

Difficulties in teaching English to rural students

Prof. Madhusudana.P.N

HOD & Asst professor in English

Govt Arts College (Autonomous)

Chitradurga

Abstract

This paper attempts to bring in the issues related to the Problems of teaching English in rural schools of India. The language policy in school education emerged as a social problem and personal problem. The quality of English language education in majority of Indian schools presents a very appalling picture. Teacher's language proficiency, exposure to language and materials are major concerns for quality English language learning. In reality rural students' situation is very difficult. They don't have opportunities as city students had (i.e.) language lab, audio visual aids and what not. Generally rural students consider English as a subject not as a language. It is the main obstacle of them. Majority of students read English only for the sake of examination. They are not known how to recite poems but they well known how to memory it. Actually rural students have fear on English. On the other hand many teachers don't have long vision about students' life. They focus only on examination.

Language acts as an instrument to express effectively in various communicative situations. However, it is the very second language which requires a conscious and diligent, systematic efforts to acquire or master it. Second language acquisition is really a big challenge for all native speakers of that language who really deal with it. Appropriate and adequate remedial measures are cited for the successful rectification of these problems.

Keywords: Language learning, second language acquisition, Slow acquisition, Remedial measures

Introduction

The study of language is the foundation of all other learning. Language defines us as human. To be human is to use language, and to talk is to be a person. Language is the medium of communication. English as a powerful vehicle of communication serves as a link language in

a multicultural and multilingual society like India and also as a global linguistic mediator. It holds a place of status in our country, even after seven decades since Britishers left India. No other language however, has come up to replace English, either as a medium of communication or as an official language. Over the years, it has emerged as a language of choice for commerce, economic growth and social mobility. Teaching students English has consistently emerged as one of the top expectations of parents from school.

The English language has had a remarkable history. When we first catch sight of it in historical records, it is the speech of some non-civilized tribes on the continent of Europe along the North Sea. Of course, it had a still earlier history, going back perhaps to somewhere in Eastern Europe or western Asia, and long before that to origins we can only speculate about. From those murky and undistinguished beginnings, English has become the most widespread language in the world, used by more peoples for more purposes than any other language on Earth.

The changing times have witnessed the growing importance of English language in all walks of life. It does not seem that non-native speakers or as a second language speakers. Conscious and unconscious use of the words in our everyday conversation from the English language bears evidence to this fact. Education has been the primary factor in the more formal transmission of English around the world. English symbolizes in Indian minds, better education, better culture and higher intellect. In present times, English is the most preferred language. The Indians and the Indian English language press uses many words derived from Indian language. Indian accent is sometimes difficult for non-Indians to understand. Actually English has co-existed in the Indian sub-continent alongside thousands of local languages. It has remained at the heart of the Indian society.

Objective:

This paper attempts to bring in the issues related to the Problems of teaching English in rural schools of India.

English as Language of learning

Language learning is a natural process for the natives. The approach to this learning process is called the 'behavioristic approach'. But for the students of other languages, deliberate efforts are required to learn a foreign language which requires a 'mentalistic approach'. The students

of rural and semi-urban areas in India face such problems because English is not their mother-tongue. It is neither instinctive nor intuitive. Language acquisition seems to be a process of both of analogy and application, nature and nurture. Teachers of language have adopted and invented a variety of methods to teach English.

Students of the rural schools face a number of problems. English is their second language. Learning a second language means acquiring a system of rules, but just as a very little is known about these rules, even less is known about how such rule systems are acquired. Students find themselves unable to express in English. They have no idea of proper sentence structure. They do not know proper pronunciation, spellings and grammatical rules. The sole objective of the teacher and the learner remain to clear the exams. The students never realize the importance of learning English as a language. In the past, in rural areas, English was introduced to students in the fifth class. But now there is no dearth of English medium schools in such area yet the standards of English are falling rapidly. The teacher has to keep in mind the age of the student, his native language, his cultural background and his previous experience with English. The experience of the teacher and his level of English mastery are equally important. To achieve the desired effects, the goal of a course must be kept in mind- whether it is aimed at reading, fluency in speech, inculcating translation skill. All these objects shape methodology.

Students of the rural areas do not realize the importance of English as a language of communication whereas this is the most important aspect of this global language. They lack the confidence to speak in English; expression in the language is weak. First reason is that they have been taught English through Grammar-Translation Method. This method makes them dependent on their mother tongue. Whatever they read, they translate it into their own vernacular. During the time of exams, they cram the expected questions because they cannot write one original sentence of their own. Because of GT Method, they have no vocabulary of English words. While writing, they depend on the cheap material from the help books.

Problems of Teaching English as a Second Language in India

In a country like India, classes of mixed ability groups are a feature of every small town or village. In most of the rural parts of India, learning-teaching process is done in the vernacular language. On the other hand, most of the competitive examinations (higher education and employment) require English as medium of instruction.

The ratio of students to teachers is high, leading to ineffectiveness. The rural atmosphere does not provide students the opportunity to speak and learn English. The size of the classes everywhere is considerably large. This is one of the reasons why individual attention is not possible to the students.

Teaching of English needs a drastic change for the benefit of learners in schools and colleges. The students of rural and semi-urban areas in India face a lot of problems as English is not their mother tongue. English is their second language. In many places, English becomes the third language as they have a local language, then Hindi followed by English.

As compared to the learners from urban areas, learners from rural areas face more difficulties during the process of language acquisition. In urban areas parents are mostly educated. So, the domestic environment helps the students from urban areas acquire the language quickly.

Students do not get chance to speak or read in English in the rural parts of the country. In villages and small towns students mainly hail from rural areas. Bilingual method is adopted in language classes. This method helps only to slow-learners to some extent. Moreover, this act reduces the real learning process as a whole. If a student does not understand in English, he or she asks for an explanation in L1 i.e. in his or her mother tongue. Consequently, the English teacher is in a state to adopt bilingual method.

Lack of trained teachers in rural areas has become a reality. Teaching is a continuous process and teachers in rural India are often debarred from attending workshops and seminars to acquaint themselves with new ways and methods.

The rural population of India, which depends on agriculture and limited income, end up sending their children to government schools where English is not taught as a skill but as a subject. “Throughout India, there is a 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 a symbol of better life, a pathway out of poverty and oppression”. (Graddol p.12)

Grammar translation method is used by the teacher to teach young children, where the teacher explains every word to students in the native language to make him/her understand and learn English. However, this method faces a major disadvantage. Both the teacher and the student

concentrate more on L1 rather than L2. In this method English language class seems to be L1 class rather than L2 class. Students get only limited benefit through this approach. Unfortunately, this is still in use in many rural schools throughout India.

Language could be mastered by practicing all the four skills viz. Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. The rural surrounding does not allow the learner to practice any of the skills. Many teachers are unable to teach English effectively because they face a lot of problems due to the lack of teaching aids, non-availability of required technical support and relevant atmosphere to teach English effectively. The majority of Indian students, particularly from rural pockets, especially in the states of Bihar, eastern U.P. and Maharashtra, consider this seven –letter word as a magical and mystical word. A feeling of uneasiness sets in, the moment they hear something in English. As a result of this, teachers who handle English classes face insurmountable difficulties. Students find it difficult to listen and to understand the English language. What are the reasons for this? What are the remedial measures to be taken to alleviate these problems? This paper is an attempt to discuss the nature of second language acquisition and the factors responsible for its slow acquisition, especially in the rural pockets of India.

Pain points of teaching English in rural schools of India:

- * Students of the rural schools face a number of problems. English is their second language.
- * Students find themselves unable to express in English.
- * Students do not know proper pronunciation, spellings and grammatical rules.
- * Students never realize the importance of learning English as a language.
- * Lack the confidence to speak in English
- * First reason is that they have been taught English through Grammar-Translation Method.
- * This method makes them dependent on their mother tongue.
- * Some teachers have good accent, but they do not possess a good command over the language.

English is used all over the world not out of any imposition but because of the realization that it has certain advantages. A very important reason for regarding English as a world language is that the world's knowledge is enshrined in English. It is a progressive language. It is dynamic and flexible. Over and above English is universally renowned for its power of expression and its rich literature.

Teacher preparation courses are not able to equip the teachers with adequate knowledge, skills and the ability to be able to teach the subject effectively in class. The situation is worsened by the fact that English is not the language of transaction in rural India, thereby giving teachers a very little chance of practicing what they have learned. Teachers need to upgrade themselves through a variety of means—periodic workshops, video/audio recordings of content to be taught, projects and assignments.

The majority of Indian rural students, especially in the states of Bihar, U.P. and Maharashtra, find English as a very difficult subject to learn. Since most of the students are first generation learners, they need the guidance from parents and others. Even though students study English, they are not able to produce even a single sentence without any grammatical error in English. The reason for this is that they study subjects from the examination point of view. Our examination system is such that it makes students' rote memorization rather than testing their analytical and creative skills. In this process, they memorize lessons, reproduce them in exam halls and forget them the same day itself.

We cannot expect a uniform standard of pronunciation for a second language in such a vast country, where even the mother tongue is spoken differently by different groups of the people belonging to the same language community. In learning to speak English, the mother tongue generally interferes with its pronunciation. The learners as well as the teachers speak English with regional language habits. Even during the English periods most teachers teach English without giving the students proper practice in speech because they are not properly equipped enough to practice it. They forget that every language differs in stress, intonation and pronunciation. The result is that after learning /teaching English for many years at school and college, most people cannot speak the language with intelligible accuracy.

Listening is an important language learning skill and yet the most neglected skill in Indian classrooms. It is neglected as teachers take it for granted that learners automatically acquire this skill without any special training

Peer teaching, role-play and group activities, are rare in Indian classrooms. In India, lectures speak. Teacher talking time is more than half of the prescribed time. The class listens passively. The learners are not encouraged to ask questions. The teachers must involve their students to work in pairs, groups and teams and prepare term papers, projects, etc. Therefore, in spite of being taught English in school and college for several years, learners fail to learn

the language. They cannot write in acceptable English of their own, cannot use English appropriately and fluently in speech and often cannot understand conversations in English. Why does this happen? Does it mean that the English teachers in India cannot teach?

The teaching of English in India has been text-oriented since the beginning (colonial times) because the British Government's policy was to create a class of Indians who would act as a buffer between the British and the Indians. Therefore, elementary knowledge of English was needed for a class of Indians.

Objectives of teaching and learning English have undergone a sea change in the years after Independence. Still English education in India is text-oriented.

Remedial Measures

Challenges before the English language teachers in India are enormous. It becomes more challenging and demanding in rural areas because in such areas it is the teacher who is the model, to whom a student looks for all learning needs. They should be able to cater to the practical needs of learners, to make them competent enough to interact with one another and also to retrieve information all over the world

Building a rapport with your class—Assuring smile and greeting from a teacher to the students, helps them bond with the teacher instantly. When the students bond with the teacher, they will find learning the language much easier. Place of English should be defined—English offers vast opportunities to all. The policy regarding the place of English in our education system should be well defined. This should be determined keeping in view its use and vast opportunities in the field of science, technology, social sciences, philosophy, journalism, international trade and diplomacy.

Keeping in mind the primary aims of teaching English—

The teacher should enable the students to understand English when spoken To enable the students to speak, read and write in English Grammar translation method should be avoided

Teacher should find some ways of helping students to enjoy the language activities and of building their confidence .They should use English as a medium of expression To motivate the students think through English Create confidence of speaking English in public

In a scenario where neither adequate resources nor tools are available, English teachers themselves have to devise innovative ways to make their students' climb the staircase easily. This can be done with a resolve, as Patel says: "I have to create opportunities for the students to use English in meaningful, realistic and relevant situations". (Parel, 2008, p.07).

A teacher's role is immense in rural areas as the student has only a teacher to imitate and learn from. Teachers' responsibility lies not only with the average and above average students but also with below average and slow learners. A good teacher has to handle classes for all the students in a classroom. Individual attention will solve many problems, which arise while taking class.

An English teacher has to encourage the students to talk in English only. This act makes them confident. Teachers should motivate students for participative learning. This will solve all the stumbling blocks in students. Teaching learning is not a one-way process. It is a multi-way process. The hackneyed, stereotyped and traditional pattern of exams aims at clearing English not as a language but as a subject. The students, therefore, are guided to practice pick and chose method from the sub-standard material available in the market. So that students merely pass the subject far from learning any level of the Language. It is more shocking to learn that even the questions that students are supposed to answer are told to learn through translation from English to their own vernacular. Poor performance in translation, lack of proper vocabulary, no knowledge proverbs all are results of a casual approach. Even after reading English for 14 or 15 years the level of the students remains poor.

Because of the rapidly increasing web of Educational facilities, the rural areas have been enjoying the facilities of the convents. But it has neither helped in raising the level of the students, nor made them learn English as a language. The infrastructure of such schools is weak. Some teachers have good accent, but they do not possess a good command over the language. Now In the rural and semi-Urban areas, study of English language begins at an early age, at the KG level, it continues up to Senior Secondary or first Degree level. Even in the Professional Courses, the teaching of English as a communication skill is an integral part of the curriculum or the course obligations. It is quite unfortunate that whatever our English language teachers gain in the completion of their course or education as eligibility for seeking a job or an employment, it stays there and the teaching learning stagnates.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS:

- * Teachers should recite poems and not allowed to memorize it.
- * Try to create interest to taste poems.
- * Should avoid GT method.
- * Teachers should find some way of helping pupils to enjoy their language activities, and of building their confidence.
- * The English teacher should have the wide-ranging enthusiasm and Imagination.
- * Group discussions can be arranged.
- * Texts should be read loudly by the students.
- * English will be used by them as a medium of expression.
- * To motivate the students think through English.
- * They will be able to use English as a language of communication.
- * Create confidence of speaking English in the public.

To solve all the problems, a systematic approach should be followed. The teachers should aim at teaching primarily, not knowledge but skill, the different skills required for good Listening-Speaking-Reading-Writing. Teachers should find some way of helping pupils to enjoy their language activities, and of building their confidence. A teacher who tries to help his pupils in this way has rightly rejected the image of the teacher who acts as the arbitrary dispenser of all knowledge. As children learn by way of imitation, similarly, the students tend to follow the example set by their teacher. The English teacher should have the wide-ranging enthusiasm and Imagination, It can make English course 'a sort of clearing house for ideas and interests which branch out into all the other subjects that the pupils are studying in school, and beyond them.

To tackle with the problem of lack of vocabulary in the students, Productive and receptive Use of words should be kept in mind. The students should be made to learn simple words. This will help in inculcating a habit of learning new words in them. Their newly learnt words will become a part of their own vocabulary and they will be in a position to use those words. This is the natural process of movement at need from receptive to productive use of the words. This enhancement of vocabulary will result into better expression. The common errors made by the students in the different usages of the same word can be cured by this technique.

By noticing all such components of the language they can enjoy the richness and flexibility of language. Once their interest is aroused, they will show tremendous improvement. Reading can also help them in making aware of spellings. When the students have practiced different

uses of words and have developed habit of reading, they can avoid the common errors of Translations.

There can be no learning without exposure. Group discussions can be arranged. Texts should be read loudly by the students. Simple usage of words will become a part of their speech only when they are exposed to deliver a speech and express their own ideas. The zeal for learning will help them in their own advancement. The problems of the students and the teachers are inter-related. It is necessary to assure that the learner makes a tremendous contribution in the process.

If we take into consideration the role of teacher and learner in acquiring the knowledge of a language; the problems can be solved effectively. Only then the students will realize the practical use of English language. English will be used by them as a medium of expression. They will be able to use English as a language of communication. Fluency in the speech, proper knowledge of sentence structure, confidence of speaking in the public will make them able to keep their pace with the developing world.

Conclusion

In India, majority of the workforce comes from rural areas as 75% of India lives in villages. The policy makers have to bridge the urban-rural divide in teaching of English. An English teacher teaching in rural schools has to come up with innovative strategies in the classrooms. Skilled and committed teachers need to be appointed at primary level. Teachers should be upgraded and trained to meet the problems of the learners.

That will also help in raising the standards of English as a language at the school level. On the basis of suggestions given above, the critical situations in the teaching of English can be checked from further deteriorations. Decidedly one or two persons can't do anything solid. Let everyone concerned with it take the responsibility. Only then we can create a congenial environmental & we can be able to achieve better results in the teaching and learning of English.

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