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Teaching English through Indian Writing in English in Rural India

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Interest in Learning English in Rural India

English is accepted by almost all the universities in India as a significant medium of education. At the same time, teaching English effectively and interestingly has become more important than ever. Everyone, today, is eager to acquire the knowledge and competency of English to stay ahead in this competitive world. And this is still a distant dream for rural students.

Teaching English through Indian Writing in English in Rural India

This paper attempts to point out that teaching English through Indian Writing in English (IWE) in rural India can be beneficial for several reasons: firstly, most of the rural Indians are closely connected to traditional belief systems; secondly, pride in such belief systems is seen to be an important part of one's identity as Indian and the practitioner of true Indian culture with all its prestige in rural India. In such circumstances Indian Writing in English offers good opportunities for reading, writing, speaking and thinking in English, engaging oneself with known values, metaphors, stories and expressions.

Using IWE actually follows the universal trend which recognizes that "the English Language is no longer the preserve of a few nations, but it is now used globally" (Lazar, 1993). As a result, IWE is included as part of course materials to teach English in India.

Need to Remove the Foreignness

We should recognize that English materials, developed with only English motifs, urban practices and global expressions close to Western practices, may make many rural learners shy away from them, and distract the attention of many learners of English from rural India. These learners would find it easy to hold their attention and progress further in learning English if the materials they are exposed to are familiar and interesting, not just meet their practical ends.

Materials from Indian Writing in English for English Teaching

The most important step to reach rural learners of English is to study their attitude and interest. If English is applied to them in the easiest and most intimate way through the syllabus of schools and colleges, they will be convinced to learn it appropriately.

Of course, IWE is one such easy and intimate way to meet their needs. Use of short stories, short novels, poetry and plays helps maintain the interest of the learners. It has enormous power to make up their minds that English is not a language of their oppressors. By reading their own experiences, attitudes and liking in IWE, they will definitely appreciate it as their own language.

No doubt, the foundation for IWE has been laid down by well known Indian leaders and writers such as Ram Mohan Roy, Jawaharlal Nehru, Henry Louis Vivan Derozio, Toru Dutt, R. Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, Sarojini Naidu, R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Manohar Malgaonkar, Mulk Raj Anand, Kushwant Sing, Nissim Ezekiel, Vijay Tendulkar, A. K. Ramanujan, Kamala Das, Arun Kolatkar, Anita Desai, Girish Karnad, Vikram Seth, Shashi Deshpande, Salman Rushdie, Shoba De, Rohinton Mistry, Amitav Ghosh, Kiran Desai, Arundhati Roy, Jumpa Lahiri, Namita Gokhale, etc.

The list of authors is actually expanding every year with new and powerful additions. All these writers reflect ancient and modern India in their literary works. Naturally, these writers show great interest in IWE because of their love, affection, patriotism and spirit of India. Their works have potential to capture the hearts of Indians as they reflect their very Indian spirit, attitude, experiences and situations from real life in it.

Effective Learning Achieved through IWE

However, teaching English becomes more effective if it is taught through IWE. In case of young learners, the use of simple pictures, drawings, photographs, posters, cartoons, magazines advertisements, diagrams, charts and maps stimulate focus for getting the attention of children.

In short, the things that are familiar to the learner add significance to learning. In the same way, if the learner of English as a second language is provided with familiar reading material, he or she will surely direct their attention to learning English with great interest. In fact, it is IWE that covers almost all the familiar reading material to achieve the goals of mastering English for practical ends. IWE directly looks at the mentality and psychology of a rural Indian learner who is a worshiper of Indian spirit and its prestige.

Reading and Learning

Reading comprehension plays an important part in teaching English to the rural learners,. When it is based on Indian situations, experience and imagination, it helps them to concentrate upon the passage and grow interest in reading.

Nissim Ezekiel's 'Night of the Scorpion' serves as a perfect example of a reading comprehension. The poem is written on a typical Indian situation where an Indian mother is stung by a scorpion. The poem focuses on the traditional Indian mind and rationale. The farmers gather like swarms of flies as the news spreads in the village. Some of them think that the sting will balance good and evil spirit in the body

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of the mother. Some take it as the punishment of the mother's sin committed in her previous birth. Whereas, the father is a rationalist who applies all the herbs and lastly pours kerosene on the bitten toe and puts match to it. The holy man also performs all his rites to minimize the pain. The mother twists with pain on the mat and utters the only words, "Thanks God the scorpion picked on me and spared my children". The poem expresses Indian spirit, attitude, superstitions and a typical Indian mother's goal in life. Such poems gradually involve the learner to a particular depth in order to comprehend it thoroughly. Therefore, teaching English bears fruit only when the reading materials inspire the learner.

Learner's Interest and Background Taking the Central Seat: Not Poems from the Distant Lands

Teaching English through IWE is possible because it caters to the learner's interest and liking in rural India. A textbook should be designed to meet the needs of the learner. The learner becomes a passive participant when the textbook is against his will and liking. "Even today, in quite a few states even at the intermediate/higher-secondary/first year B. A. level, poems by Keats: *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* (neither the teacher nor the students can pronounce even the title properly), Wordsworth's *Daffodils* (which nobody has seen in India) or poems about the courtly love games of the idle European feudal classes like *To His Mistress* by Andrew Marvell are prescribed" (N. and Lalita Krishnaswamy, 2003). Thus, a textbook that does not respond to the liking and interest of a learner can prove to be a total failure. An active participation of the learner is essential which can be secured through IWE to some extent.

Meditation, contemplation and reflective thinking have always been encouraged in learning English. To create a proper environment and encourage critical interaction with text is essential to develop critical thinking and contemplative power in learner. Learners of rural India can think and contemplate in English when they are given the text of their liking. The meditation done in this way makes permanent impression upon the minds of the learners and leads them to that state of mind where they have ample chances to learn English.

Some Additional Selections

Moreover, Indians believe in Sanskriti and Gods. They are ready to do anything for the sake of a god. Tagore's 'Gitanjali', Ramanujan's 'A River', and Arun Kolatkar's 'Jejuri' have touch and sense of devotion. The works of fiction like R. K. Narayan's 'The Guide', Kamala Markanday's 'A Pleasure City', Shashi Deshpande's 'The Dark Holds No Terror', Rohinton Mistry's 'Family Matters', Chaman Nahal's 'The Crown and the Loincloth' reflect the social, political and economical phases of Indian life. Naturally, such types of writings are preferred by Indians to meditate over.

Practical Improvement Guaranteed

Use of IWE in teaching English helps to improve the knowledge of the language in many ways. In a piece of literature, content is communicated in several ways, with metaphors and multiple meanings, sarcasm, cynicism etc. These and many

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other characteristics of literary pieces help the learner to improve his skills in understanding and using English effectively, since he will be confronted with similar characteristics even in his day to day conversations.

To conclude, religious, social, economical and political background of the learner can be considered in order to teach English effectively. The learner's interest and liking are equally important in the process. In the present scenario, education is imparted on the optional ground. Learners have several alternatives while taking education.

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