

Challenges of Rural Students in English Language Acquisition

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Abstract

English as a language has been used in India for more than a century, but it continues to pose challenges for many of the non-native speakers. It is used as a link language and widely used in academic institutes, offices, business and industrial concerns and so teaching of English in schools has gained importance in the education system of our country. In a multi-lingual and multi-cultural country like India, classes of mixed ability groups are a feature of every small town and 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 & employment) require English as medium of instruction. Vernacular language is spoken and is in common use. Teachers require proper guidance on the effective methods of language-teaching. The ratio of students and teachers is high, leading to ineffectiveness. The rural atmosphere also does not provide students the opportunity to speak and learn English. This paper deals with the difficulties rural students face while learning English.

Key Words: English language, learning process, rural students, difficulties and challenges

Introduction

Though we have been using English in India for more than a century, attaining proficiency in English is all Greek and Latin for many of our learners. English is a major link language at national and international levels and is a commonly used language in offices, business, industry, preparation of professionals like Doctors and Engineers and in research particularly in the fields of science and technology. Hence, teaching of English in schools has acquired due importance in the education system of our country.

Importance of English

In a multi-lingual and multi-cultural country like India, classes of mixed ability groups are a feature of every small town and village. In most of the rural parts of India, learning – teaching process is done in the vernacular language, where the word *English* is considered as a magical and mystical one. On the other hand, most of the competitive examinations (higher education & employment) require English as medium of instruction. Vernacular language is spoken and is in common use. The ratio of students and teachers is high that makes individualization of instruction a little challenge. Besides, learners from rural areas lack exposure in English till they complete their school education and when they step into college, they face real challenges.

Lack of Exposure in English

Plutarch says, “*The mind is not a vessel to be filled, but a fire to be kindled*”. Students of today even after twelve years of school study lack mastery over English, where English is also a medium of instruction. Teaching of English needs a sea change for the benefit of the learners in schools. Bilingual method is adopted in language classes, because majority of the students hail from rural areas, do not have any exposure to the effective use of English. English is mostly taught only as a subject, not as a language. It is a well-known fact that language is a skill which cannot be taught or learnt. Instead a skill can be acquired by means of constant practice. One, who practises language constantly with a great zeal and zest, gets more chances to acquire mastery over the language.

Circumstances of learners

Weak domestic environment of the students may also affect their psychological and educational status. Complex is one of the barriers to the acquisition of language learning skills. Motivation removes complex. No border should be drawn between rural and urban students. Slightly modified coaching can be given to three different types of learners (Slow

learners, average learners and fast learners) instead of demotivating slow learners and average learners by building the bridge of complex.

Difficulties of Learners

Generally, learners from rural areas face more difficulties than those from urban areas during the process of language acquisition. In cities, mostly parents are educated. So, even domestic environment helps the students from urban areas acquire the language quickly because there are more chances that the wards can speak in English other than their mother tongue with their family members. But in rural parts of the country, students of today mostly do not get chances to either speak or read in English. Even in classroom, teachers use vernacular language in order to help the students to learn.

Dominance of Vernacular Language in Learning and Teaching English

Even though students study English as a medium of instruction, they find difficult to frame even a single sentence without any grammatical error in English. The reason for this plight of the students is that they study subjects from the examination point of view only. Even English language is taught in the vernacular language. Our examination system encourages the students to learn lessons by heart and reproduce them in the examinations, just aiming at a pass mark or some grade in English. The focus of the teachers in general is more on teaching about English rather than teaching in English.

Teaching about English rather than Teaching in English

Students learn basic grammar at school level with the so called intention of getting a pass mark in the tests and examinations, and not to confront with challenges they face due to lack of communicative skills in English. Application-oriented advanced grammar is not taught in schools. Furthermore, adequate practice is not given to students to effectively use the language for their prosperous future. Exposure too is far less to them. School study is an important phase in every student's life. A student grows from a small child to a grown up when he/she completes higher secondary examinations. A student, after this phase, enters into college life. This period is considered a transition period. The system followed in colleges is different from that of schools. They suffer a lot due to poor communication skills and knowledge over the language. Each and every child has much talents and capabilities, but it is unfortunate that they do not get proper guidance and opportunity to develop their skills and ignite their talents.

Challenges faced by the rural students

- Problem in understanding the abstract idea
- Psychological, financial and environmental interference
- Learning method
- First generation learners
- Mother tongue influence
- Pronunciation difference in language
- Lack of interest
- Lack of practice
- Lack of motivation

Remedies

- Building a rapport among learners in classroom
- Importance of English should be explained
- Using different methods of teaching
- Building confidence among students
- Improvement in teaching facilities

Conclusion

“The aim of education is not the acquisition of information, although important, or acquisition of technical skills, though essential in modern society, but the development of that bent of mind, that attitude of reason, that spirit of democracy which will make us responsible citizens.” - Dr. S. Radhakrishnan

As Gandhiji said, if village is destroyed, India too will be destroyed. The restoration of the village is possible only when it is no more exploited. Whatever the wealth one has the real wealth that never gets lost and never be carried from us by any is ‘Education’. Such an effective and qualitative education should be provided to all without any difference. Mostly in the classrooms, the teachers are the active speakers and learners passive listeners. This scenario must be changed. Students should be encouraged to take part in communicative based activities. Evaluation should be based on assuring the effectiveness of English language teaching and learning. Students are mostly involved in the writing process in the name of written exam. Written exam is there to test their subject knowledge not mastery of writing skills and the learners are not involved in other skills namely listening, speaking and reading and other communicative based activities. Awareness about the importance of English and

developing the communicative competence must be stimulated in the minds of the school students. The ultimate objective of English teachers must be developing the communicative competence of the students in English. Curriculum revision is the need of the hour. The syllabus in English must be challenging and updated, and cater to the academic and professional needs and requirements of the student community.

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