



An Analysis of Factors Affecting Teaching and Learning of English Language in Rural and Semi-Urban Colleges of India

Dr. Neha

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Dayanand Mahila Mahavidyalaya, Kurukshetra -136119 (INDIA)

ABSTRACT

Teaching English to students of mixed ability coming from different socio-cultural, linguistic and economic backgrounds in rural and semi-urban areas remains a great challenge because of several reasons. It requires not only courageous, well-determined, and committed teachers but also creative and innovative teaching techniques, background environment and base exposure of the language at school level. A persistent problem among the graduate students particularly rural one is the failure to use the English language in communication once the examinations are over. The students from urban parts show better performance in their exams or interviews, whereas most of the rural and semi-urban students failed to express themselves. Poor communication skills of many such students as seen in their poor performance in tests/examinations and interviews have kindled an idea of analyzing the factors causing problems in teaching and learning of English language in rural and semi urban areas colleges of our country.

KEYWORDS : Communication skill; Education & Government Polices; ELT; Rural students.

Introduction

With the globalization spread of English occurs around the world as language of communication, as a consequence English is used as a second language in the country like India and for some people the 1st language. At present the role and status of English is that it is the language of social context, political, socio-cultural, business, education, industries, media, library and communication across borders etc. It is also a crucial determinant for university entrance and possession of well paid jobs in the government and private sector. Thus, with the changing times the importance of English language is growing in all walks of life.

There are two groups of students in our colleges, one group of those coming through regional language medium schools "who do not have enough English to read English literature with pleasure and discrimination." The number of such students is very high in rural and small city colleges. Another group of those, who are fluent in English, almost like their mother tongue due to surrounding and all sorts of facilities, are very few and yet they are powerful enough to create a sense of alienation among the students whose English is faulty. The latter group gets advantage of knowing English and shows better performance in their exams or interviews. India being the developing country has mostly rural or economically poor family backgrounds, thus the students of such backgrounds need prime attention, so that they can also improve their personality and compete with urban students in their studies and career development. The communication in English needs to be developed so as to turn ourselves winners in the current competitive world and make India a developed country. The aim of the present paper is to find out various factors affecting teaching and learning of English language among the semi-urban and rural college students of our country. Knowledge of these factors can be helpful in development of possible remedial measures so as to improve communication skills in English of such students.

Factors affecting teaching and learning of English language:

Why the difficulties come along the way of the students is the basic question. Many a questions arises in one's mind while strolling over this issue. What are teachers' viewpoint about and guiding principles for teaching English language? What instructional strategies do teachers use to teach English, Phonics, Spelling, Comprehension, Vocabulary development? How is assessment conducted and used? Is the current System of learning and teaching English is full of defects? What other factors affecting teaching and learning of English language? There are several reasons playing an important role, some of these are:

Large size and mixed ability class – a regular and normal feature in rural areas

In a multilingual and multicultural country like India, large size classes of mixed ability groups comprising of *very able, able, less able and unable* students are a feature of every small town and village. According to Peter Hubbard, et al. 1983 and others, the strength of a typi-

cal class could be much smaller but in our country we come across classrooms overflowing with students generally comprising 50 to 150 students, especially in schools and colleges which have a name or because of no or less availability of institutions in nearby areas. Locastro (2001) summarizes the problems of teaching of such classes such as discomfort caused by the physical constraints, control problems (discipline aspects), lack of individual attentions particularly to those sitting at the back and difficulty on evaluation etc. These problems can be physical, psychological but to a great extent technical.

Non seriousness of students towards studies

Mostly students are not serious in classroom as well as in their overall studies due to several reasons. One is unawareness of importance of English language communication skill in their academic, social and professional career. Second those days' students remains engaged in other non-significant activities like mobile games and other apps. Third one is important particularly in rural areas woman's colleges, most of the girls are either unaware about their future career or non serious regarding it and they are sent and come to the college only to pass the UG degree for getting good proposals of marriage.

Socio economic background of family

Educational outcomes are greatly influenced by family incomes and literacy background. It is found that the English communication competence of the students whose parents are literate belongs to higher middle class is better than that of the students whose parents are illiterate or poorly literate and belong to lower middle class to poor family. The fact for this situation is that the literate parents can provide more exposure to their child to English as they are aware of the importance of English and therefore guide them at home to perform better as well as provide better resources for the same. On other hand rural students generally belong to the poor families of labors, farmers, household worker averted from education and are without any knowledge of English so that these students do not find an atmosphere to learn English and poor in getting external resources also. Even sometimes instead of learning they have to focus on earning.

Lack of skillful teachers

According to theories of language learning, a learner imitates a teacher's every utterance and gestures. The students in rural areas, who are much unacquainted and first generation learners of English, treat a teacher's voice as sacrosanct. So it is very important that a teacher teaching English at any level - primary, secondary or college has to have a very good command over all the skills of English language. Unfortunately, most of the teachers at all the learning levels are untrained they are unaware of the current trends and advanced techniques of English Language teaching. The training provided is purely theoretical and bookish. In rural areas majority of schools/ colleges are government run and recruitment of good English teachers in such institutions is an inflammable issue. Appointments are highly political and mere possession of degrees is sufficient to label somebody as an English teacher irrespective of their knowledge and competence. Considering their incompetence at using English or Will to use Eng-

lish, how one can expect miraculous results from them?

Guest faculty appointments

Sometimes teachers appointed as guest teacher/on contract basis in government and private schools and colleges are either untrained and having substandard qualifications or even if having skill and qualifications they remains engaged in tuition classes or in other side businesses to supplement their income that much affects teaching and learning.

The Position of English in the Primary Education

The position of English in the curriculum at primary level does not seem to have received any serious attention. In some states English is taught from Class 1 onwards, while in some other states it is taught at a later stage. ELT experts like Perren, as quoted by Hans R. Dua, (1994:109) tells us that the earlier a child is exposed to a language the quicker it learns to use it: "Since all must use English, it is best for children to begin at an age when it is easiest, when there is no pronounced language-learning differential." Further, mostly there are no English teachers to teach English at primary and secondary level. Any Social Studies' or other subject teacher teaches English, assuming all is well. Such non English teachers teach and communicate in vernacular (as most of the teachers do in rural areas), how such English class could prove effective. Most children in our primary schools are either totally not exposed or exposed to a very limited amount of English and over a period of five or six years crucial to learn a language irreparable damage is done to the student's ability to acquire English. Thus, the real problem is in the minimum requirement of language proficiency which the rural students have not learnt in the previous years. In colleges, a teacher cannot spend their time first on the task of training for that proficiency and then teach what they expected to.

Government Polices

Some states have taken the decision of promotion of students to the next higher class up to 8 Standard or like without passing exams with adequate performance. This policy badly affects teaching and learning process making students and teachers inactive and lethargic. To such students it becomes difficult to cope up with the syllabus of English at graduation level.

Education system

The other important factor is the traditional education system which affects English language learning and acquisition. Basically it requires four skills i.e. Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing (LSRW). Our students are being trained in reading and writing for long ages and listening and speaking skills are neglected and ignored which are very important. Learning is the one basic skill which makes speaking possible. Learning language is possible only through active listening. As an illustration we can take an example of language acquisition by a baby. It starts speaking the words which it listens frequently. Our education system neglects the importance of listening which results in lack of speaking skill.

Exam oriented learning

The process of teaching and learning English is much exam result oriented. The present examination process is related with writing skill and mere to test the memory power alone. Normally, English is taught and learnt as one of subject for examination. Teachers taught the English language always under a pressure generally exerted by society and institutional authorities for completion of syllabus so that most of the students pass the examination with good percentage. Students' basic concern is also to get marks to clear the examination and most of the students have only this much of attitude which not only reduces the interest of learning English but its level also. Even the parents are craving for the marks than knowledge and communication competence.

Poor testing and evaluation

The testing and evaluation designed by boards of education and universities have a negative wash back effect on teaching and learning English. Because of this several times many of the *less able* and *unable* students have scored good marks in their qualifying examinations,

although failure in constructing simple sentences and even spellings of simple words are like a puzzle for them. With such weak knowledge of English, in colleges all efforts of teachers to reform their English language skills prove futile.

Copying in exams

Copying in exams of school and higher level occurs more at remote areas. Copying is done from books/guides at individual level by the help of student's relatives or friends or even sometimes at mass level either promoted by the institutes self to show better results of their institute to compete with others or due to inability to control the copying. This copying in exams promotes the students to higher classes but in actual they even fail to understand the basics of English language and the situation turn into more and more complication as students move to higher classes.

Use of technology and infrastructure

The use of modern and advanced technology in the process of language learning also affects the language acquisition e.g. use of computers and internet, power point presentation, OHP, radio, TV, mobile applications etc (Bhushan R, 2011). But it is very painful that our rural learners still don't have language laboratories and such technological facilities and even sometimes chalk, duster and black board are missing, expecting technology will be asking for sky. With this I am not saying that English language can't be taught without technology. Nobody can undermine the value and effectiveness of human interaction/ interface and moreover we all have learnt English without using technology. But that is no excuse to deprive rural learners of the basic technological devices like TV, Tape recorders, Computer etc.

Multiple tasks of the English teachers

English teachers are the torch bearer of the college as they have to coordinate the entire tasks including organization of various cultural and other functions, UGC interface, NAAC, University committees etc. Those days' teachers also remains engaged in maintenance of their API scores required for their own professional growth. Hence, all such activities dilute the focus of their teaching.

Season factor & Attendance

There are several periods throughout the year when student's absentee is particularly prevalent either due to their engagement in crops harvesting and other farming related works e.g. March to May period of wheat and oil crop harvesting or due to various festivals.

Load shedding

Students particularly rural face various problems due to the long power load shedding, they can't concentrate on their study at home during the night period, the best time for their study when they are free from other works. Thus, performance in studies goes down day by day and they fail to pace the teaching in class.

Extensive use of SMS, Whatsapp & like other applications (apps) impact-spelling

By such practices, punctuation, grammar, and capitalization are largely ignored. Some examples misspelled by the students are:

Caml - (Camel), Tigr - (Tiger), Hors- (Horse), Masin - (Mechine), Monki- (Monkey), Papr- (Paper), Bafelo (Buffalo) etc. Extensive use of these also affect in correct writing and speaking of English.

In conclusion, the purpose of this paper is to highlights the problems encountered in teaching and learning English language among the rural and semi – urban college students. So that the students of mixed ability coming from different socio-cultural, linguistic and economic backgrounds can compete not only to urban well resourced students of our country but to the rest world also. It is possible to achieve the goals by making solutions of the problems discussed above and by further looking for the problems coming in front of development of English communication skill.

REFERENCES

Bhushan R. (2011). Challenging but Enjoyable English Language Teaching in Rural Areas: A Case Study of BPSWomen University, Khanpur Kalan, Haryana. *ELT voices (INDIA)*, October issue, 44-50. | Dua, Hans R. (1994). Hegemony of English: Future of Developing Languages in the Third World. Mysore: Yashoda Publications. | Locastro, V (2001). Teaching English to large classes. *TESOL Quarterly*, 35 (3), 493-496.