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English Language Teaching in Rural India: Measures for Empowering Unprivileged

Farheen Anjum
Aligarh Muslim University.

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Abstract:

This paper describes the challenges faced by teachers and students in teaching and learning of English at rural areas. It has been observed that in recent times the governments of India has been providing a lot of facilities but the teaching and learning of English is not up to mark. There are numerous elements which affect the teaching learning process of English as a second language. All these elements need to work with good synchronization, pertinently to engender the desired output. We need to restructure our strategies according to the challenges that our students have to uphold in this competitive world. For that sake English should be treated less as a subject more of as a language. This paper is a humble attempt to provide a neutral view towards all the important elements and it is a sincere effort to share few of the solutions which would be helpful in achieving the prime goal of English language teaching.

Keywords: English teacher, Learners, Existing practices, Challenges and solutions.

Introduction:-

English language teaching in India demands great attention on the part of the teachers and students. English is a symbol of people's aspirations in India for quality in education and a fuller participation in national and international life. It is predicted that by 2010, a surge in English-language learning will include a third of the world's people (Graddol 1997). The opening up of the Indian economy in the 1990s has coincided with an explosion in the demand for English in our schools because English is perceived to open up opportunities (Das 2005).

For many decades teaching English whether for beginners or for the advanced learners has been a challenging pursuit for the teachers of English especially the area that cover the acquisition of four skills of language – Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing (LSRW). 70% of Indians live in rural part of the country and even after so many years of formal teaching English language did not get recognition properly in rural institutions. A review of literature also said that English language is undervalued or marginalized (Pennington 7-19). With the rapidly changing conditions in the life of the people in the world, the old

system of teacher training no longer seems to meet the requirements of our schools and society. It is the need of the hour to improve the training of teachers for the enhancement of teaching system.

Existing situation of ELT in marginalised institutions: An overview

If we look around, it would not take long to realise that not everything is well with the teaching of English in India today, it has become one of the most controversial subjects to teach in the Indian situation. Differences in the levels of Initiation of instruction, differences in the socio-economic status, differences in urban and rural background, paucity of teachers well-versed in content matter as well as the methodology of teaching, lack of adequate aids and instructional material, hamper in their own way the successful handling of English in the classroom.

“English language teaching in India has suffered a lot so much that our students who pass intermediate or degree examinations with English either as a compulsory or as an elective subject can neither speak nor write correct English, may be because the emphasis in our schools and colleges has always been on the conceptual content and the functional content has been neglected so far” (A. K. Sharma1991). The National Knowledge Commission (NKC 2007), of India brings it 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 language is a phobia in marginalized institutions, Although English language is considered now as compulsory subject because of its universal demands but implementation of English language practically is so far away; till now it is a matter of concern in rural India. They are suffering from Anglophobia as English seems *milk of tigress* to those learners as well as teachers and they do not have courage to “go near this cruel and wild animal” (Ghodke 99). Their prime goal is to clear the examination and to get rid of this phobia. There are lots of government policies to take over this problem and make a smooth way so that English language can be reached to the marginalized students. But in India and other developing countries the real scenario is not as smoother as the policies look in the paper. Therefore English language remains a stress to all these rural learners as well as teachers.

Challenges of Teaching and learning English language in rural India:-

Absence of teacher Training Since there are no separate policies for the education of English language teachers in the country, it may be necessary to ensure that the teachers



who are selected to the job are proficient in English and have the required language awareness to operate effectively in their respective classrooms. The National Curriculum Framework for Teacher education, 2010 address the issue of teachers language proficiency, which was pointed out as a major concern in the national Curriculum framework, 2005 and emphasizes that the teacher education programmes should give high priority to improving the language proficiency and communication skills of teachers irrespective of the stage specify the content area. The problem of dearth of competent teachers arises due to the lack of teachers who are specialized in the methods of teaching English. Dhamija in her thesis mentions that most of the teachers get in these jobs on the strength of their academic degrees. Only 4% of the teachers have actually attended any orientation programmes or workshops on ELT (Dhamija, 1993). This goes to show the paucity of teacher training programmes leading to the lack of interest in implementing changes in language teaching methodology and pedagogy.

Lack of Task-There is a lot of confusion in understanding ‘what an activity’ or ‘a task’ is in language classroom. The activity / task needs to let the learner use the language, i.e. get engaged with the language. This requires learner initiating, turn taking, suggesting, debating, etc. the syllabi and a cursory look at textbooks shows that the activities are teacher directed and teacher centered.

Lack of Interest/Motivation: - Teachers have little or no understanding of the background of their pupils. In learning a second, motivation is the crucial force which determines whether the learner embarks on a task at all, how much energy he devotes to it and how long he perseveres. As Alan Cunningsworth (1980) observes, “A well-motivated student badly taught will probably do better than a poorly motivated student well taught. Motivation determines the students’ level of attention during class and the assiduity with which he does his home work. It certainly has a deep influence in the effectiveness of learning.”

Fear of English language :- It is a widespread misunderstanding amongst students that English the most difficult of all subjects. The result and the failure candidates act as evidence to prove this fact. Hence most of the students look at this subject with a prejudiced vision and bear the fear through the year. The psychological depression results in poor performance at the end of the year.

Interference of Mother tongue : - interference of mother tongue creates lots of problems in speaking English. When they speak in their mother-tongue they sometimes use English words in the midst of the sentences. They forget that every language differs in stress, intonation and pronunciation.

Lack of Practice: - Language could be mastered by practicing all the four skills viz. Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing. The rural surrounding does not allow the learner to

practice any of these skills. The lack of audio tools also adds in the problem of lack of practice.

Crowded Classes: - The large size of the classes everywhere is considerably responsible for inactive participation in the class. The ratio of students in relation to teachers is not proportional. This is one of the reasons why individual attention is not possible to the students.

Limited Scope of Professional Development- There is a lack of motivation and accountability amongst many teachers, especially in rural schools where there is limited scope and opportunity for professional improvements. In rural areas there is very little opportunity of recognition or appreciation of good, innovative work by these teachers.

No use of Technology-The importance of technology-based teacher training cannot be ignored. Every newly appointed teacher, right from the primary school to college levels, especially teachers from a rural background, should undergo at least a one-month intensive training in the skills of English. The purpose of this course is to fine-tune the teachers own proficiency in the language and to help them teach English with technological aids for concrete results. Such courses may be held under the guidance of experts at the State ELTIs or at centers constituted for this purpose.

Impractical:- It is necessary that the language teaching course as implemented should prepare the students for this world. However it is really tragic that it fails miserably in this context for the curriculum does not address this particular aspect of language learning, which is the need of this practical world. The course does not include any kind of practical impairment of knowledge especially in language learning. “In Indian classrooms, lecturers speak, the class listens passively.....Indian classroom (up to graduation level) often do not allow projects, seminars, conferences etc” (Bhatia, 2008).

Lack of Clear-cut Aims:- There is a general lack of clarity about the aims and objectives of teaching of English in India. The policy framers have tried but failed to specify clear-cut aims and objectives of teaching English in schools. The teachers know that they have to teach the subject since it is included in the syllabus.

Lack of facilities:- There is scarcity of classroom, library, availability of books and lack of teaching aid i.e. computers, charts, smart board and language lab where students can enrich their listening and speaking skills. And because of these ill-equipped environment learners lag behind their urban counterpart who are learning English language with ICT gadgets in urban area.

Faulty Methods of Teaching: - The teaching of English in India suffers from the faulty methods of teaching. In most of the schools, the Translation Method is the sole favorite of the teachers. No attention is ever paid to pronunciation practice, listening comprehension



and structure practice. So, when they pass out, they are as ignorant as they were when they first entered the English class.

Lack of Innovation: - Another problem faced by the students in the learning of English in India is that the teachers lack innovation. They teach English like any other subject. They do not give extra effort for the students to enhance their communicative ability, to be able to use in real life situations. This is another obstacle which hinders the growth and use of English skills among the students.

Learners Need- A language teacher is well aware that their students bring to the language classroom a variety of attitude, experiences & strategies as well as variety of beliefs & he/she has to handle them. Need is to create (English) language environment in the classroom and attempt to enable the learners of heterogeneous background to explore finding the language in use outside the classroom. This requires bilingual proficient teachers, who are conformable 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.

Some possible solutions:-

- ✓ Teachers should try to encourage students to use English as medium of communication not only in the class but also at home as well. Child centered activities are necessary to be used in the class.
- ✓ Efforts should be made to promote all four skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing) of English language in the classroom. Teachers should also try to encourage students to read English news papers and same be provided to schools. Teachers should prepare lesson plans and should deliver them with the help of audio visual aids which could create realistic situation for teaching of English.
- ✓ They should also try to learn and use modern methods of teaching including communicative method in the class room. Students should be given creative home work
- ✓ Students are advised to use English language in the classroom as well as at home so that, they can get good practice. They should ask questions from the teachers in the classroom and get your concepts cleared. Students need to work properly and come to school regularly and emphasize to develop all four skills while learning English and promote self study.
- ✓ They should try to watch English programs when they get free time, specially listen to English speeches. If possible students should try to use internet for learning English.

- ✓ Curriculum should be reviewed after some specific time. All the stake holders, including students, teachers, parents and administrators should be included in the committee for reviewing the curriculum.
- ✓ Curriculum should be child centered and activity based which could promote English as language not as subject. Curriculum should be based on modern teaching methodologies.
- ✓ Teachers should be trained keeping in view the changes made in the curriculum. More creative exercises based on four skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing) should be included in the text book of English.
- ✓ Parents should encourage their children to use English at home and class. They should also try to buy their children different English books and magazines especially English news papers and make sure that children read them on the regular basis. Parents should also make sure that their children attend their classes regularly. They should also have close contact with the teacher so that, they can inquire about the study and class performance of their children.
- ✓ The ELT experts should also pay attention on course syllabus of the marginalized schools and colleges, which is not updated in accordance with current trend of English language.
- ✓ Government should think about the infrastructure of rural institutions. It can be developed by adding Multimedia technology like language lab. , computers, voice recorder, VCD player and so on.
- ✓ Teachers should motivate their students and make English easier for them by using it more and more in practical or real life context. Teachers should handle the learner's mistakes very carefully so that they cannot be de-motivated and there should be a friendly rapport between teachers and learners in the classroom.
- ✓ The administrators should try to motivate teachers for attending the classes regularly and make use of English language in the class. They should try to provide required facilities in the schools. They should try to provide professional assistance to the teachers.
- ✓ In-service teacher training programme should be designed keeping in mind the needs of the learners.
- ✓ Besides these, there should be a provision of assessing teacher training programme on regular basis.

Conclusion:-

A few measures like appointment of skilled & committed teachers of English at all levels, proper evaluation of teacher traing programme, effective implementation of technological schemes like EDUSAT, zero tolerance on the quality of both human and infrastructural resources, provision of minimum technological aids like TV, Tabs, Computers, Stereos, weekly film shows, facelift to the general ambience in schools, etc should be put in place



to arrest the dwindling standards of teaching/ learning of English in rural areas. The said measures may appear farfetched but will certainly help in better teaching and learning of English language in rural areas.

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