

English Language Teaching: Prospects and Problems in Rural Areas

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Abstract: English has made little impact on development of the rural areas in comparison to cities in India. A huge population has been emigrating from villages to the cities and abroad in search of better living. Proficiency in English plays a major role for these migrants to take up jobs in the cities and abroad especially Europe and America over many decades. Although English Education System was introduced in 1980s across India including villages, English isn't used much in the rural areas as in cities. But in present times, English is gaining momentum in Indian villages due to television and increasing use of internet. It is quiet interesting to note that English is gradually being used in villages through code mixing for communication. Yet, there are differences in English language proficiency among students from urban and rural areas. This paper presents interpretations on English Language Teaching in rural areas of Maharashtra. It focuses on the prospects and problems in English language teaching both in English and Regional Education Systems specific to rural areas and includes some suggestions.

Key words: English Language Teaching, Problems in ELT, English Proficiency

I. INTRODUCTION

Languages have a substantial role in development of the human society as a basic medium of communication. English is significant in the global economy and has been more impactful in development of the regions across globe. English Education in India was introduced by the British during their rule. The elites of the Indian society raced ahead but the rural families and tribal could not access English Education during this period. English Education received great momentum in 1980s across India. In this period, many institutions sprang up offering the courses in English both in cities and villages across the state. As a result, English became popular and a key factor in development of the Indian cities. But, the rural society and tribal were untouched of the development English brought to the cities. The objective of English language teaching in school education is to develop the communicative ability in students. But, we observe huge disparities in English language teaching in rural and urban areas. The students in urban areas are good at English but students in rural areas struggle to learn English properly. Most of these students could not acquire the basic language competencies in English due to several challenges. This paper presents the interpretations on English Language Teaching at rural areas of Maharashtra and points out the problems and prospects of English language teaching in these rural areas.

II. ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN SCHOOL EDUCATION OF MAHARASHTRA

School education plays a vital role in the development of society. The institutions and the students need to be proactive in imparting and acquiring skills respectively through curriculum and academic environment for successful education system. The scenario of English language at school level is considered in this paper as it is the most crucial stage in education and has great impact on learning the basic language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Maharashtra has unified education system for all the schools run under the State Board of Education. Marathi is a regional language and English has limited use in rural areas but popular in cities like Mumbai and Pune. English is either a medium of instruction or a subject which is taught at different levels of school from pre-primary, primary, secondary and higher secondary education in both regional and English mediums as a first to third language across the state. As pointed earlier, the students from rural areas lack in basic language skills and find English difficult due to several factors. The aspects like curriculum, learning environment and resources and teaching competency in English are considered to understand the prospects and problems of ELT in rural areas.

III. PROBLEMS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING TO STUDENTS OF RURAL AREAS

There are differences in English language competencies among students of rural and urban areas, despite of unified curriculum framework of English throughout the state. There are many factors which create the differences in English Language Learning and English proficiency among rural and urban students are as follows:

1. Family Background: Family background plays key role in determining the performance of students in education. The rural families are often ignorant of educational needs of their wards which affect the performance of students in education. Most of the families in rural areas are monolingual which makes them difficult to acquire English outside the classroom.
2. Educational Resources: Students, who can access better resources, have better chance of developing language competencies. But, the students from rural areas do not have access to enough educational resources due to low economic background.
3. Facilities in ELT Classroom: Facilities like Library, English Language Laboratory and English Language Clinic increase the exposure to English and develop language skills. These facilities for ELT classroom are not available to facilitate language learning for the rural students.
4. A qualified and trained teacher is the primary requisite for a successful educational programme. We observe that it is the greatest hindrance for ELT in rural areas irrespective of medium of instruction since the qualified teachers prefer urban areas for better employment and facilities. The private institutions especially pay least heed to the qualification and training of the teachers. In public schools, motivation plays an important role in teaching- learning of English for the teacher and students.
5. Motivation and Right Attitude for Language Learning: Motivation and right attitude is essential in language learning. It affects learning both positively and negatively. The students face difficulty to grasp English and somewhat fearful of the language. Active participation of students and proper guidance become necessary in learning a language for non-native students of English.
6. Size of the Classroom: Across the state, the average classroom size is 60 or more students per classroom which does not allow a teacher to pay equal attention to individual learning needs of the students.
7. Examination Oriented Mindset: The curriculum is merely treated from the point of view of exam and the focus shifts from language learning to merely passing in the

examination. Additionally, the quality of evaluation doesn't fulfill the objectives of learning English.

8. Pedagogy in Practice: Methods of ELT greatly influence language learning among students. The present system of teaching English in schools in rural areas holds no ray of hope as the teachers commonly use translation method and rote learning in teaching English.

IV. PROSPECTS OF ELT IN MAHARASHTRA

The State Education Department has taken concrete steps in addressing the problems in teaching- learning of English and facilitating language acquisition over last decade. These measures range from educational policies to curriculum framework and teachers training programmes which would offer better prospects in ELT at all levels of school education. It would certainly help to eliminate the problems in English language proficiency among rural and urban students.

1. Introducing English at the primary school level for the regional medium students is a revolutionary step in school education taken by the education department. Catching the learners at young age and at early stage of education would increase the chances of learning English language faster with proficiency.
2. The new curriculum frame-work of English and text book design for all levels of school emphasis on attaining the basic objectives of language learning. The content of textbooks is much connected with the changing needs of a language learner. It also enables the teachers to use innovative ways of teaching adapting to the needs of learners considering their background.
3. The training and professional development programmes for teachers have changed drastically in recent years. The government of Maharashtra has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the British council to strengthen English education across the state. Under this agreement, British Council has been offering training to English language teachers. It would certainly help in improving the quality of teaching-learning, and developing the basic language skills among school students.
4. Creating English Eco System in schools with Task-based Language Learning and Natural Approaches in teaching English is stressed through training sessions. These approaches emphasis on language proficiency rather language competency which is a drastic shift from the previous curriculum framework. These approaches would promote subconscious and stress free language acquisition for learner and would be suitable to a wide range of learners and situations.

V. ENHANCING ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY OF STUDENTS FROM RURAL AREAS

The measures taken by the education department would certainly improve the scenario of English language proficiency among students at large. We need to devise different ways of developing English language proficiency among rural students if we want to help them and benefit themselves and their communities. Some additional steps can help to improve the scenario of English Language Proficiency among these students and bring further change in learning environment of schools like:

1. All Language skills namely listening, speaking, reading and writing should equally be focused during teaching-learning process.
2. The comprehensive evaluation techniques should be used to find outcome of learning and design subsequent activities to help students overcome their problems in English language.
3. The teachers should create learning resources as per the needs and background of students as there are less facilities inside the class and no facilities outside in rural areas.
4. Use of ICT and innovative methods in teaching would certainly motivate students and cater to their individual learning needs.
5. The background of students must be considered for classroom teaching strategies.
6. The emphasis must also shift from teaching and testing of content to imparting skills in the target language.

VI. CONCLUSION

Efforts to make the students of rural areas proficient in English language and increase their employability skills for global market will go a long way. There should be a long-term solution to improve the teaching-learning of English in schools in rural areas if we have to top the chart on global English proficiency index. Since English is the second language in rural areas, effective implementation of English curriculum is of utmost importance with teachers training programmes.

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