

A STUDY OF VARIOUS WAYS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING METHODS IN RURAL AREAS

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Abstract

We live in a global world where our existence depends solely on our felicity of using English most often. Thus, getting well versed in English has become quite mandatory. While this does not pose a problem in metropolitan cities and towns, people in rural areas lack the skills to converse in English. There is still a major chunk of civilization devoid of the developments in terms of language and technology. English teachers teaching in rural areas often face the non-availability of required technical support and relevant atmosphere to teach English effectively. It is here that the role of innovative teachers becomes quite essential. An effective teacher, despite having limited resources, can prove himself as a tool. The present paper examines various resources and tools that can prove beneficial in teaching English as a foreign language. It will also throw light on the advantages and disadvantages of using teaching aids and will discover ways of how our pedagogical styles may work wonders at times. It has to be realized that despite all cacophony, it is ultimately the man who has to master the machines. Teaching is not only about the introduction of innovative technology but is also the desire to be created amongst our students. This desire ultimately converted into action can prompt an effective teacher to play a pivotal role in the entire process. The mere mention of teacher in a rural area reminds us of the teacher in Oliver Goldsmith's poem "The Village Schoolmaster" whose 'one small head could carry all he knew'. Things have changed today with the advances of science and the expectations of the global world. Today we need to have specialist teachers in every subject even in rural areas. This is because of the increased level of competition and the anxiety to survive and sustain in a fast-changing world. Knowledge of English today has become a sine-qua non for getting a coveted job and hence the importance of English teaching and learning has become manifold. As regards English teachers, their roles are not confined now to a hard task master but they are expected to be facilitator, a trainer, a counselor, a manager and a supervisor. There has been a transformation from 'talk and chalk' and teachers today have moved from BALL to CALL and now to MALL.

Keywords: Technology, teaching, facilitation, rural India, learners.

Introduction

While it is an unalterable truth that a viable life in a corporate global world cannot be imagined of without the felicity of using English every moment, the scenario of English teaching and learning in rural India is still bleak. In reality, the reasons for this lack lustre atmosphere are galore and at times beyond control. The rural areas lack good schools having proper ambience and affordability which cater to the changing needs and expectations of the crass-commercial global world. In addition, the paying capacities of people in rural areas also

add to the malady of learners who are forced to resort to traditional schools having teachers devoid of the familiarity with the effective language teaching strategies. Undeniably, many English teachers in rural areas are themselves not effective and fluent in using English. In many Indian states English language teaching is confined to the verbal rendering of lessons in regional languages helping learners to understand the content and not the structural nuances of languages. It is not surprising to note that English as a subject at school level in

Indian rural areas gains serious attention when learners reach their secondary levels. Poor grounding of students as regards vocabulary and structure disinterest them in paying attention to their English course. While teachers in their primary and secondary levels fail to complete the exercises or work-book sheets, students too shy away from these cumbersome tasks--- resulting in their aversion to English. While lack of trained teachers in rural areas has become a reality, the engagement of teachers in various non-academic tasks (viz. data collection, census, election related works etc.) adds to the malaise. 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. Many teachers find no time for self-evaluation, which perhaps could lead to some self- devised ways of enhancing their teaching abilities. Schools and colleges in rural areas abound in natural bounties, much to the envy of urban populace. This also becomes a hurdle for many teachers to prefer teaching in rural areas. Natural disasters such as flood and draught, inadequate transport facilities and lack of other amenities also make even trained teachers reluctant to take an appointment in remote areas. Also, the slow pace of life and tardy speed of government policies and resources most often deter both teachers and students from garnering the benefits of advanced aids. In such a scenario an English teacher is bound to take resort to his old tools— namely books. The Indian rural populace, which depends on agriculture and limited income, despite their avidity to provide their children with a qualitative life, end up sending them to government schools where English is not taught as a skill but as a subject. Both parents and students emphasize simply on passing examinations just to climb the ladder of

a higher class. As a result, students continue to carry the lapses of English throughout their lives. But this should not be taken as student's lack of intellectual progress rather than the lack of resources. Mishra 39. The endangering situation of English language teaching in rural areas is no excuse to allow this malaise. A majority of Indians as, Graddol (2010) observes, 'believe in the transformative power of English'. The new reality has enormous scope and application. Graddol observes: "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.120). In such a scenario where neither adequate resource nor tools are available, English teachers themselves have to devise innovative ways to make their students climb the staircase easily. The teacher has to take a solemn pledge to hone his students' knowledge of English. This can be done with a resolve, as Patil says: "I have to create opportunities for them to use English in meaningful, realistic, and relevant situations. Games, role play activities, information gap tasks, brain storming activities, riddles, puzzles, cartoons, anecdotes, jokes, songs and other low-cost and easily available teaching materials become handy" (Patil, 2008, p.07). In a world governed by technology, both students and teachers in rural areas have high expectations. The spreading hands of technology in their everyday lives have enabled them to compete with others despite some unalterable truths.

The arrival of computers, i-pads, cell phones, and innumerable gadgets has made them more enthusiastic. Who would not like to google and skype nowadays in an age of technology? The plethora of ambitions most often remain

famished because of several reasons--- known or unknown. There are various technological tools, which though can enhance English language teaching in rural areas, often have certain limitations. An English teacher's task in a rural area becomes more intimidating because of certain shortcomings on his part. While the syllabus makers are least bothered about the teacher's predicament, the teacher himself feels responsible for the poor products that are been produced over the years. The various limitations like course completion, successful implementation of government's schemes, lack of autonomy and lack of exposure add to his agony. Some trained teachers who strictly follow the grammar-translation method of teaching English find some solace by correcting his students' written errors yet fail to instill in them the effective spoken skills. While some students because of their congenial home atmosphere formulate and speak some sentences in English, they most often fail to bring the required effect. Here, the teacher's role also comes into question. A good number of English teachers are not properly trained in terms of pronunciation and eloquence. We cannot ignore the fact that despite immense potential of our rural students, they most often fail to compete in life and career with their urban counterparts because of their poor background in English. How should an English teacher respond to these challenges that hamper the growth of their students? The introduction of ICT in teaching English particularly in rural areas can be rewarding. Technology, which nowadays is a uniting force, can help in facing these challenges. These challenges have to be transformed into reality. While many state governments have provided technological support to schools and colleges in rural areas, it is an irony that despite bouts of enthusiasm initially, the fever frets away after some days.

Efficiency in language cannot be guaranteed unless it is practiced regularly. Government policies endeavor to organize training camps though with the help of several foreign agencies from time to time yet not much success results. Actually, these professional agencies with their professionally created audio-video clips exhort teachers but after some days of fun and frolic, the charm fades away. Moreover, such training camps are often very expensive and hence cannot become a regular feature. In many cases, the course modules of such agencies are not conditioned locally and its rigor appears intimidating than facilitating. Since technology has changed our course of life, it cannot face a blanket ban even in rural areas. Let us discover how technology can facilitate teaching English in rural areas. One cannot guarantee a hundred percent success of teaching English through technology, yet can create awareness both among students and teachers through technology. While the most common technology in urban areas, like Internet facility may appear difficult, some easily available technological resources like radio, T.V, Computer, mobile phones etc. can facilitate teaching of English in rural areas. Now, the efficacy of these devices depends upon the creativity and desire of teachers. A technically savvy teacher can also encourage his students to learn English at their own will, of course, under the tutelage of elders in the family.

Autonomy of teachers

In an age of technological proliferation, the English teacher in rural areas also expects to be provided with adequate freedom of choosing his gadgets. While it may become difficult to provide every school with a multimedia language laboratory, one major secondary school can be made a centre where the students of the nearby schools can join one/ half day

especially for English training along with their English teacher. A trained and expert English teacher from the adjacent town can also be appointed initially to train both the students and teachers alike. The trainer with his selected material (mostly based on regional cultural customs and festivals) can create amongst students the desire to communicate in English. The lessons/modules selected for these purposes should be interactive which could either be group discussion, group assignments, short films, short presentations etc. Such exercises, if repeated amongst students after initial training in other schools, can work wonders even without the use of technology. The teacher, acting upon the instructions of the trainer, may also organize such sessions every week in his school and get desired results. But a regular evaluation and feedback of students becomes imperative in this regard.

Teaching English as a skill

Job market today expects a candidate to have good communication skills to succeed and sustain in a global world. English teachers have to remain extra cautious of developing in their students the ability of four language skills namely—LSRW. Hence, the teaching of English as a skill and not only as a subject becomes indispensable. There is a growing consternation about English in rural areas that it is a language of the elite. What causes more agony is that even English teachers themselves are not free from this phobia. One has to remember that the task of an English teacher is not confined to mere vernacular rendering of a prose or a poem. The nuances of verbal melody, the proper pronunciation and use of patterns too are important. How many English teachers have the patience to hear his students recite poem and then correct wherever the latter go wrong? A sincere teacher can go an extra mile and play the

recorded rendering of the poem and allow students to recite with the same style. Some over-enthusiastic teachers most often explain the poem and block students' creative ability. Actually, they can be allowed to have their own explanation, if possible. They can also be allowed in groups to choose proper images and then after their discussion, write a short report and later present in the class. Such exercises, though may appear time-taking, yet are rewarding. These exercises help students enhance their four skills of language learning.

Shortage of Qualified Teachers of English

Language teachers in rural areas have been reported to be insufficient in quantity and lack resources as well as adequate professional preparation for working in such contexts. The shortage of qualified teachers for English language education is one of the major problems confronting rural schools impeding the possibility of catering for the needs of learners. There have also been grave concerns over teachers' language proficiency and expertise in language teaching. In the case of Vietnam, recent statistics in the mass media has revealed that a learning number of teachers, especially those from rural schools, fail to meet the language requirement imposed by MOET. They also have very limited access to professional development. Program, resulting in rather obsolete approaches to language teaching and poor classroom management strategies that foster a positive language learning environment. In relation to these issues, Hansen-Thomas et al. point out that "teachers need to develop specialized skills and strategies to understand the cultural and linguistic challenges faced by students; to more effectively engage students from the time the teacher enters the classroom until the teacher leaves". The limitations in terms of facilities

and language resources also make it hard for teachers to effectively conduct classroom activities and adopting certain innovative approaches to teaching. This points to the need to prepare trainee teachers for working in diverse teaching settings, including rural contexts; however, teacher education programs have unfortunately failed to address the potential issues that these teachers may encounter.

Learners' Motivation to Learn English

Given the challenging life circumstances and learning conditions in rural areas, learners display differing levels of motivation, resilience and attainment in English language studies. Framing his study from a self-system approach to L2 motivation, Lamb worked with ten adolescent students in rural Indonesia using survey responses and interview data. His study shows that the majority of the participants were aware of the value of learning

English for their upward social mobility and developed diverse visions of language use. They claimed to expend effort to learn English and adopt various learning strategies; however, Lamb emphasized the fact that "there is no evidence that any of them were following a plan or had any pedagogic guidance; activities appeared to be idiosyncratic and spontaneous". These students also showed their lack of confidence in using English for communication. In a similar study from a self-system perspective, Zulkefly and Razali analyze the impacts of the learning conditions between urban and rural schools on secondary school learners' exposure to English input, motivation and language attainment. The findings revealed that learners from rural areas had less access to language and lower linguistic achievement than their urban counterparts. A

striking feature of their study was that these two groups of learners developed motivational profiles and appreciation of the importance of learning English that were highly analogous. Truong's [2017] study with 1235 Vietnamese university students from different regions and educational backgrounds also reveals the same situation in which students from rural and remote areas exhibited a low level of L2 confidence and motivation due to the financial and resource limitations hindering their language learning. Further, while rural learners expressed lower self-efficacy than those from urban backgrounds, they tended to invest more effort in language learning. Such resilience and willingness to learn were also identified among students from rural South Africa and Spain as they were aware of their shortcomings and aspired to a vision of bridging their social-economic gap]. Conversely, there are cases in which learners were discouraged from learning English due to the lack of an environment for authentic communication or were entangled in the vicious circle of poverty or other social concerns that may thwart their motivation.

Values Associated with Language Learning

Learners' attitudes towards learning English and their expended efforts are largely attributable to the practical values of language use as well as parental involvement in language education. To many learners and their families, proficiency in English has a life-changing power for career opportunities and upward social mobility. Lamb's study shows that English is seen as a means of social advancement and has versatility in realizing the varying ambitions of many of his participants including international travel, international social networks, academic success, socially respected career, and self-fulfillment. In the same vein, education in general and language

learning in particular are seen as the ‘top priority’ for success in life in rural contexts in Vietnam or as “the agent of social mediation” for improving one’s socio-economic status in rural South Africa. In contrast, Hayes points out the fact that the role of English is not always transparent in certain rural areas in Thailand where “English was regarded as a foreign language, with no immediate usefulness and without prestige”. Such opposing views of English account for the different degrees of parental involvement and investment in children’s language education. Whereas some rural parents in many parts of the world voice their strong support, others express doubts about the practical value of language learning or financially fail to provide their children with adequate access to resources for learning.

Teaching English through mobile and projectors

The primary purpose of English teaching today is to convert pupils into products and hence an effective communication skill comes into picture. Teachers in the rural backdrop of almost all countries where English happens to be a second language have to realize this fact. Our students need to be exposed to those skills which can make them employable. While rural areas lack in the required ambience, teachers can make much use of the easily available resources. Mobile phones which have become common even in rural areas can work as a panacea to many challenges of teaching English. True, that all students cannot afford cell phones, teachers can use their own mobile phones for the purpose of teaching provided the school provides them with a projector. Selection of required materials based on a country’s cultural faith and episodes of sacred texts converted into visuals can help students relate to their roots and in turn motivate them.

One cannot deny the fact that visuals speak more than words. In Indian villages, teachings of Lord Budhha, Mahaveera, Gandhi, Tagore, and Mother Teresa can ignite the minds of young learners and benefit them. After showing them these clips, the teacher can assign them tasks of developing these into conversational paragraphs through role plays. Sincere teachers can also make selections and grading of these assignments and provide their students with meaningful suggestions. Students often feel more attracted towards images and photographs. This can be converted into an opportunity by an English teacher. Let us allow our students to narrate stories in English in turns. While this can be recorded in a multi-media lab, teachers in rural areas can record these through their mobile and later play with the help of projector. Some selected recordings can be later shown and explained in the classroom. This activity will encourage other students also to come forward and prompt many others to participate. The teacher has to mark the lapses of students during their participation and later explain them in details focusing on pronunciation, lip and other body movements. Such endeavour of teachers can make every classroom very eventful and the English teacher will feel a sense of achievement. Likewise, English teachers in rural areas can use advertisements to teach English.

Teaching through advertisements

In an age where English teachers refer to the use of online teaching either through YouTube, social networking and other websites, it may still appear a romantic illusion in rural areas. However, there are other ways through which English can be taught with the help of advertisements. Since advertisements are audio-video, students tend to get more attracted towards them. Most of the advertisements

because of their punch lines often can be easily remembered by students in rural areas. These online tags can be assigned to students as pattern practice through which students can develop grammatically correct sentence formations. Some of these advertisements can also be a mix of code switching and code-mixing.

What an idea, Sirjee! --- Idea Mobile "I think, therefore IBM". -- IBM ThinkPad "Let's make things better" --- Philips We Make the Things that Make India Proud. --- L&T "Express yourself every day. "– Philips "Eye it. Try it. Buy it."– Chevrolet "Have a break, have a Kit Kat"- Kit Kat chocolate

While teaching English through advertisements involves our purpose of teaching grammar, teachers can also resort to some ads which are a queer mix of Hinglish. But a careful teacher of English can also assign the task of translation, which will make his students use his vocabulary and grammatical skills. Teachers have to be extra conscious while choosing catchy slogans from other languages lest it interfere with any culture. Hungry Kya (Are you Hungry?) - Domino's Pizza Yeh Dil maange more (Our hearts want more) - Pepsi Pal banaye magical (Make every moment magical) – Lays Hum mein hai hero (There's a hero in everyone) – Hero Motocorp Kyaaap Close Up karte hain? (Do you use Close Up toothpaste?) – Close-Up Thus, the paper has made numerous arguments in favour of teaching English through technology and other means in rural areas. But as teachers of English, we have to remain strictly aware of students picking up haphazard spellings and short expressions inappropriate for Standard English. As teachers of English, we cannot forget the fact that digital language gaining popularity on our cells and blogs stealthily makes their presence on examination

scripts. Short expressions such as CUall, Goodnite, RUOK, multi-tasking, lol, b/w, stn, asap, CUSN, etc. cannot be considered part of standard English. The excessive use of technology may often irritate us as it is no wonder to receive unnecessary and untoward calls at odd hours.

CONCLUSION

The discussion made in this paper does not intend to eliminate the use of text books in the classrooms. All technical gadgets or tools are mere substitutes to books. Of course, the substitutes are adopted as teaching materials just to make language teaching more relaxed rather than rigorous, friendlier rather than intimidating and more creative and goal – oriented rather than cumbersome and haphazard. Technology-integrated language teaching can, of course, be made more fruitful by the dual and combined efforts of the teacher and the taught. It is quite significant to note that ultimately it is the teacher (the man) who with his careful planning can control technology (the machine) since technical glitches may have well-defined remedies yet they stand far behind teachers who possess fountains of forgiveness and oceans of optimism. The teacher's interference at the right moment in the classroom has appeared more remedial in all times and herein lies his innovation. The real English teaching can be realized not in the segregation of different units of grammar and composition but in its integration, says Widdowson. Finally, as the primary agents in the learning process, learners should be made aware of the utility value of language learning overarching their own idiosyncrasies, backgrounds and goals. Learning English has been widely identified as a "a means to climb up the social ladder", consolidating the rewards of pursuing it. However, Omidire propounds

that “Learners in rural areas need support to help actualize their dreams and hopes for a future where they can move away from their current context”. In addition to providing learners from rural areas with adequate access to English and an environment for regular practice, it is no less important to ignite their interest in learning English and fostering their resilience. These elements may be mitigated by learners’ other life and household concerns or their failure to see the immediate needs of using English that undermine their motivation and commitment. Therefore, teachers and parents can work together in raising learners’ awareness of potential benefits of learning English and help them envisage the versatility of English for employability and other future prospects.

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