

Challenges of English Language Teaching in Rural Areas

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The main purpose of using language is to communicate one's needs, necessities, feelings, thoughts and ideas to others (Banu, 2). The last decade or so has been marked by a new phenomenon called globalization. This has a profound impact on different domains of life such as social, political and economic. It has also experienced significant changes in the communication dynamics of the world. English language is the most crucial gear of this new communication euphoria. English has become the modern lingua franca, i.e. the language of communication among speakers of other languages. As such, English can help bridge communication barriers across cultures. English has opened up avenues for many areas such as means of communication, medicine, agro-business, science, technology, international businesses, trade, shipping, aviation, sports, research, books, diplomacy, and so on. Its quick wide spreading also arrived at small rural communities, where life goes around the school and the fields. It is in this limited space, distant from the great urban centers, that the English language is taught in rural areas.

Teaching of English in rural or difficult areas is definitely a challenge. It's a challenge in the sense that all theoretical knowledge acquired as part of ELT training goes haywire in the classroom. A teacher has to evolve strategies at every step during his/her class. Before I deliberate on the remedial measures, let us take an overview of the grey areas as far as teaching of English in rural areas is concerned.

This paper is developed to demonstrate the main difficulties English teachers have to face when they have students from different and distant communities and who do not have any interests in learning a foreign language. Moreover, problems such as lack of adjusted material, the long distances that students must travel, and the fact that they almost live isolated and with a minimum contact with the imposed language, certainly frustrate the teachers's expectations towards English teaching. Apart from this there are other factors also which are equally important for lack of proficiency of English language both as a subject or language in rural areas as: lack of literature books, textbooks, movies, lack of visual contact of English, great number of students in the classrooms, parents value school but they over-protect their sons and daughters, lack of English material, long distances to arrive at school/college, lack of investments in rural education, different cultures living in the same rural community, lack of interests in learning English, higher teacher-student ratio, lack of effective teacher training, lack of quality teacher, unavailability of language skills learning tools are the most problematic factors towards

implementing English curriculum effectively in rural areas.. English as a phobia, English treated as elite over other languages, English as an indicator of social status, taught like any other subject notional introduction of technology, incompetent teachers jingoism, substandard teaching material, non-availability of basic infrastructure hostile socio-cultural factors are also the drawbacks for teachers of English. According to Dudley-Evans and ST John (1998) the material chosen by teachers should have some motivational characteristics:

To stimulate and motivate, materials need to be challenging yet achievable; to offer new ideas and information whilst being grounded in the learners' experience and knowledge; to encourage fun and creativity. The input must contain concepts and/or knowledge that are familiar but it must also offer something new, a reason to communicate, to get involved. The exploitation need to match how the input would be outside the learning situation and take account of language learning needs. The purpose and the connection to the learners' reality need to be clear. (172)

To me any institution can play an important role in three key areas, namely: providing qualitative learner friendly infrastructure, recruitment of good English teachers: this is an inflammable issue. Look at the kind of teachers appointed by various State governments in rural areas. Considering their incompetence at using English or Will to use English, why should one expect miraculous results from them? Appointments are highly political and mere possession of degrees like Diploma in Education (D.Ed), Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) is sufficient to label somebody as an English teacher. Avenues for socio-cultural opportunities: in a rural school or college one hardly finds a chance to interact with the society/ community. The institutes should organize interactive activities to ensure participation of learners. Eye contact is maintained between the teacher and the student. Teaching is synchronized with the student's mind. Immediate remedial action such as repeating the material already taught or altering the pace of teaching can be executed. Doubts on the part of the student are immediately cleared by the teacher. The teacher does not spend time grappling with technology. There should be rapport and bonding development between the teacher and the student through regular face to face interactions in class. The teacher acts as a role model for the student, thereby enhancing the learning process. Find out own material, access to radio-CD player, TV, DVD player, computer and photocopy machine, good relationship between students/teachers and teachers/students' families, school support , Initial motivation to start learning English, Homogeneous classrooms (in terms of English knowledge) are also the requirement for this purpose.

Moreover, the almost in existing use of spoken English in the classroom is a factor that influences students' learning. If they do not practice in the classroom, possibly they will not do it in their homes. The reason why teachers do not use English in the classroom varies from the difficulty students have to understand what is being said till the difficulty of communication and the shame in using English. These factors are explained by themselves, once there is no learning without knowledge and practice. A propitious environment in which English should be explored

and used a lot is in the classroom. When teachers are in the classroom they should speak English as much as possible, however this almost does not happen in rural areas. Moreover, the biggest problem to put in practice the lesson plans is not the students, but the lack and/or access to English related material. Teachers agree that the lack of material transforms the classes yet more difficult than they really are. When students get a copy of any kind of material, they have contact with the foreign language and they do their best to discover what is written in that piece of paper. However, when they do not get a copy, they must copy from the blackboard what is tiring, difficult and a boring activity. Teachers try to show the importance of copying in order to improve their writing, but this argument is weak and lost in itself. In fact, teachers note that what they really want is just wait for the right answers. For many of them, learning what is and how to use English becomes a play where there is no winner, but the teacher and the school. These positive or negative views on English are acceptable as English plays a different role for different people, what has already been investigated by Richards and Lockhart (1994):

English represents different things to different people. For some it represents the language of English literature. For others it is the language of the English-speaking world. Some associate it with the language of colonialism. Other sees English simply as a mean of doing business and making money. People' view of English, or of any other language, are influenced by contacts they have had with the language and its speakers. (32)

Certainly, this is a big challenge teachers have to face in their English teaching, once they have to convince the students about the importance of learning English, moreover demonstrate the value teachers have in their field of actuation. As a professional, difficulties like these are common in the scholar universe, and teachers must be prepared to face them with serenity and calm, showing that the most important for students is to assimilate the subject as part of their curriculum and try to bring it to their routine, demonstrating its importance around the world. In spite of the great number of negative views on English by students in rural areas, it is comprehensible that students think like that. Their reality is centered on their own world, and their world is surrounded by farmers, harvesting machines, farm tractors, trucks, domestic animals, plantations, and the land, mainly the land. Everything they do is linked to the seasons, the sun, the rain and the final result: the products they produce and sell in order to live and keep their families. In this context, it is comprehensible why there is a kind of rejection of the English language, especially because of its imposition by the public school at the first hand. The hegemony of English transforms it in an indispensable subject in the school curriculum, what sometime does not reflect the students' choice. Learning English is directly associated with students' way of living (family background; pronunciation problems; considered useless and a waste of time; lack of interest in learning it; its compulsory nature). Students' reality and students' age influence directly upon the teachers' methods and outcomes. Teachers and students have to walk and travel long distances to arrive at college or school. Once in the school or college, they are tired and lose their concentration. The four skills associated with their failures,

namely, reading (lack of literature; distance from the target language), writing (vocabulary problems; lack of practice), listening (lack of contact with the spoken language; insignificant related material), and speaking (small lexicon; memorized words just for tests), demonstrate the difficulties teachers have to face in order to get students attention and develop these skills.

Library access and available material (almost non-existent) create a barrier to English learning that teachers have to overcome by their own way. Over-protection – students have to work in their farm and their parents protect them instead of encouraging them to learn more – becomes dangerous for students, motivating them to study less than they are able to. Teachers should understand students' viewpoints of learning English and they should try to overcome this situation showing the role English plays nowadays. Teachers should plan their classes according to students' needs and ages. Teachers must know where their students come from and understand their specific situations. They should try to demonstrate the importance of English around the world (business, science, computing, technology, trade, shipping, etc.), but always respecting students' background. Teachers should prepare good classes decreasing the level of anxiety of each different group. Teachers must perform more practical exercises and use English as much as possible. They should develop activities based on the four skills: reading (read aloud and texts for comprehension); writing (copy from the blackboard and write in the notebook); listening (play CDs with English dialogues and listening to music); and speaking (repetition exercises and act out small dialogues). Teachers should do general tests and provide activities evolving the whole group, especially in classes with a lot of students. Teachers may try to break down the over-protection by showing to the parents the importance of learning a foreign language.

Having known that 70% of India lives in villages, majority of the work force comes from rural areas. It becomes imperative that students of such areas are given equal opportunities to learn English. The urban rural divide in teaching of English has to be bridged. It is possible only if a committed and honest approach is adopted. Having said that a rural student is equally competent to learn English, an English teacher has to adopt innovative strategies in the classroom. One has to go for action research to find the solutions on the spot. A few measures like appointment of skilled and committed teachers of English at primary level, effective implementation of technological schemes like EDUSAT, soft skill classes should be there. But, zero tolerance on the quality of both human and infrastructural resources, provision of minimum technological aids like TV, LCD Projectors, Computers, Stereos, weekly film shows, facelift to the general ambience in schools and colleges, etc should be put in place to arrest the dwindling standards of teaching/ learning of English in rural areas. Some of the said measures may appear farfetched but will certainly help in better teaching and learning of English language in rural areas. Since English is the foreign language to the people of India, students of our country find it a complex task in their education. Considering the global needs, English was implemented as a compulsory subject since the independence at higher level. In this context, it is a matter of great

sorrow that right implementation of English curriculum is still far away. Especially in rural areas of India, English is yet the matter of fear for students. Urban students are comparatively adroit in English language because school teachers are skilled in English language teaching and they get support from parents and house tutors. But in rural areas, most of the parents are not educated and unable to spend money for private tutor. If schools teacher become qualified and conscious to teach students, it will be helpful for rural students to learn English effectively. To emancipate the fear of English language learning among the rural students and to achieve the curriculum goals and objectives, government and non-government organizations, whose are trying to improve English language skills of rural primary schools student, should take some short and long terms plan by considering existent condition of English language learning and the prevailing problems which are hindrances for implementing English curriculum. Recruiting high qualified and subject specialist teacher, providing adequate training for their professional development, increasing salary level so that they can respect their own jobs and proving sufficient materials for learning language skills could the solution of these problems. Here we would like to encourage other researchers to do a comparative research about urban and rural student's competency in English language and find out the solutions to overcome the thwarts of English language learning.

Curriculum is the heart of education system which indicates the education aims, objectives and learning outcomes (Hasan, n.p). It helps teacher to conduct their teaching in classroom .To implement English language curriculum at primary and higher level, teachers' knowledge about the aims, objectives of English curriculum is very essential (Rahman, n.p). But it is found that most of the teachers are not aware of the aims, objectives of English curriculum. When most of the teachers do not know the English curriculum aims and objectives, it is tough to achieve expected curriculum goal which is one of main hindrances for implementing curriculum.

As the people of a developing country, we cannot depend just on our mother tongue for communication since we are not self dependent at all. For this reason, learning English is indispensable for worldwide communication, as English is used mostly in international perspective. But keeping the problems alive it is next to impossible to cope with the demands of the present world. Therefore, it is expected that the authority will be concern to solve the existing problems.

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