

## ‘We Learn English’ Programme: An Intervention to Improve English Language Teaching

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### Abstract

In this paper, we will discuss various difficulties faced in English language teaching and learning in rural settings. Moreover, we will explore the implications of implementing a program named *We Learn English*, an initiative by the education department of Zilla Parishad Parbhani. This programme is a course developed by teachers and students to improve English-speaking skills among the students in primary schools in rural settings. The medium of instruction and its design make it more effective and valuable.

### Keywords:

English language teaching, difficult circumstances, English language, possible interventions, speaking skills.

### 1. Introduction

The English language has been increasing in importance for many decades. The gradual advancement in technology has given it a boost. Learning English is a tool for becoming a global citizen, facing challenges, and grabbing opportunities.

Hence, policymakers focus more on English language teaching and learning. For this, different programs and initiatives have been designed and implemented in different states. The Maharashtra government announced English as a compulsory subject from grade one, which shows the importance of the English language in school curricula.

English language is taught as a foreign language in schools in India. Learning a foreign or second language needs more effort and attention compared to the mother tongue. In addition to this, India is a multilingual and multicultural country, which affects language learning. The school settings can be divided broadly into two categories: 1. Urban and 2. Rural. Considering infrastructure as one of the crucial parts of teaching and learning, schools in rural settings face difficult circumstances when learning the English language compared to urban ones.

### 2. Objective

The main objective of the current study is:

1. To discuss the difficulties faced in rural areas while teaching and learning English.
2. To discuss the 'We Learn English' programme as an intervention in ELT.

### **3. Literature Review**

#### **3.1 Difficult Circumstances in Rural Settings for ELT**

Literature is reviewed under two categories: first, regarding the difficult circumstances in ELT and second, some studies showing possible interventions.

The study by P. Kalia (2017) mentions challenges in teaching English in India, like over-dependence on teachers, unmotivated students, lack of participation, overcrowded classes, etc. A study conducted in rural north Karnataka at the undergraduate level noted difficulties in ELT- teachers attend their classes without preparation, students don't have basic knowledge of the language, English is treated as a subject rather than a language, and English is taught and learned from an exam point of view. (Ganachari., 2016). After looking into the matter of ELT in Indian primary schools, the researcher turned attention towards the issues- inappropriate teaching methods, lack of speaking practice, incompetent syllabus, inappropriate examination system, and lack of teachers' proficiency. (Tank, 2016).

#### **3.2 Some Interventions to Overcome the Difficult Circumstances**

In this part of the literature review, the researchers found some studies that tried to change the scenario with the intervention.

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is a recent development in language teaching. It teaches a curricular subject in a language other than the mother tongue. The CLIL method is used to teach a second or a foreign language. English is learnt as a second language in India. (H.Jeraltin Vency ,Dr. E.Ramganes, 2013). A study was conducted to measure the effect of the pilot project and mentioned positive results about developing English reading in low-income groups in Bangalore. (Weber, F., & Bali, K., 2010). (Srinivasan, V., & Murthy, H. , 2021) The paper reports on a multi-year, large-scale intervention in India that has now expanded to nine other countries, including Sri Lanka. Results from a large-scale randomised control study of efficacy establish significant improvement in learning outcomes.

The literature review revealed difficulties in Indigenous English language teaching, but it is still possible to intervene to overcome these issues. This is the time to work to bridge the gap between the haves and the have-nots.

### **4. Methodology**

#### **4.1 Development of the Programme**

The programme 'We Learn English' was designed and developed by teachers and students. Its aim was to develop the students' English-speaking skills. The programme was a series of 84 audio episodes of English language learning. The audios were conversations

between Aunty and the kids in informal situations. The bilingual approach, communicative language teaching, blended learning, and task-based language learning approaches were used.

#### 4.2 Tools and Techniques

42400 students and 2544 teachers among 848 schools in Zilla Parishad Primary schools in Parbhani district were part of the population of the study. Out of which 400 students and 50 teachers are the participants selected in the present study. Participants are selected randomly. Observation of the students and interviews of the teachers. Median is used as a tool for data analysis.

#### 4.3 Discussion / Implementation of the Programme

Every day, one of the audio episodes was broadcast on the radio from 10:15 am to 10:30 am. The students and teachers listened to the programme and participated in practice sessions during school time. Then, both practised and conducted activities according to the school schedule. The recordings of each episode were made available for teachers and students to listen to and practice after the school timetable. The programme was conducted for 90 days in the same way. After that, ten days were given to practice more. Then, schools were asked to create a conversation based on any situation and present it. Some of the presentations were broadcast on the radio again as developed role models. After the programme is implemented, observations and interviews are conducted. Based on the collected data, results are discussed.

### 5. Findings

The findings of the present study are broadly categorised into two sections: the learners' observations and the teachers' interviews.

#### 5.1 Observations of the Learners: Table: 5.1.1

Sr. No.	Statement	before	after
1	Students were speaking with confidence.	80	330
2.	Students were talking with fluency	120	350
3	Students were using proper sentence structure	70	280
4	Students were enthusiastic to participate in activities.	130	380
5	Students were searching for new vocabulary	60	220
6	Students enjoyed learning	90	320
7	Students were listening and practising out of school	60	240

The students were observed using the criteria mentioned in Table 5.1.1. The data shows that the number of students increased after the programme was implemented.

#### 5. 2 Teacher's Interviews: Table: 5.2.1

Sr. No.	Statement / Response	Yes	No	Not sure
1	Was the programme useful in improving the English-speaking skills of students?	50	00	
2	Did the programme help to create an English language learning atmosphere?	45	5	

3	Did the programme motivate learners to speak in English	30	2	18
4	Was the programme helpful for the teacher to instruct?	34	12	4
5	Was it helpful to overcome the fear of English language teaching and learning?	40	10	
6	Was it helpful for illiterate parents' ward to learn English?	25	15	10
7	Was it enabling the learner to learn on their own?	30	18	2
8	Did it need expensive infrastructure?	45	5	
9	Was it useful for a large number of classes?	30	10	10
10	Was it helpful for primary school students?	32	16	2

Table 5.2.1 above presents the data from teacher interviews. The data shows that the number of teachers who found the programme useful in overcoming difficulties is greater than that of those who didn't.

## 6. Conclusion

Studies have shown that there are many difficulties in teaching the English language in India as a foreign language, such as overcrowded classrooms, less competent teachers, unsuitable assessment process, don't have motivated environment, use of traditional methods, lack of infrastructure, treating English as a subject, teaching and learning English with exam point of view etc. Though there are many difficult circumstances in English language teaching in India, many rays of hope take place through different experiments at different levels of education – primary, secondary or higher education. Such a programme was run in primary schools in Parbhani district of Maharashtra. It found that the 'We Learn English' Programme as an intervention to improve English language teaching in India.

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