



TEACHING ENGLISH IN RURAL INDIAN CLASSROOMS: DIFFICULTIES AND SOLUTIONS

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Abstract

The world has become a global village in recent times and we are experiencing the need for communication as a source of sustenance to exist in the world. The recognition of English as a global lingua franca no more needs an introduction. The prerequisite to be proficient in the English language is a necessity today for each one of us. If we focus on the status of English particularly in the Indian context, the language has established itself in India as a language of trade, media, technology, commerce, social media, and most importantly in education as a second language. As English has become the language of instruction in most schools, colleges, and universities in urban areas (English medium) except government schools (Hindi medium) in India. However, on the other hand, the situation in village schools is severely vulnerable concerning pedagogy and learning of the English language. As for the student's certainty, rural students' situation is very problematic. Teacher's proficiency in language skills, exposure to language, and resources are major concerns for excellence in English language learning. Teachers have to pay commitment to the language skills of the students such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Besides that, the teachers should also help the technology, and encourage the students to have enthusiasm, a good attitude, and motivation to learn English. Generally, rural teachers and students consider English as a course, not as a language. Both of them want to complete the syllabus somehow without gaining any competence in the language per say. This paper attempts to analyse the challenges and their solutions to the difficulties faced by the teachers as well as students in a rural Indian classroom.

Keywords: Language learning, language skills, pedagogy, rural classroom, second language.

Introduction:

The vitality of English Language in the recent times has made the countries to reform their English language education system. At present time the whole world is going through the crisis of this pandemic which has fostered upon us the lockdown and physical distancing. These circumstances have further emphasized the need of learning and teaching English for communication, as the language

is serving as a global language of information and technology. And during this COVID-19 calamity our educational systems as well as our communication system is entirely dependent upon our proficiency of English language. Hence, in this way it has become essential for each one of us to learn English language in a skillful manner. Because, without the appropriate and proficient learning and teaching of English, one will not be able to understand the

technology which can lead to the failure of communication and education.

Before we deal with the difficulties and problems faced by the students as well as teachers in the rural areas schools and mention solution to those difficulties, it will be proper to have a brief discussion of a historical background to the language policy of India.

A Brief History of the Language Policy in India:

Language planning and policy in India has revised itself to the altering demand and ambitions of people over the period of time from 1947 to the present. Change has occurred on many levels. Firstly, the question of a national language – which was wisely addressed during the formative years of independence by not declaring any language as the national language – has now been permanently settled. Indian languages can function in the regions where they prevail; if any additional function were to be required then it could be satisfied by bringing in English. Many Asian countries, with the recognition of English as an international communication tool have renewed their English education within the past two decades to confront with the proliferating global economy, and rising the number of effective English-communication citizens. (Littlewood, 2007).

English significantly or non-significantly has played an influential role in preserving the diversity of India's linguistic characteristics as an associate official language. In fact, English has been introduced readily by the states in the first year of schooling. English today has become almost a compulsory second language. The underprivileged sections of the society now perceive the language as a powerful tool for progress. English had been approved 'associate official language' status though it is still not a language listed in the eighth schedule of the Indian constitution. English continued to dominate higher education. Increasingly, it has become more independent and has confidently made its position into school education. The status of English education in Indian schools can be described in the following paragraph.

There are 75 different languages are used in India's education system. Among them 31 diverse languages are used as media of instruction; this is nearly half the number of languages that were being used for this purpose in the 1980s. However, English is being taught somewhere in the curriculum of all the 32 states and Union Territories. Surprisingly, The percentage of schools teaching English as a 'first language' doubled between 1993 and 2002 from seven percent to thirteen percent in upper primary schools and five percent to ten per cent in primary schools. As a result English is offered as a second language by more states than any other language. Moreover, 33 of 35 states claim to offer English as a medium of instruction; this is more than any other language. As a matter of fact Between 1993 and 2002 there was an upsurge in the percentage of schools offering English as a medium of education; the strident rise occurred in primary schools. Till 2002, more than a quarter of all secondary schools offered English as a standard of instruction. English has been offered as a second language in 19 states, of which 16 introduce English in Class I, one in Class III and two in Class V.

Background of Indian villages

i. Education:

If we study the background of Indian villages in connection with education, we find that, comparison to past fifty years, English education has developed very fast but still it has not reached up to mark, especially in the teaching of English language. The village schools lag behind from their counterparts in urban areas. Because of the social and cultural background of Indian village students, a teacher of English faces a lot of problems while teaching his students in a village school. There are many reasons for this which we will discuss in the following pages.

Because of the socio-cultural background of the students of rural India, they do not find opportunity to learn English properly. Their parents are not qualified enough in English to guide their wards in the study of English Language. So, the students depend only on their teachers in the school for the education of English Language. Except school, they do not find opportunity to learn English.

They are not able to interact in English at their house or in the village where they live because in their village they do not find any one who can help them in learning English. As a result their interest in learning English decreases and they feel problem in learning English and as a result they become weak and weaker in English. The teachers also belong to the same background and are not able to speak even simple sentences in English. Because of the less exposure to English language, teachers are not able to impart correct pronunciation of several words. Moreover, they not take pain in improving their English because there is no pressure on them to teach the students properly. Their only aim is to make the students pass in the exam.

ii. Occupation:

People of village are busy with agricultural work throughout the day in farms and also at homes. The main source of their livelihood is farming and dairy. A fair amount of population is engaged in small- and large-scale business. Most of the rural population belong to labor class. Their livelihood depends upon daily wages they are paid. Although they earn sufficient amount for their livelihood but they are unable to spend money on books to learn English. With the rapid advancement in technology and the need of information technology, villagers are not able to afford the smart gadgets like laptop and mobiles to their wards so that they can be familiar with the technology and other advanced educational methods.

iii. Culture:

Indian villagers are deeply rooted in culture. Even today there are many cultures in which English is still considered the language of foreign invaders. The people of Santhal Pragan and other Adivasis in India consider the English language against their culture and religion. It was the same at the time of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan when the Indian Muslims considered the English Language as the language of non-believers (kafir). Thus we see that culture also creates a hindrance in the learning of English Language.

Problems faced by the teachers and students in rural areas:**i. Lack of schools:**

There is insufficient number of schools in comparison to urban areas. In urban areas almost every locality has one or more schools. On the other hand, the remote location of schools from home poses a great challenge to school education. Children find it difficult to attend the schools daily and in extreme weather conditions. The number of private schools is higher than the number of government schools and they situate at far places. Therefore, most of the parents admit their children at private schools in rural areas according to their financial condition.

ii. Lesser exposure to English language environment:

Even if English language bears the status of second language in India, the students from rural areas get less exposure to English language environment, they find time to learn English at school only. As the parents of these children either know a little or no English, they face difficulty to guide their wards in learning English. Children at home if encounter problems during the course of doing their homework their parents cannot solve their problem because of their poor command on English language. Most of the parents know English only to the extent of writing their names and address in English. Although they acknowledge the importance of learning English language and encourage their child to complete their home work but they are unable to help them. As a result, a student is entirely dependent upon his English teacher to learn English.

iii. Teaching English as a Subject not as a skill:

English language is taught as a subject rather than a language in Indian schools. The main focus of the School teachers is directed towards completion of their course before exams. In rural schools no attention is paid to learn language as a skill and not as a content subject. The learning of language is limited to the learning various set of vocabulary, learning of some English sentences and completing a course book up to upper primary level.

The poor foundations hinder students to understand English at secondary and senior secondary level.

iv. Large number of students in the class:

Due to the lesser number of schools and increased number of students, every class contains a large size of strength of students so the teacher is not able to focus on weak students and could not spare time to teach them separately because of the overburden. So, their basic knowledge of language remains poor.

v. Inappropriate infrastructure for language learning:

The rural school lacks proper infrastructure. Two of the basic language skills (listening and speaking) are learnt through constant listening and imitating and such facilities are not available in rural schools. Language teaching aids like audio-visual aids, tape recorders, vocabulary charts and language labs.

vi. Low Motivational level:

The students of rural areas have low level of motivation to learn English language. The reason behind this attitude depends on tedious teaching methods adopted by teachers in the classroom as the class becomes boring for students. As a result, most of the students in class do not understand whatever the teacher is teaching and pay less devotion to the teacher and becomes incapable to complete their homework. Eventually leading to the poor learning of the language.

vii. Dearth of professionally trained teachers:

Learning English language means acquiring a system of rules. As the teachers of the rural areas also belong to same rural background. They also lack proficient language skills. They are not able to impart correct grammatical system of language to the students. They are not trained to create an atmosphere where students can listen and speak English during the class timings. The teachers use the strategy of teaching the lessons in native or regional language as they themselves are incompetent of communicating in English language. Although this strategy makes the pupil to understand the contents of the lessons but they become incompetent when

it comes to the understanding the structure of language. These students with shaken foundation when reaches to secondary levels, needs grave consideration. At secondary and senior secondary levels, the course books are standardized according to the respective boards and so many students, with poor grounding, find them difficult to understand.

viii. Financially deprivation:

Undeniably, the low financial status of rural people compels the parents to admit their kids in either the government or local public schools and these schools follow the traditional methods of language teaching and learning. This leads to the inadequate language skills in students.

ix. Incompetence in vocabulary:

The students of rural schools are less acquainted with vocabulary of English language. Their vocabulary is limited only to the course books which do not come into practical life and speaking. Teachers do not make efforts to relate the stories and activities to their real life and neither they make them understand in English language. The controlled use of English language becomes a hindrance in retaining the vocabulary and learning new vocabulary.

x. Negligence of Parents:

Parents and guardians in rural areas spend most of the time in their farms. Children are also involved in same activities after their schools. As farming is the source of their sustenance, they focus on farming rather than taking the responsibility of their performance in school. Less income of house also makes the students to devote much time on the farms. Most of them have lesser support from parents which demotivate them to learn English language.

Solution to the problems in learning and teaching English language:

In our so far study, we pointed out the problems and difficulties faced by the students as well as the teachers in the schools of rural areas of India. In the preceding paragraph we will try to find the solution to those problems and difficulties faced

by the students as well as the teachers in a village school. Followings are the solutions:

i. Creating an environment to learn English at home: an initiative by parents and government

Most parents in rural areas have a little or no knowledge of English language therefore children find no English learning environment except their text books and homework, which is also hardly up to the mark. To create an English learning environment at home several initiatives should be taken to teach the importance of English language to the parents. Likewise, there should be some schools for elderly, parents and guardians in the village, specifically for teaching and learning English language. By practicing this students will feel themselves supported by their family while doing their homework and they can also develop listening and speaking habit while staying at home small libraries of one or two rooms can be constructed in the villages where English reading writing and learning materials can be availed by the students.

ii. Necessity of professional Teacher's training:

The teachers of rural areas should receive training a professional manner to teach English language as a skill. More focus should be paid on teaching the four language skills viz a viz listening, speaking, reading and writing. The teachers of rural areas are themselves of diffident and have a phobia to English language to overcome this problem the teachers should be trained or the trained teachers should be hired from nearby cities who could teach children and train the school teachers as well with the assistance of modern methods of language teaching like communicative language teaching, traditional methods like grammar- translation method and audio-lingual methods which focus to achieve one or two language skills should be avoided. The main objective of the teacher should be to inculcate language in communication and incentive should be taken for the holistic development of language skills.

iii. Emphasis on vocabulary learning:

Vocabulary mastery is one of the most significant aspects of mastering a second

language. Great emphasis should be paid on learning English language as vocabulary is an essence for communication in any language. The students of rural areas know a few items in English vocabulary. Teachers and students do not realize the importance of English in communication at higher levels of education and they do not pay attention to teach and learn the vocabulary. Teachers should motivate students to learn different vocabulary items through engaging students in different kind of activities games and reading sessions. Different kinds of visual aids and imagery can also be used for the remembering the vocabulary. The concepts and ideas should be connected with the images while telling a story or poem so that students can retain and recall the desired vocabulary at the time of needs.

iv. Motivational upliftment:

As we have seen earlier that the rural students are taught by the teacher who also comes from the same background and so he is unable to motivate the students to learn English language. To handle this problem the government should appoint trained teachers who can teach them in an easy way and can motivate them by adopting easy method of teaching English so that a kind of interest to learn English among the students can be created.

v. Availability of proper infrastructure and language teaching aids:

It is well known that in the rural schools of India there is lack of infrastructure and teaching aids which affect the teaching of English language. The teachers are forced to adopt the traditional methods of teaching English which makes the students bored and they remained deprived of the speaking and listening skills. So the government should take initiative to make the infrastructure and language teaching aids available in rural schools which can make the learning English language enjoyable for the students.

vi. Teaching English as a skill not a subject:

As we have mentioned earlier in this paper that in rural areas English is taught as a subject which main aim is to pass the exam. As a result the students' endeavor is only to pass the exam and not

to learn English as a language. To handle these problem teachers should teachers should teach English as a skill and try to his best to make it interesting so that students may learn it happily.

Parental support:

Without parental support learning any language is impossible. Same is the case with English language. So, it is the duty of every parent to support their wards in every way in learning English. They should spend money on books, materials and should hire tutor who can teach the students to learn English.

Conclusion

Thus, to conclude, we can say that to learn English language for the students of Indian villages is very difficult because of the lack of environment in which English is learned. To handle this problem the government should appoint well-trained and competent teachers to teach English in the schools of Indian villages. Moreover, the teacher should be laborious, full of patience, honest and devoted. He should create a suitable atmosphere where students can learn English easily. He should teach in a light way and should present English as an easy subject so that the misconception of English as a difficult language among the students may be removed. For this he should start teaching from the very beginning. If possible, they should take a comprehensive test of English and then start with writing and reading of small sentences. They should give some basic tips of learning English to students. It should also be their effort to make the subject easy for the students as far as possible. He should use all the four skills of English while teaching the students. Which skill, out of the four, is the most important depends on the purpose of the learners. "But from the technical point of view, reading and writing skills are the most important. (Ansari, International Research Journals, 2012, www.interestjournals.org/ER). In most of the schools in villages English is not considered a serious subject. Students as well as teachers take it very lightly. So, in the schools the teacher should take a proper care to reading skill first. Students should be taught to recognize the alphabets properly. They should be asked to recognize the mingled alphabets. The second stage

should be the writing skill. The starting should be with the small words with their meanings. Then the teachers should move towards writing of small and simple sentences and he should make the students to write them and to understand their meaning in their mother tongue. When the students are perfect in these two skills, the two other skills—speaking and listening—will automatically be improved and when they have some English vocabulary, they will strive to speak in English among themselves and when they start speaking English, their listening power will automatically be improved. Thus, in this way, the rural students can be taught English successfully. But, as we have discussed earlier, only a competent teacher can be helpful for these students and only he can achieve his desired goal. Beside a competent teacher, and an easy curriculum especially for these students are necessary for learning English language. In the end, we can say that a competent and honest teacher is the most important in the process of learning English, "If a teacher is dedicated, competent, intelligent and understands the psychology of students, he rescues his students from their frustration." (A.A. Ansari, Teaching of English to Arab Students: Problems and Remedies, International Research Journals, 2012, www.interestjournals.org/ER).

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