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Teaching of English in Indian Rural Schools and Colleges: Problems and Perspectives

Dr. NARESH U C

Associate Professor, Department of English, Government First Grade College & P G Centre, Davanagere, Karnataka, India

English is the 'Lingua Franca' of the world. With the IT Revolution and most of software and operating system being in English Language, a new utility for written and oral communication in English Language has emerged. English is said to be the world's most important language having communicative and educative value. English is used all over the world not out of any imposition but because of the realization that it has certain advantages. A very important reason for regarding English as a world language is that the world's knowledge is enshrined and enriched in English. It is a progressive and developing language. It is ever dynamic and flexible. Over and above English is universally renowned for its power of expression and its rich literature.

We are going to have children in other parts of the world besides England, speaking English as their first language. But the gap still remains like those of the haves and have-nots, developed and developing, urban and the rural. Much is required to be done by the linguists, the polyglots, the scholars and the teachers to bridge the gap between the English literate and the English illiterate population of the world. We have to go into the intricacies of the English language and simplify the methodology.

Whatever English now represents or has represented over centuries of colonization, it belongs to every one and it has become a global language. The Australian poet Peter Porter emphasized the point in a World Conference Welcome Poem, published in the Times Literary Supplement (28th February 1992) to the effect that:

'Everything will be exposed in English
So delegates and lovers understand'.

The increasing demand for English – both as a language and as a medium driven by the instrumental motivation has compelled most governments at the state (provincial) level to introduce English as a language from class One.

The recent curricular revision at the national level culminated in the framework for National Curriculum Framework – 2005 (NCF) records the half a century development very objectively when it says, —The level of introduction of English has now become a matter of political response to people's aspirations rendering almost irrelevant an academic debate on the merits of very early introduction (Position Paper Teaching of English 2005-p1) English is an institutionalized subject in the school curriculum. Twenty six out of the thirty five states and union territories (the provinces and the specially created regions) introduce English as a language from class I and the remaining states introduce the language either from class three or five. There is every likelihood that these states (which do not introduce English in class I) would bring it down to class I with in a year or two. Resistance to spread of English language education is countered by genuine arguments which look at the English language as a tool for empowerment. English today is simultaneously sought after and suspected (Tickoo 1996) phenomenon. The motives, generally, are not only social-political and but academic too. While the demand increases on the one hand, the quality of English language education in our state run schools, more particularly in rural schools, presents an abysmal picture. The 'divide' between the urban and rural is further contributed by the way English language education is making its way as a medium of instruction. The paradox of demand and suspicion (Tickoo 1996) mentioned above could be further reflected through the paradox of access depicted by the report of the National Knowledge Commission (NKC 2007), India as it brings out rightly, —There is an irony in the situation. English has been part of our education system for more than a century. Yet English is beyond the reach of most of our young people, which make for highly unequal access. Indeed, even now, more than one percent of our people use it as a second language, let alone a first language But NKC believes that the time has come for us to teach our people, ordinary people, English as a language in schools.



Early action in this sphere would help us build an inclusive society and transform India into a knowledge society. (P.47)

English has been successfully taught through literature for many years. But now when the students are taking their exams of other subjects of post-graduation i.e. History, Political Science, Economics etc. in Hindi or Punjabi, their interest and efficiency in English is decreasing. Even those students, who have passed their post-graduation in English, are not able to write and speak it accurately. Whereas the fluency in the spoken language should be stressed. Teachers should aim at teaching of pragmatics. Pragmatic competence is central to Communication 'the ability to use language effectively to fulfill intentions and goals'. (5) Different languages use different strategies. It is important that the learners of English are given such information as possible the ways in which to use their language. English should be taught as a language, not as a subject. The course material should be designed in such a manner that emphasis on language should be there. For example while teaching a simple poem like Daffodils by Wordsworth to the students, the teacher can ask the student to underline the different words used by the poet for the expression of happiness.

English symbolizes in Indian minds, better education, better culture and higher intellect. In present times, English is the most preferred language through out the country. The Indians and the Indian English language press uses many words derived from Indian languages. Indian accent is sometimes difficult for non-Indians to understand. Actually English has co-existed in the Indian sub-continent alongside thousands of local languages. It has remained at the heart of the Indian society. According to recent surveys, approximately 4% of the Indian population use English. That figure might seem insignificant, but out of the total population it represents 35 million speakers. It means India is the largest English speaking community outside USA and the UK. As India celebrates its 60th year of independence from British rule, English continues to expand its empire. English is virtually the mother-tongue for many educated South Asian, but for the vast majority, it remains second language. So English, spoken by such speakers is heavily influenced by speech patterns of their ethnic language.

Students of the rural areas do not realize the importance of English as a language of communication whereas this is the most important aspect of this global language. They lack the confidence to speak in English; expression in the language is weak. First reason is that they have been taught English through Grammar-Translation Method. This method makes them dependent on their mother tongue.

Whatever they read, they translate it into their own vernacular. During the time of exams, they cram the expected questions because they cannot write one original sentence of their own. Because of grammar translation method, they have no vocabulary of English words. While writing, they depend on the cheap material from the help books.

The hackneyed, stereotyped and traditional pattern of exams aims at clearing English not as a language but as a subject. The students, therefore, are guided to practice pick and choose method from the sub-standard material available in the market. So that students merely pass the subject far from learning any level of the Language. It is more shocking to learn that even the questions that students are supposed to answer are told to learn through translation from English to their own vernacular. Poor performance in translation, lack of proper vocabulary, no knowledge of proverbs all are results of a casual approach. Even after reading English for 14 or 15 years the level of the students remains poor.

To solve all the problems, a systematic approach should be followed. The teachers should aim at teaching primarily, not knowledge but skill, the different skills required for good Listening-Speaking-Reading-Writing. Teachers should find some way of helping pupils to enjoy their language activities, and of building their confidence. A teacher who tries to help his pupils in this way has rightly rejected the image of the teacher who acts as the arbitrary dispenser of all knowledge. As children learn by way of imitation, similarly, the students tend to follow the example set by their teacher. The English teacher should have the wide-ranging enthusiasm and Imagination, It can make English course 'a sort of clearing house for ideas and interests which branch out into all the other subjects that the pupils are studying in school, and beyond them.' (4)

To tackle with the problem of lack of vocabulary in the students, Productive and receptive Use of words should be kept in mind. The students should be made to learn simple words. This will help in inculcating a habit of learning new words in them. Their newly learnt words will become a part of their own vocabulary and they will be in a position to use those words. This is the natural process of movement from need from receptive to productive use of the words. This enhancement of vocabulary will result into better expression. The common errors made by the students in the different usages of the same word can be cured by this technique. Normally, the students can not differentiate between Noun and Verb, adjective or adverb. They should be clearly guided about the difference between the parts of speech by practice.

They can be made aware of the different parts of a word; root, suffix, prefix and how can they change the total meaning of the word by adding suffix or prefix with the root i.e.

The diverse English language education situation in the country shows both a rosy and an abysmal picture. Schools in different regions and systems operate in their contexts. The state policy on language education, curricular statements and syllabi and materials for teaching-learning of English along with teacher inputs decide the quality of education in schools more so in rural schools. An analysis of language policy practices and the curriculum and syllabi of five the states, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Mizoram, Manipur and Nagaland reveals how planning for language in education is not looked at holistically in terms of basic assumptions about language learning / acquisition (how language learning takes place), learners profiles and the contexts in which learning takes place and the recent developments in language learning-teaching.

If the teaching-learning situation is to be made rural learner centered, the curriculum in language education needs to:

- Have a holistic approach to language planning where language education is perceived as whole in which English language education find its complementary and supplementary role.
- Use the languages of children as a resource for teaching-learning of languages and other content subjects (NCF - 2005). Adopting the multilingualism as strategy for learning of languages and other subjects will help the rural learner finding their contexts and connecting their life outside the school with happenings of the classroom.
- Create (English) language environment in the classroom and attempt to enable the learner to explore finding the language in use outside the classroom. This requires bilingual proficient teachers, who are comfortable in the mother tongue(s) of children and in English. The activities and assignments that would demand children to move beyond the textbook and the classroom in finding to use the language. Newspapers, radio, TV and computers could be exploited for the purpose.
- Let us have, what David Graddol (1997) calls in his *The Future of English*, an ethical framework for ELT in which he brings in the questions of (a) How then, can the teaching of English be brought with in a more ethical framework? (b) What social responsibilities are associated with the promotion and teaching of English?

And there is a growing concern about endangered languages but very little debate about the management of large languages, of which English is the largest. (P63). The languages of children, more the languages in our tribal locales as also languages spoken by less number of people would find a comfortable position in the school curriculum.

English will continue to dominate the school curriculum not only as a language, but as a medium of learning too. Given the important roles to English in education and in the larger society (Tickoo 1996), this will have greater implications for language education, particularly English language education in rural settings. The anti-English spirit or English hatred is dying out and will slowly diminish in coming years as the language is perceived as language of hope and better life. While some of our native languages are loosing their battle for survival where English is taking the 'killer' role and the curricular documents calling for collaborative bi-/multilingualism, what in reality felt is subtractive bilingualism? This dangerous trend may lead to mass conversion to English medium instruction in our schools, both urban and rural schools. We must ensure that English as a language in education is fully realised in terms of the basic conditions for learning the language and those educated through native medium schools attain the proficiency that would not hamper them to move forward to higher education and employment any other urban English medium educated child would compete. Much discussed Common School System needs to be taken seriously along with right to education to realise a comprehensive language-in education strategy that would keep our rural learners comfortable.

Teaching can be enjoyed by both the teacher and the students in this manner. Students do enjoy poetry and drama provided the feed back is given in the same spirit. The enthusiasm, the zeal and interest of the teacher can kindle the spark of learning in the students. Presentations by the students can help them enhancing their level of confidence. Teacher can change subject matter from prose to poetry, from essay writing to letter writing to prevent the class from monotonous routine. Audio-Visual aids can add to the presentation of the topic. Students can be encouraged to listen to English news and English commentaries broadcast on Radio and telecast on TV. Motivation in the initial phase, proper methodology in the next phase should be followed. Teachers own personality and command over language counts a lot. Faculty improvement programmes should be held. Teachers should be made aware of the latest techniques and methods.



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An English language teacher should be capable of arising the interest and imagination of the students. As a seasoned teacher of English once warned a callow colleague: 'Never forget, my, boy that the English teacher's business is with the imagination' (6). If the students enjoy literature, only then they can quote from it. Literature taught in such a way will be enjoyed and remembered for a long time.

If we take into consideration the role of teacher and learner in acquiring the knowledge of a language; the problems can be solved effectively. Only then the students will realize the practical use of English language. English will be used by them as a medium of expression. They will be able to use English as a language of communication. Fluency in the speech, proper knowledge of sentence structure, confidence of speaking in the public will make them able to keep their pace with the developing world.

It will also help in raising the standards of English as a language at the college level. On the basis of suggestions given above, the critical situations in the teaching of English can be checked from further deteriorations. Decidedly one or two persons can't do anything solid. Let everyone concerned with it take the responsibility. Only then we can create a congenial environmental & we can be able to achieve better results in the teaching and learning of English.

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