

Problems of Teaching English to the Rural Students of Vernacular Medium Schools

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Abstract

English holds the position of an international language and is therefore valued as a subject of study in secondary schools. Teaching English as a foreign language is a challenging task. However, when it comes to teaching English in vernacular schools, the teacher has a variety of difficulties. The obstacles include a lack of learning resources, inadequate facilities, language barriers, the economic condition of the students, an unsupportive environment, demotivated students, and more. Also, for the Pandemic situation, a new regulation required that schools be held online. It causes many difficulties for teachers to teach English in rural areas schools. The main purpose of this research paper is to understand the problems in the Indian education system basically in the rural areas. The main thing which is highlighted here is the problem of teaching English to the rural students of vernacular schools. The issues that they have been facing are also discussed here. This paper also concerns some suggestions for making improvements in teaching English in rural schools.

Key Words: Second language acquisition, foreign language, teaching in vernacular schools, Indian education system, challenges.

Introduction

Dr. Abdul Kalam believes that students play a significant role to transform India into a developing country. But now it seems to be a dream or a nightmare. The present Pandemic condition makes education harder to reach students in India. And the most difficult task is the acquisition of 2nd language which is the English Language.

The history of the English language in India commenced with the arrival of the British during colonial rule. The British established the East-India Company in India in 1600. However, they did not concentrate on education, from the beginning. Their main aim was trade. Babu English is a dialect of English that was first used amongst the clerks in offices in Bengali in the era before the partition. William Bentick and Macaulay introduced English education in India. On 2nd February 1835, Thomas Babington Macaulay presented his Minute on Indian Education ("Manifesto of English Education in India"/ "Macaulay's Minute") which mainly focused on conveying English education to Indian natives. Only the people who knew English would get various jobs in offices. The Charter Act of 1813, encouraged Missionaries to open English schools in India. They aimed to educate Indians and to convert them to a new language that was 'English', and convert them to a new culture that was 'Western', and a new religion that was

‘Christianity’. Likewise, since colonial times English has been considered a superior language in contrast to all the regional languages of India. The “Three Language Formula” was officially endorsed at the National Integration Conference in 1961. Then in 1967, the official language act was passed which stated that English will continue as an official language.

Some problems that students face

Today English is an international language. English is also a mediator language or ‘link language’ because of the multicultural diversity in our country. So, at present time English plays a very crucial role in the areas of education and administration. That’s why, currently, English is the most widely taught as a 2nd language around the world. But most of the students are unable to grab it, especially, the rural students in our country. And in this pandemic situation, the difficulty reached its high peak for them. During the pandemic situation, a new regulation required that schools be held in online mode. However, it is not possible for rural schools to follow this regulation, as the students cannot afford any electronic gadgets and also sometimes there is not any signal in the students’ residences. The biggest cause for rural students is not being able to learn English in their environment. Most of the rural people belong to the lower middle class or lower class. Their economic condition is not much good. As a result, the children don’t get proper guidance on education. One native speaker, who practices speaking English regularly, can achieve fluency. But the rural students cannot follow this strategy. Because they find no one to speak English. So, the main cause is the lack of knowledge. They don’t get proper guidance and that’s why they cannot learn English and its rules properly, also, they don’t get the opportunity to practice speaking in English. Some major problems that become the barrier to teaching learning English to the rural students of vernacular medium schools are shortly discussed below.

Grammatical construction or syntax is one of the major problems for the rural students of vernacular medium schools. Sentence construction seems to them the hardest job for students. One reason behind this is the grammatical rules. Whenever they try to make a sentence in English, the mother tongue Pool always interferes with this. L1 interference is the biggest cause of errors in sentence-making. In Bengali, the subject of a sentence comes first, and then the object and the next verb. The learners apply this rule unintentionally, which is not granted because, in the English grammatical rule, we have subject first then verb, and then object. So, the learners occur this error just because of the mother tongue pool. Besides this, the usage of auxiliary verbs in English also becomes a problem for them in sentence making. They are often confused or we can say that sometimes they don’t even have it in mind to put the auxiliary verb while making an English sentence. The reason is the same, L1 interference. Usually, in Bengali, the auxiliary verb of a sentence remains implicit. But in English without an auxiliary verb, the sentence is unacceptable. In that case, rural students face problems while constructing sentences in English. They again get in trouble for the ‘over generalization’. Sometimes they construct a sentence like -“Ram eated an apple”. This error occurs only because of over-generalization. In English, the past tense maker is ‘-ed’ which is not a fixed rule. But the learners apply this rule for exceptional cases also.

Developing Reading skills amongst the rural students of vernacular medium schools is also the hardest job for the teachers. There are four basic language skills – Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. This ‘LSRW’ is an essential way for learning a language. When a child is born the language used by his/her surroundings is acquired by him/her through the first process of listening. A child can absorb the language only by listening at first. After that, the child tries to utter those words or phrases and gradually, he/she speaks meaningful sentences. Once the skill of speaking is achieved wholly, the child becomes able to read. So, the skill of reading is can be achieved by listening and speaking. But for the rural students of the vernacular medium schools, their main problem is the availability of exposure. Their exposures to the English language are very few. Naturally, they are neither always able to listen to the language nor speak outside the classroom. And then, whenever they are asked to read the text, in most cases they fumble and stumble. They cannot read correctly and properly. Language acquisition goes better through the normal process. In an informal situation, the acquisition of a language progressed better than in a formal situation. But the rural students never get that informal environment. They rarely get a chance to hear English and a chance to speak less than that. Further, in most rural schools there are not given importance on speaking English inside the classroom. They can’t get a chance to expose the language. Naturally, the difficulty comes whenever they read any English text.

The most vital point for rural students is their psychological ‘Fear’ of English. It stuck in their mind that English is a very difficult language, they can’t speak, can’t write. That fear creates in them indifferences. And then, they stop reading and speaking in English and gradually their performances go poor. And they go into depression. At last, they give up the desire to learn English.

Probable solution

If we want to overcome this difficulty among these students of rural schools, the thing we have to do first is ‘motivation’. Firstly, we have to motivate them. They need to understand the importance of learning the English language. As it is a ‘Global language’ without it they will not be able to build their bright future, and they will not be able to enrich themselves through higher studies. They need to increase their confidence level. They need to understand that if they try, they can do anything. English is not a difficult language; if they can learn it properly, they will achieve it definitely. The teachers must build rapport with the students and must be awakened to the willpower in their minds.

Now they’ve come the Teaching Methods. As teaching and learning are integrated into each other, the teaching method should be proper for the development of ‘LSRW’ skills. Teachers have to pay attention to language skills. For rural students, teachers should change the methods according to student’s needs and abilities. The direct method should not be used at all. The audio-lingual method can be used for them. Most importantly, the Bi-lingual method must be used in the classroom. The classroom environment should be joyful. Besides the teaching methods, teachers should also make concerned about teaching aids. In most rural schools, there are seen unavailability of teaching aids. Some teaching aids are very expensive and that’s why rural teachers avoid those. Teaching aids (basically audio-visual aids) increase students’ interest in the classroom. So, appropriate teaching aids should be arranged there in those rural schools.

They also face the problem of not getting sufficient study materials. An overcrowded classroom is another drawback for both the teachers to teach and the students to learn. Because of the unavailability of teachers in rural schools, it becomes impossible to divide the class into separate sections. As a result, the classrooms become overcrowding. So, it also needs to make sure that the classroom is free from overcrowding, or the teachers should take care of individual students' needs. With all these, the problem of teaching English to rural students in vernacular medium schools can be solved, and can also make the teaching very effective.

Conclusion

Since English is a foreign language, Indian students find it a difficult task to grab it. It is very regrettable that the effective teaching method of the English curriculum is still far away, especially in rural areas schools, where English continues to be a source of anxiety for the pupils. Nowadays, it is a topic of constant debate in India that the children in vernacular language schools are supposedly less proficient in English. Students with such educational backgrounds, therefore, struggle in higher education, and various kinds of job interviews, and also suffer in the professional fields only for lacking communication skills. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to identify some of the underlying factors contributing to the low performance of English in vernacular medium schools in rural areas of India. To get rid of this problem of teaching English to the rural students of vernacular medium schools, governmental and non-governmental groups should make some short- and long-term plans to help rural students overcome their apprehension about studying the English language and meet the curriculum's goals and objectives.

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