

LANGUAGE IN INDIA

Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow

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**Teaching English as a Second Language to Meet
the Needs of the Learners in Rural Areas: A Challenge**

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Indians, English and the Competitive World

English has become a part and parcel of Indian *Sanskriti*. As Indians begin to be part of the competitive world, English has begun to play a vital role in almost every walk of life, and in favor of Indian national interests.

In addition, whether we like it or not, English has genuinely become a language of great prestige in the Indian society. English has acquired a prominent place in the hearts of millions of Indians who seek better jobs. As a result, there is the necessity of its proper teaching and guidance, particularly to the learners in the rural areas as most of the population of India lives in the villages.

Present Condition of English Teaching in Rural Areas

I want to concentrate in this paper on the present condition of teaching English as a second language to meet the needs of students from rural areas at the undergraduate level. It is clear to all of us that the standard of English in rural areas in India (Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal) is very poor when compared with the skills students in the urban areas demonstrate.

Why This Poor Standard?

We see many teachers of English pursuing a “side-business,” that is, they are focused more in doing jobs as private tuition masters, rather than focusing on teaching English effectively in their respective rural colleges.

Secondly, teachers of English must have the appropriate knowledge of the language. Most of the teachers do not try to increase their knowledge by reading English materials on a regular basis and by participating in activities such as Conferences, Workshops, Discussion Groups, and Seminars.

Thirdly, caste factor plays a crucial role in encouraging or discouraging students from learning English. Students with a long tradition of school education in their families are better placed in acquiring English. First generation learners in schools and colleges are usually “condemned” as “failures” in learning English.

Fourthly, a tendency of superiority complex is noticed in some teachers. Such people never want to guide new learners.

Lastly, teaching English is a basic skill that can be acquired through teaching experience and hard work. Many people never try to improve their teaching skill. As a result, they cannot teach English effectively.

How Come Students of Indian Languages Media Do Well in Other Subjects, But Not in English?

The time has come now to understand the needs of the weaker learners when we teach English in rural areas, particularly at the under graduation level. Generally, the learners in the said areas are poor with not many facilities to improve their performance in studies. In such a condition one cannot expect more from them. But, then, we also notice that these poor and rural students can perform well in other subjects, for example, when they choose to study in Marathi medium.

It means that these “weak” students can do better with English if appropriate efforts are made to help them. These students continuously demonstrate their capacity to get the passing marks in English by memorizing the right answers. But the real goal of getting them well trained in reading, writing and speaking English remains unfulfilled.

Prejudice Against English

One of the major reasons behind this kind of result is the hatred these students have for English and its teachers. And it results in the reduction in the enrollment in English classes in many colleges in rural areas. In such a condition teaching English has become a challenge before the teacher.

Prevailing Attitudes Against English Among Rural Students

Attitude of the weaker learners of English in rural areas at the undergraduate level may be summarized as follows:

- i. English language is seen as an imposition on them as the language is a compulsory subject in the school curriculum.
- ii. That English is not their language and that it is a foreign language is often reiterated in the public speeches of local politicians and this “deshi” talk acts as a debilitating force. They think that since they are not the native speakers of English, they may never succeed in mastering it. Thus, they lack confidence and joy in learning English.
- iii. They are afraid of the language as they think that only intelligent learners can understand English. So, they consider that the study of English is beyond their reach.
- iv. Many learners do not attend English classes as they label these boring.
- v. Many, anyhow, memorize the materials in English and reproduce the answers without knowing the meaning.
- vi. Many do not know even the very basic grammatical rules because they never have had an opportunity to use full and complete sentences in English. Their

- functional contexts do not require or encourage them to use English. Whenever they try to use English, they would be ridiculed as aping the English masters.
- vii. So, they cannot express their innermost emotions in English.
 - viii. They are deprived of the opportunities like seminars, group discussions and other similar activities because of their negative approach to the language.
 - ix. Many still tend to have a poor opinion of those who try to learn English and tend to hate English as the language of our oppressors who ruled over India. Such ancient perceptions and prejudices are deeply rooted.

The standard of teaching English completely depends upon the teachers. With the help of innovative methods teachers can teach English effectively.

I'd also like to point out that although the situation in the rural setting needs remedial action, it does not mean that English is not taught properly in India. Teaching English as a second language is a major concern of many teachers in India.

What Can We Do?

- i. Teachers should help change the negative attitude of the learners about English.
- ii. We must emphasize that English is an international language.
- iii. We must tell them how important even for the rural students to learn English well in order to get good jobs. Resistance to learning English as a political strategy has not worked out well in favor of the rural people.
- iv. We should motivate the learners to attend the classes regularly by creating interest and joy in learning.
- v. Reading interest of the learners should be cultivated in order to understand the meaning and idea of the construction of sentences.
- vi. As English language in Indian college and school curriculum is closely related to literature, the learners should be encouraged to read dramas, novels, poetry and prose selections. However, an easy way to improve reading skills is to read English daily newspapers and weekly magazines.
- vii. Reading habit surely helps learners to improve their diction.
- viii. Language Knowledge Tests, Unit-Tests, etc., should be conducted regularly in order to develop their competitive ability. Evaluation of the answer papers is a must.
- ix. Teachers should encourage them to participate in discussions, debate, elocution, and seminars.
- x. Learners should be encouraged to express their emotions in English.
- xi. To make the teaching effective, audio-visual aids should be used.
- xii. If the curriculum insists on oral examination as part of the course work in compulsory English, learners may attend classes regularly.

To Conclude

Indeed, teachers' positive attitude and their use of innovative methods of teaching can provide a reliable bridge to the process of learning English in rural areas. Taking into consideration the social, political, religious, and economic backgrounds of the learners, possibly the Bilingual Method may help, if the method and materials are properly designed and implemented.

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