



CHALLENGES OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN RURAL INDIA: A SYNOPTIC STUDY OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS OF RAJASTHAN

Dr.SEEMA SHARMA

Assistant Professor(English), Maharaja Ganga Singh University,Bikaner

ABSTRACT

* Dr.SEEMA SHARMA

Article Info:

Article Received: 18/10/2013

Revised on: 24/10/2013

Accepted on:25/10/2013

Of the total population of Rajasthan state, around 75.11 percent live in the villages of rural areas and after half a century since its creation, Rajasthan has a large primary education infrastructure. About half a dozen special schemes and programmes to improve the quality of education and to reach the rural children are running in the state, but still most of the Schools are not able to meet because of the irregularity of their set-up, the low level of teacher attendance and quality of teaching. There is still a gap between the need and demand for 'functional' schools and what is actually available to most children. The gap is huge when teaching English language part is concerned. The present paper is concerned with the issues and problems of English language teaching in rural areas and would explore the possibilities of evolving strategies for empowering and equipping the "English teacher" supposed to teach in rural areas

Throughout India, there is an extraordinary belief, among almost all castes and classes, in both rural and urban areas, in the transformative power of English. English is seen not just as a useful skill, but as a symbol of a better life, a pathway out of poverty and oppression. Aspiration of such magnitude is a heavy burden for any language, and for those who have responsibility for teaching it, to bear. The challenges of providing universal access to English are significant, and many are bound to feel frustrated at the speed of progress. But we cannot ignore the way that the English language has emerged as a powerful agent for change in India. (Graddol 2010:120)

INTRODUCTION

English has become a global language and teaching it as a foreign or second language has increasingly become a universal demand. According to a survey carried out by Indian television channel CNN-IBN in August 2009, 87% people feel that knowledge of English is important to succeed in life but 82% feel

that knowing the State language is very important and interestingly 57% feel that English is making us forget our mother tongue. {CNN_IBN Survey, 09} This fact cannot be denied that to keep pace up with other countries and to acquire a place on global platform, English is must. Realizing the demand and importance of English, in almost all the states of India, English is taught as a compulsory subject from first standard. In year 2000, India declared provision of 'Education for all' (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan). Still there is widening gap in the people's English language skills between rural and urban areas. The present paper is the synoptic study of the biggest state Rajasthan. The study focuses on some key factors which are responsible for this widening gap on teachers and learners part in the rural areas of Rajasthan.

Present Status- The National Knowledge Commission (NKC 2007), of India brings it out rightly, *"There is an irony in the situation. English has been part of our education system for more than a century. Yet English is beyond the reach of most of*

our young people, which make for highly unequal access. Indeed, even now, more than one percent of our people use it as a second language, let alone a first language But NKC believes that the time has come for us to teach our people, ordinary people, English as a language in schools. Early action in this sphere would help us build an inclusive society and transform India into a knowledge society.”(P.47)

Education in India has improved dramatically over the last three decades. Schools are accessible to most children, both student enrolment and attendance are at their highest level, and teachers are adequately remunerated. The RTE Act guarantees a quality education to a wider range of students than ever before. However, challenges in implementing and monitoring high standards in teaching and learning outcomes across regional, cultural and socioeconomic subsets prevent Rajasthan from fully achieving this goal. The census report of 2011, Rajasthan shows literacy rate of 67.06 which is below national average of 74.04%. PAISA report shows increase in the budget by 11% between 2010-11 & 2012-13. It provides 11617 RS. on per student allocation in 2012-13. Still it shows increase in female illiterates in Rajasthan. Educational deprivation of Rajasthani women, especially those in rural areas, continues to be high in almost all the districts of the state, despite the substantial improvements recorded in the last decade. The report includes 45.8% literacy rate of women in rural Rajasthan. The bottom four reported districts are Barmer (38.6%), Jalore (36.8%), Jaisalmer (35.5%) and Sirohi (32.7%). The 2011 Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), which tracks trends in rural education, indicated that enrolment rates among primary-school-aged children were about 93%, with little difference by gender. However, behind the veil of such promising statistics, the learning outcomes of India's children show little progress. The country ranked 63 out of 64 in the latest Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) study, with some of its best

schools ranked about average among those surveyed.

In addition, teacher support and scalability of high-performing teaching professionals in disparate areas, funding allocation for schools in remote districts and limited use of technology in the classroom remain barriers to reforming primary education. The study conducted by the ASER Centre, a network of civil society organisations led by Pratham, in collaboration with UNICEF and UNESCO, draws attention to gaps that need to be filled for effective roll out of universal elementary education. The study, conducted in Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Rajasthan, focused on school organisations, teacher background, and teacher's capability for teaching, classroom processes and learning outcomes. Highlighting the slow progress of students, the report said that while "children are expected to read simple words in standard I, less than 30% could read them in standard II and only 40% in standard III". Even in high performing states, the report said, "Both standard II and standard IV children have difficulty writing simple words correctly". In the survey PAISA report, 2012 48% children in standard III – V could read a standard I text and only 33% can do a basic arithmetic. The table below highlights the status of child when this tool was provided to them:

English Tool	
<p>Give this test to ALL children. Record the highest reading level. Note the ability of the child to tell the meaning of words OR sentences depending on the child's highest reading level.</p>	
<p>B H R</p> <p>L V</p> <p>M P F</p>	<p>z j o</p> <p>w g</p> <p>u s k</p>
<p>Ask the child to read any 5. At least 4 must be correct.</p>	<p>Ask the child to read any 5. At least 4 must be correct.</p>
<p>cow wet</p> <p>big</p> <p>hat man</p> <p>pen</p>	<p>Where is your house?</p> <p>This is a long road.</p> <p>I like to play.</p> <p>She has a green kite.</p>
<p>Ask the child to read any 5 words. At least 4 must be correct.</p> <p>Ask the child to say the meaning of these words in the local language, if she is at 'word level' in reading.</p>	<p>Ask the child to read all sentences. At least 2 must be correct.</p> <p>Ask the child to say the meaning of these sentences in the local language, if she is at 'sentence level' in reading.</p>

% Children by class and READING level in ENGLISH All Schools 2012

Standard	Not even capital letters	Capital letters	Small letters	Simple letters	Easy sentences	Total
I	65.9	19.6	9.8	3.5	1.2	100
II	43.9	26.0	18.8	7.8	3.6	100
III	31.8	24.9	22.9	16.2	4.2	100
IV	21.5	21.5	25.9	24.0	7.2	100
V	13.3	18.3	23.6	30.1	14.7	100
VI	7.9	13.0	22.5	30.8	25.8	100
VII	4.5	10.9	19.3	32.7	32.6	100
VIII	3.5	7.6	17.5	31.6	39.8	100
Total	25.4	18.2	20.0	21.3	15.1	100

% Children by class who CAN COMPREHEND ENGLISH All schools 2012

Standard	Of those who can read words, % who can tell meanings of the words	Of those who can read sentences, % who can tell meanings of the sentences
I		
II	61.4	
III	64.3	
IV	64.9	53.1
V	64.4	60.4
VI	67.4	59.4
VII	65.4	61.1
VIII	64.8	68.2
Total	64.9	61.3

Source-ASER 2012 report p-190

This data gives an overview of primary level only. But output might be same on secondary and tertiary level too. Different factors are responsible for this type of output. In a consortium organized in India in May, 2007 by the United States Children’s Fund (UNICEF) in Mumbai to review the state of ELT, it is pointed out that there was no English Language policy at the state level in the country; English was taught by regular teachers and there were no special English teachers in state –run Schools. Though there have been occasional talks about reforming the system. (For example “Report on the Curriculum Development Centre in English”, 1989) not many recommendations have found their way into policies. It has been observed that the curricular approach to teaching English and to teacher preparation in various states including Rajasthan

have not kept pace with developments in ELT/ESL field. Further, a vigorous engagement with the vision and practical guidelines provided in NCF 2005 and NCTE 2009 in the specific area of teaching English has not yet gained momentum. (Draft Syllabus Report-2012)

The Role of Teacher-The role of the teacher became crucial, as half the students in the rural areas come from home without effective learning support. In this context, it is recommended that teacher recruitment and training policies must assess teachers' knowledge, but more importantly their ability to explain content to children, make information relevant to their lives and to use teaching learning materials and activities other than the textbook. These need to start from what children can do and be more realistic and age

appropriate in what children are expected to learn, with clear learning goals. Most of the primary school classrooms are “not child-friendly at all”.

Language Training for Teachers

Wright (2003) argues that the proficiency in language use, knowledge about language, and knowledge of teaching methods are essential to the successful language teaching and emphasizes that the language awareness can operate under three domains corresponding to the three areas in teacher education-user, analyst and teacher. While the first one involves using language successfully in addition to knowing the rules of use, the second one includes knowing the system of the language and the last one is all about facilitating language learning. Wrights suggestion is indeed an interesting option since current research in language teacher education has shown a lot of sensitivity towards socio-cultural factors, explicit training of and about language and affective factors related to teachers.

Absence of language Training

Since there are no separate policies for the education of English language teachers in the country, it may be necessary to ensure that the teachers who are selected to the job are proficient in English and have the required language awareness to operate effectively in their respective classrooms. The National Curriculum Framework for Teacher education, 2010 address the issue of teachers language proficiency, which was pointed out as a major concern in the national Curriculum framework, 2005 and emphasizes that the teacher education programmes should give high priority to improving the language proficiency and communication skills of teachers irrespective of the stage specify the content area.

Communicative language teaching requires a multi-dimensional approach that facilitates context based learning, activity based learning, functional and skill based learning. Most of the teachers are not familiar with these approaches nor are they provided with adequate learning material. There is limited/no access to good libraries, to higher education institutions and to internet.

Flawed Teaching Methodology: In Rajasthan, rote learning has been institutionalized as a teaching methodology. Primary school teachers in rural Rajasthan often try to educate students by making them repeat sections of text over and over again. Often they do not explain the meaning of the text, which results in stunted reading comprehension skills over the course of the children's education. For example, many students in grade two and three in one particular school struggle to read individual words, but can neatly copy entire paragraphs from their textbooks into their notebooks as though they were drawing pictures.

Lack of Task-There is a lot of confusion in understanding ‘what an activity’ or ‘a task’ is in language classroom. The activity / task needs to let the learner use the language, i.e. get engaged with the language. This requires learner initiating, turn taking, suggesting, debating, etc. the syllabi and a cursory look at textbooks shows that the activities are teacher directed and teacher centered. The syllabus does not visualize (except cursorily in the objectives) how activities in the classroom can be organized and what roles learners and teachers have in the classroom. We can notice the paradox of the syllabus aiming to design communication syllabi and doing the opposite of the same.

Lack of Interest-Teachers in some rural schools are themselves from urban areas and have little or no understanding of the background of their pupils; they may be posted to a rural area against their will, have to travel a long distance to school and, as a result, may have very little commitment to their work. As a result of demonization, the curriculum implemented may vary markedly from the original, time available for learning is likely to be reduced, and pedagogical practices are likely to be poor. The teaching styles adopted by some urban teachers may be alien to what rural children experience in their day-to-day activities because these elite styles presuppose cognitive frameworks based on middle-class cultures (Singh, 1988).

Limited Scope of Professional Development- There is a lack of motivation and accountability amongst many teachers, especially in rural schools where there is limited scope and opportunity for professional improvements. In rural areas there is

very little opportunity of recognition or appreciation of good, innovative work by these teachers.

Lack of Facilities- The rigid structure of the timetable, pressure on them to "cover" the curriculum according to a prescribed plan and the narrow requirements of the examination system allows them no flexibility to adopt innovative teaching methods. Teachers find it easier and feel more secure if they teach through books, which does not require great effort or creative, imaginative planning of learning experiences necessary for innovative teaching.

Teaching with Technology-The importance of technology-based teacher training cannot be ignored. Every newly appointed teacher, right from the primary school to college levels, especially teachers from a rural background, should undergo at least a one-month intensive training in the skills of English. The purpose of this course is to fine-tune the teachers own proficiency in the language and to help them teach English with technological aids for concrete results. Such courses may be held under the guidance of experts at the State ELTIs or at centers constituted for this purpose.

Learners Need- Learners in the rural part have to work to supplement family income or help in household chores or their parents are illiterate or they fails to understand value of education. These learners don't get any facility or environment of learning at their home. So they need special attention. Need of the hour is to equip them with basic needs and motivate them. The other reason is that other subjects are taught in Hindi or in vernacular languages. So like other subjects, students take English as a subject not a language. They don't put their effort to learn it as a language. The problem is not with tertiary level but from the primary & secondary level. The fact is that the roots are rotten. That's way so many policies are made but all are failure. A teacher has to use mother tongue to make them understand. A language teacher is well aware that their students bring to the language classroom a variety of attitude, experiences & strategies as well as variety of beliefs & he/she has to handle them. Need is to create (English) language environment in the classroom

and attempt to enable the learner to explore finding the language in use outside the classroom. This requires bilingual proficient teachers, who are conformable in the mother tongue(s) of children and in English. The activities and assignments that would demand children to move beyond the textbook and the classroom in finding to use the language. Newspapers, radio, TV and computers could be exploited for the purpose.

Solutions

National Advisory Committee report (1993) states *'both the teacher and the child have lost the sense of joy in being involved in an educational process.'* *Teaching and learning have both become a chore for a great number of teachers and children.... the majority of our school-going children are made to view learning at school as a boring, even unpleasant and bitter experience'*. Competency levels in reading, writing and numeracy of primary school children are estimated to be very low; at most only 30% of children have adequate competencies in these areas. Undue importance has been given to 'memory', instead of developing 'thinking' capabilities. To be effective, rural primary schools should equip the students to face the realities of the environment in which they live, and this is not being achieved in the current education system. Teachers, parents and pupils all agreed that learning is easier when out of school experience is used and related to 'what is taught' in school through the formal curriculum. They say it helps them understand things better, apply knowledge in practical daily life situations and see the relationship between knowledge from school and real life situations. ELT experts like Perren, as quoted by Hans R. Dua, (1994:109) tells us that the earlier a child is exposed to a language the quicker it learns to use it: "Since all must use English, it is best for children to begin at an age when it is easiest, when there is no pronounced language-learning differential." As far as English is concerned, many children get very limited exposure to the language, specifically in the case of first generation learners who do not get much support at home and there is no environment which supports her in the use of that language. The English language classroom should overcome these constraints. This can be done, if the child is given tasks at the right level of difficulty – tasks involving

language the child can 'just about' understand; in the course of applying herself to these tasks, the child will construct the grammar of English on her own. (cf. Krashen (1985), Prabhu (1987))

Children's exposure to language being limited and opportunities for language use being scant, the proficiency level attained at the end of elementary level belies the expectations of desired outcomes. Seshadri says: "[Learners], they don't see the usefulness or relevance of English in their immediate environment." (1997:206) This thinking should be changed by proper motivation. The focus should be more on the process of learning language in meaningful contexts and providing children opportunity to express. This kind of experience through active process of learning for eight years of formal English learning, the learner should be able to use the language both in speech and writing in real-life situations. English is like a phobia to the learners. This fear should be removed. As Alan Cunningsworth (1980) observes, "A well-motivated student badly taught will probably do better than a poorly motivated student well taught. Motivation determines the students' level of attention during class and the assiduity with which he does his home work. It certainly has a deep influence in the effectiveness of learning."

In their detailed study on 'how people learn', Bransford et al. explain that, "In the most general sense, the contemporary view of learning is that people construct new knowledge and understandings based on what they already know and believe." In practice, this means that teachers must know their students well and build on existing knowledge and abilities to deliver a greater range of teaching styles. As teachers add to their repertoire of teaching techniques, they are better positioned to adopt different strategies to ensure that each student's personal learning needs can be met.

CONCLUSION

Rajasthan Government has taken various steps such as Aap ki Beti, Zila Prathamik Shiksha, Mahila Samkaya Schemes, etc for the development of the rural people of Rajasthan. To cope up with the needs of learners new English language textbooks for classes VI, VII and VIII are included in curriculum. The progress should be noticed by a project and

research should be done. A few measures like appointment of skilled & committed teachers of English at all levels, effective implementation of technological schemes like EDUSAT, zero tolerance on the quality of both human and infrastructural resources, provision of minimum technological aids like TV, Tabs, Computers, Stereos, weekly film shows, facelift to the general ambience in schools, etc should be put in place to arrest the dwindling standards of teaching/ learning of English in rural areas. The said measures may appear farfetched but will certainly help in better teaching and learning of English language in rural areas. Measures, such as higher levels of financial incentives for poor parents to send their children to school, improved quality teaching and wide-ranging awareness programs, changes in the learning methods and techniques, making classroom activities more experimental and enjoyable for the children, improved teacher training, and of course upgrading the school infrastructure are required for the quality output.

REFERENCES

- Graddol, D. (2010). *English Next India*. New Delhi: British Council. p-102
- Guneshekar ,P, Padwad,A.,Pawelec,D.- (2011)*Starting , Stimulating and Sustaining English Language,Teacher Education*, art-Baruah, Nabanita-Challenges of English Language Teacher Training In Rural India,British Council,p- 49-54
- Bransford, J.D., Brown, A. L. & Cocking, R.R. (1999) *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School*, National Academy Press, Washington DC
- Cunningsworth, A. (1984). *Evaluating and Selecting EFL Teaching Materials*. Heinemann.
- Wright,T.(2003). 'Doing language awareness: issues for language study in language teacher education' *Language in Language Teacher Education*.113-131
- Bajpai, Nirupam and Dholakia, Ravindra H. (2006) *Scaling Up Primary Education Services in Rural Rajasthan: Public Investment Requirements and Policy Reform* ,CGSD Working Paper No. 31 November, Center on Globalization and Sustainable Development, The Earth Institute

- at Columbia
University, www.earth.columbia.edu
- Dua, Hans R. (1994). *Hegemony of English: Future of Developing Languages in the Third World*. Mysore: Yashoda Publications.
- Krashen, S. (1985) *Second Language Acquisition* Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Prabhu, N.S. (1987) *Second Language Pedagogy*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.
- Simon G. Bernabas, English Language Teaching in Rural India - Issues and Suggestions March 2011, p-303-311 Language in India www.languageinindia.com
- Seshadri, CK. (1997). "English Studies in India." In *Critical Theory: Western and Indian: Essays Presented to VY Kantak*, ed. PC Kar. New Delhi: Pencraft International
- www.knowledgecommission.gov.in/reports/report07.
- www.rajssa.nic.in/documents/Elementary%20School%20...P-1-55
- www.pratham.org/images/Aser-2011-report.pdf
- www.accountabilityindia.in/paisa-planning-allocations.p-104-118
- www.rajcensus.gov.in/PCA_2011_FINAL_DATA/PCA_chapter_3.pdf p-46-55
- www.asercentre.org/education/India/status/p/143.html
- www.images2.asercentre.org/...document_-_4_august_2012.pdf p-189-194
-