning English in rural areas.Focus on rote learning than on learning communication skills make a rural student less knowledgeable.

Lack of modern tools is another challenge a rural student may face and especially the child problem lies with some teachers avoiding the use of mother tongue totally in their English classes. To make the student understand, they go out of the way to use demonstrations, or gestures which may often be not understood by the student. This method of teaching once again makes a child feel that both cannot use English without using a large number of gestures.

English language has a phonology which is markedly different from that of most Indian languages. This is seen in the existence of discordance between the spelling and pronunciation of English. This is difficult for a rural student to capture in the early stages. Take for example the pronunciation of letters ‘c’ and ‘g’. These two letters have softer and harder versions which are free variants.(This means there is no definite rule that we can teach a child as to when ‘c’ should be pronounced as /s/or/k/ and similarly when ‘g’ should be pronounced as /g/ or dz.) Many more examples of this kind can be given to show how English spelling and pronunciation do not match with each other and this is the biggest challenge for a rural student to master this language. Besides pronunciation, English language also uses stress at the word level and also at the sentence level. This phenomenon is new to a rural student.

The word stress though is rule bound, is not consistent. It depends on the spelling, and the grammatical category to which the word belongs. Sometimes, the stress on a word is also arbitrary. To learn how each word needs to be pronounced can cause many problems to rural students who are learning English.

Stress at the sentence level can cause further difficulty, for the shift from one stressed syllable to another stressed syllable takes exactly the same time and this creates rhythm unique to English language. English has stress timed rhythm while most Indian languages

have syllable timed rhythm. To explain this in simple words, to read a sentence in an Indian language the time taken is proportionate to its length or the number of syllables included in it. In English the time taken to read a sentence depends on the number of stressed syllables in it and not the actual number of syllables. Take a look at these two sentences.

- a. I read a English book
- b. Take my dog for a walk in the park.

Though these two sentences are of different length, both have just four stressed syllables in them. Hence this time taken to read sentence ‘a’ will be the same time taken to read sentence ‘b’. Does this happen in your language? Next time you read a book in your language, read it aloud, and see whether the time taken to read a sentence is independent of its length.

There are also another challenges associated with learning English in our colleges and in our country at large. Students get to listen to English for about one hour is a day during English class. This could also be a generous estimate, as several lecturers of English are found to use a pair share of mother tongue while team to English are seldom found. This is particularly true of rural schools and colleges and state run schools or colleges in cities. Lack of opportunity is a great detriment to learn English. Teacher plays a model user of language, a partner in learning a resource of knowledge for the learner. In performing these roles the teacher uses social and academic language which the learners emulate.

Remedies of these challenges: Language learning is also a developmental process. This means we do not learn language all at one time. We learn it gradually and learning can be divided into several stages. Learning a language means learning to speak and write in the language. We should also be able to understand when someone speaks that language. So acquiring these skills is an important aspect of learning language.

The teacher in rural areas should make the students learn comprehension skills , organizational skills, , Role play, Pair work, using dialogues help one to learn English language very much. Command the four skills (Listening, speaking, reading and writing) through structures will help a lot to learn English language especially in rural colleges.

1. Mastery of both pronunciation and grammar.
2. Ability to express in speech situations.
3. Ability to use structures and sentence patterns. Will definitely help to learn language.

A rural student can speak in a better way if he gains knowledge on these below points.

1. It would be better to master the spoken language.
2. Give importance to communication aspects of language.
3. Interest should be shown in meaningful learning.

4. Prominence should be given more to functional aspects of language than structural aspects.

Where there is a will, there is a way. If one has strong will to learn English language, then we can easily overcome these challenges and a rural student also can gain mastery of the English language if he sincerely works on it.

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