



Teaching of English to the Disadvantaged students of Rural Areas : Communication skill

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1. Introduction

There are not two opinions that English continues to be the lingua franca of not only the denizens of India but also other nations of the world today. Even the Chinese and Japanese have started learning English today since they have been impelled to acquire skills in English to interact with the different communities for various purposes, for e.g. education, business etc.

Teaching English as second or foreign language has been considered to be one of the most challenging jobs in school or college education especially in rural areas and I think sometimes it might be happened in other colleges also. Anyway! but we all must be congratulated for accepting this challenge.

In spite of English, being so popular and common in usage, it continues to be the headache for millions of our students in schools and colleges across the country. Especially the students who hail from rural areas find it difficult to communicate even after 12 years of learning English at school.

We all know very well that effective communication enhances every aspect of one's life and paves the way to success in both personal and professional life. Communication skill is the buzz word in today's education and job market, but many undergraduates from rural area struggle a lot to communicate in English. Even college leaving boys and girls find it difficult to use English for social and academic purposes. This inability has become a stumbling block to their career progress. Though they are good in academics, many of them have not got jobs because of their lack of communication skills. And if by chance, luckily they got the job, they became failure and they can't communicate with others in a very convincing manner.

2. What are the causes for this condition?

The teaching of English in Indian rural classrooms is a real challenge because of some reasons. (1) English is not one of the Indian languages or regional. (2) There are very few people who want to learn English genuinely. (3) Still it is not sure, particularly in rural areas, whether we need English or not.—But in my area the scenario is different. They want to learn English and they work hard for learning it.

Despite their interest in learning English, the students have anxiety when it comes to communicating in English. It is surprising to see, students, who even proudly confess that they do not know their mother tongue properly, feel shy to admit their lack of English language skills. The students must understand that English is a foreign language and they need to take sincere, conscious effort and interest to learn English. 'What will others think of me, if they come to know I do not know English?' or 'will others laugh at me if I say something incorrect?' or 'How will I face my classmates if the teacher discusses my mistakes and embarrasses me?' Or 'will I ever be able to learn and talk English at all?' etc. These fears are common with many students from the rural areas.

In spite of learning English from class 1st or somewhere from nursery, students from rural areas find it difficult to follow in the class, if they are taught only through English. This may be because they do not get proper guidance due to non-availability of trained teachers in rural areas. Even they learn grammar without knowing rules and learn by heart the question-answers in order to pass in their examinations.

The traditional pattern of examination oriented systems focuses on passing English as a subject and not as a language. The teachers face a lot of problems because of lack of basic infrastructure facilities in rural areas and they are expected to complete the syllabus within the stipulated time and show good results. When teachers handle large classes, they may not be able to devote time for any language activity.

3. How are we going to make our disadvantaged students better in all four basic skills LSRW in English?

College teachers face the challenge of teaching communication skills to the students from rural background, who are deficient in grammar and vocabulary. The challenging task can be transformed to a pleasant teaching learning experience when the teacher adopts innovative methodologies to cater to the needs of the rural students.

The teacher of language is not a teacher but she is such a friend who really put her efforts in carving the personality. The language dominates the factors affecting personality and language teachers do work hard for building personalities.

The English teacher, who has to instill confidence in the students, motivated them and be able to overcome their fear when they are allowed to talk freely. The teacher must encourage the students to talk more and more in English. The teacher must give more training to students on speaking by playing audio tapes, video tapes, films, software packages in the English language laboratory. All the students should be advised to give atleast one or two presentations in a term. The teacher should never forget the power of encouragement. Above all, the English teacher must be active, cheerful, friendly, cordial and competent in his communication and inter-personal relationships. He should never scold anyone for his or her lack of English.

The teacher can practically see it works like magic, in the classes, when he/she appreciates students for getting up with courage to participate in the class. Once the students break out of their shell of inhibition and fear, learning becomes easy. The teacher can quote the example of other successful students and famous personalities who emerged from rural areas. The teacher can also share some of his/her own positive teaching-learning experiences with the students.

When teaching the undergraduate students, the teacher should keep in mind, the attitude, aptitude and psychology of youth. It is easy to correct the pronunciation, sentence constructions and spellings etc. In a school student but it becomes a challenging task for the teachers to correct the students at the college level. The teacher has to work hard. It may take time, but it is not impossible. Peer pressure is more among the college students than school goes. The teacher has to help them cope with these odds and make them learn English. There are also some advantages with the college level students. They have mental maturity and their understanding and grasping level will be much higher than that of small children. Another advantage is, they also know the importance of communication skills and their willingness to learn will make the teacher's job easy.

4. Some practical issues that I observed during my teaching work in so many rural areas

I had taught at Khergam, Vansada, Songadh, Mandvi for few years and am presently teaching in Vyara. All these places are known as Tribal/Forest areas. And most of my students were/ are coming from backward or rural areas. They even can't speak pure Gujarati. They have their own dialect. And by teaching them I experienced that through bilingual teaching method or translation method, the students feel comfortable in the class and the teacher more approachable and enhances the teacher-learner relationship. The teacher also becomes a role model to the students and therefore the knowledge of the regional language is an added advantage to a teacher. If the teacher speaks only in English and the students do not understand English, there is a risk of students losing interest in the class. In such cases, there is no harm in teaching bilingually, till the students are ready to take everything taught in English.

The teacher has to constantly motivate the students and kindle their interest to listen to English language and comprehend the meaning. Gradually the teacher should switch over to English. In my Third year students I succeed to do this.

There may be constraints in pronunciation, due to the influence of their mother tongue or the regional language that they have learnt at their very young age. For e.g. students from rural parts have confusion in using /f/ and /s/ --same /s/ and /h/ like Surat = Hurat , Songadh = Hongudh, /ei / and /æ/ in paper, fail. They even can't differentiate Form –From.

Most of the students from rural area pronounce /h/ sound where it is supposed to be silent in words like honesty, hour, honest, honor etc. The teacher has to coach the students and clear these common errors and to teach the students the correct pronunciation.

Listening is one of the best ways to learn a language. A good listener becomes a good conversationalist too. The students should be made to listen to famous stories and interesting speeches. The teacher should encourage the students to converse in English in classes as the rural students may not have opportunity to speak in English outside the college. The teacher should also insist an eye contact when they talk. The teacher should make it a point to appreciate the learners for even small things, when they get it right.

5. Some interesting activities

The teaching learning process becomes very effective and easy through activities. For improving vocabulary, activities like word game like—Chair—air, hair, car, Context game (lexical set), antonyms, synonyms, suffixes, prefixes game etc. can be introduced. The activities like reading aloud from the newspaper, narrating stories, asking questions and answering questions develop their reading, writing and speaking skill also. Teaching should be learner centered and students must be motivated to participate in class- activities. The teachers must create such atmosphere where the students can feel free, comfortable and cheerful. They should help the students to get rid of their fear, nervousness and make them feel at home. They should identify the weak students in the class and pay more personal attention, use even the mother tongue of the learners in such a way that the students will communicate their problems, more and more and will pick up language skills in course of time.

Tell the students an event or story and stop at an interesting point and ask the students to continue. This will improve their creativity, listening comprehension and speaking skills.

The teacher can facilitate the brain- storming sessions giving the students assignment on some interesting topics or recent issues, description, narration etc.

6. Results

Some of the students were capable of responding to the questions. —After answering they felt satisfied over what they have done.—They, after some practice in both spoken and written communication, realized that they were getting rid of the fear and nervousness gradually.

7. Conclusion

It is a continuous practice and encouragement that will make students successful. The teacher can build a lot of activities into teaching the lesson. Teachers should have a wide range of imagination, talent and enthusiasm so that they create more activities and teaching methods with the minimum resources available. It should be kept in mind that many colleges in rural areas have no proper infrastructure or teaching facilities and the teacher should be able to compensate for this lack of facilities through their enthusiasm and dedication. The teachers at college level should be quite friendly and must build a healthy learner- teacher relationship. The teacher should be more of a facilitator rather than a stern traditional type of instructor. Encouragement is a great tonic for students at all levels. The teacher must create a flexible atmosphere by devising different tools like the English language lab, audio, video, and

language games, so that students will develop an interest, a sort of love for language and for learning soft skills in an atmosphere fused with fun, happiness and warmth. Once such an atmosphere is created, learning English can really be a pleasure for everyone in the classroom. Then only teachers who create such an atmosphere can feel proud. This is, undoubtedly, the obligation of the English teacher.

The students from rural background have realized the importance of communication skills for their career and development. Developing communication skills in English has a special place in the vision of every student from rural area and the teacher has to help them to make their dream, a reality.