

Teaching english in rural india: a tough task

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Abstract

Teaching English language in India, especially in rural India, as a second language is not only difficult for teachers of English but also a tiresome task for students. While learning English, not only Indian rural students but also teachers face a lot of problems and difficulties in the class room. Although English is a popular language in India and it has also been given official status and even in some parts of India English is considered the first language yet in rural areas of India, which consists of 80% of the population, English is still considered the toughest subjects by the students and the rural Indian students suffer from English phobia. In this paper we propose to study the problems and difficulties faced by rural Indian students as well as their teachers in the class room and find out the solution to tackle those difficulties to create a favorable environment for learners and teachers.

Keywords: - Difficulties, Problems, Rural India, Solution, Teaching English.

1. Introduction

It is true that teaching English in the schools or colleges situated in the rural areas of India is not easy but it can be taught with patience and hard labour by using a teacher's competency. When a student comes to the class, he faces a lot of problems because he is unaware of the English language teaching environment in the class room. After attending some classes, he realizes that he is unable to understand anything in the class room and as a result he often bunks the class or switch to other subject of his interest. At this stage the competent teacher comes forward for his help. He tries to understand the student's problems, solves them and encourages his student to learn the language. He frames curriculum suitable for his students, selects reading materials for them and create a suitable environment for learning English language in the class room. While learning English as a second language a student having the rural background faces a many fold problems like socio-cultural problems, unfamiliarity with the subject, different style of writing from his mother tongue, Mother tongue impact of pronunciation, Problem in recognizing the alphabets, and the lack of vocabulary, grammar issues, and no English-speaking environment. All these problems and difficulties make the student fade up with the English language and the task of teacher becomes tough.

In this research paper we propose to explore the following questions for the better teaching of English to the students of rural background in India:

1. What are the main problems of teaching English in rural India?
2. Why are the students of rural areas weak in English comparison to the students of urban areas?
3. What are the challenges of teaching English in rural areas?
4. How can a teacher teach English effectively in rural areas?
5. What steps should be taken by the government for effective teaching and learning English in rural areas of India?

During our survey, which is based on discussion with students and teachers of schools and colleges situated in the rural areas, we found that the socio-cultural background of a student plays a vital role in learning English as a second language. In the rural areas of India, a student's culture is totally different from the culture of the English language which he is learning. He is only aware of the village culture where the people only speak their regional language and live a simple life. Unlike city life where the people often use English in their daily life and are well acquainted with the western life style due to their convent or English medium school, the life in a village is far away from the western style. This unawareness of the culture confuses the student while learning English.

The other most important problem faced by a student that he does not find an English-speaking environment around him. Except his teacher there is no one at home with whom he can practice English. So, whatever he learns from his teacher in the class room, he cannot practice it at home because there is no one at his home or locality who can help him in learning English language.

Since there is no practice of English writing or speaking, the student has a limited vocabulary which he learns from his teacher in one hour class room. Due to the lack of sufficient vocabulary, he is unable to express himself in English. He is unable to acquire new vocabulary from others. He has to memorize all the vocabulary which is a difficult task for him. Moreover, he also faces translation difficulties while learning English. He has to translate everything from his language into English which needs a lot of vocabulary. Sometimes, due the difference of the structure of his mother tongue and English language, he commits mistake in translation. The grammar of his mother tongue is different from the English language. So, he commits a lot of mistakes while writing something in English. Above all his mother tongue has a drastic impact on his spoken English. It affects his pronunciation and reading style of English. He is totally under the influence of his mother tongue. All these above-mentioned problems create a hindrance in the learning of English language for an Indian student having rural background.

Above all the most important problem and drawback is the incompetent teachers in the schools and colleges of rural areas of India. In these schools and colleges teachers are themselves the products of the same environment. Living in the villages they are not exposed to the English-speaking environment and so they are not competent. The government should appoint a highly qualified and competent teacher of English for the better teaching and learning of the English language. A teacher should be aware of the English culture, the way of the English people and the linguistic style of the second language. Moreover, he should be familiar with the subject he is teaching. If he is efficient, competent and well qualified, he can prepare the students to learn the language.

The main attention of a teacher should be to develop the linguistic knowledge of his students. To achieve this goal, a teacher has to take the following steps:

- a. A teacher should encourage students to learn new vocabularies and their usages.
- b. A teacher must tell students how to consult a dictionary.
- c. A teacher must teach his students the parts of speech. It means that students must know either the word which they are learning is a verb, noun, adjective or adverb.
- d. A teacher should make students use the words in their own sentences. The sentences should be small, simple and of the daily use.
- e. If, in the beginning, student uses translation method in forming sentences, it is not bad. He should not be discouraged. But after sometimes this method should be discarded and the direct method should be practiced.
- f. To make the correct sentences, a student should be taught structural pattern. It means he should know which parts of speech should come first, second, and third etc. For this a student should be given a structure and asked to form a sentence based on the structure. For example: -

1. Subject + verb + object

He reads a book

2. Subject + verb + adverb

He Walks slowly

3. Subject + verb + adjective + Noun

She is a beautiful girl.

To learn the structure takes time but it makes the students perfect in writing. Unless a student learns the structure, he will not be able to write correctly. Once a student acquires the knowledge of parts of speech and grammatical sentences, he will enjoy learning the English language.

A student becomes bore and does not show interest in the language because of the following reasons:

1. He does not know the language at all.
2. He does not have sufficient vocabulary power to express himself in sentences.
3. He does not know the grammatical structural pattern.

Because of all these above reasons a student feels shy in learning English and so gradually, loses interest in the language. Therefore, it is the foremost duty of an English teacher to create interest among his students to learn the language. He can easily achieve his goal by enriching students' vocabulary power, teaching them the structural patterns and inspiring them to use new words in their sentences.

The students of rural areas are taught English in their primary and secondary schools, but they are not taught seriously. The teachers take English lightly and so the students. The only need the marks to pass the examination and they even pass the examination by memorizing the answer without understanding and learning anything. Consequently, they lose their



valuable years in schools without learning anything of English Language. But when they come to college for higher education where the medium of instruction is English, they face great problems. At this stage English becomes a problem for them. At this problematic stage only a good and competent teacher can come forward for their help. If, unfortunately, a student does not get a competent teacher, his interest in learning English will disappear forever.

In this case a teacher can take the following steps to create interest in such students:

- a. He should forget that he is teaching a higher class for some weeks, especially in the beginning of the session.
- b. He should teach the students from the lower level and rise above step by step.
- c. He should start with the basics of English grammar and language.
- d. He should ask simple questions based on what he has taught his students.
- e. He should encourage the students to learn new vocabulary by explaining the meaning of the words or even by translating the meaning of the words into their language.
- f. He should ask them to use the words in their sentences. He should teach them to form short and simple sentences.
- g. He should teach them the structure of a sentence and ask his students to re-write a sentence on a given structure.

These methods will be the most effective in the case of rural Indian students who are weak in English. Within a fortnight the result will be before you. 80% of your students will start taking interest in English and start attending the classes regularly. You will become the most respectable and sought after teacher for them.

2. Teaching Methods

While teaching English Language, a teacher uses a lot of different methods, techniques and styles. This use of different techniques is called methodology. Methodology means the way of teaching. The different techniques are used for the different needs and levels of the students. Beginners need different methods of teaching from those students who have been learning for a long time.

The teaching of English, perhaps, has the largest number of different methodologies. Moreover, methodologies have changed over the years. Some have become fashionable, while others have started to become out of date. There are three generally recognized methodologies of teaching English Language:

1. Grammar and Translation Method.
2. The Communicative Method.
3. Direct Method.

3. Grammar Translation Method

This is the oldest methods of teaching English language. This method is still very popular in the schools and colleges situated in the rural areas of India. In this method English is taught by the use of rules and lists of vocabulary. The students have to memorize the rules of grammar and a long list of vocabulary. Then they are asked to translate the sentences or the passages from one language to other. Due to the practice of this method, the Indian rural students are not good in speaking. The other two methods, communicative and direct methods are not used by the teachers in the rural areas of India. Anyhow, the aim of the teacher should not be the preference of the methodology but the learning of English and the students' knowledge of the language. If he thinks a particular method is useful for the students, he can use that one without any hesitation.

When we say English Language Teaching or Language Learning, we are concerned with the four- language skill:

- a. Writing
- b. Reading
- c. Speaking and
- d. Listening.

All these four skills are very important and so all of them should be taught with equal emphasis. All these four skills are related with each other. We cannot say that one skill is more important than others. It is true that learning reading and writing is very important because they make the students pass the examination but in their practical lives, speaking and listening are equally important. Keeping the examination in mind, some teachers put emphasis only on reading and writing skills because examination usually tests reading and writing only. Due to this spoken and listening skills are neglected or given a little teaching time. This is the problems in the rural areas. This is the reason that rural students are not good in speaking or listening although some students are very good at reading and writing. The teachers in the rural schools and colleges must pay attention towards the all four skills of language. They should also train their students in spoken English. For this they should give them some topics and make them speak in the class room. This will improve their speaking as well as listening skills. Thus, a teacher should pay attention towards the overall progress of their students.

4. Conclusion

Thus, we see that there are many different methods to teach the four skills of the English language. But this division of language into four skills is not natural and appropriate while teaching the students belonging to the backward rural areas who do not find opportunity to practice English at their home after the class. They totally depend on their teachers to learn English. So, instead of wasting their time telling their students about the four skills of language, they should teach their



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students English as a whole. When the students become somewhat expert in English then teachers can tell them about the four skills. All the four skills are related to one another and teaching of all the four skills are very important for the students of rural areas. So, in rural areas' schools or colleges, instead of teaching four or five different classes, one teacher should teach all the four skills to one class so that he may be aware of the overall progress of his students. So, it is highly recommended that in rural areas English should be taught as an integrated course.

In the same way, teachers should adopt any methodology which they think appropriate for their students. It should be kept in mind that the most important thing is to learn English, not the use of methodology. The teacher may use any methodology for the convenience and understanding of the students.

But as we know that for the learner of English reading and writing skills are the most important from the technical point of view. So, the emphasis should be first on reading and writing for the rural students in India. If a student once learns how to read words or sentences, he will automatically become able to write and speak English. If he does not know how to read, listening English words will fall flat on his ears. He will not understand anything because he is not acquainted with words or sentences in English. So, first of all, a student belonging to rural areas of India, should be trained in reading the English alphabets, words and sentences.

To teach such students, a teacher must have patience. To teach an EFL student, especially a student from rural areas where there is no environment of English language, the patience on the part of the teacher is very important. If a teacher is dedicated, competent, and understands the psychology of the students, he may rescue his students from their frustration with the English language. To teach grammar and composition to student having the knowledge of English language is very easy but to prepare a student for English language is the most difficult task. The development of these students totally depends on the competency of their English teacher and the curriculum they are being taught.

Conflict of Interest

The authors have declared that there is no conflict of interest in the manuscript.

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