

ELT IN RURAL INDIA: THE NEW MODEL OF DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The soul of India lives in villages as the villagers of India constitute the majority of Indian population. Apparently the progress of India greatly depends upon the development of the rural region. Now what we need to consider is that in today's tech-savvy world when there is a lot of competition around, mere possession of a professional degree does not guarantee a successful career rather one needs to be perfect in all the aspects. In such a scenario it is getting difficult for rural people to be successful professionals as they not only lack in technical skills but also in communication skills. In spite of their hard work, certain lacunas in education system leave them nowhere. Nowadays there is an ever increasing demand of English language resulting in the failure of poor desperate people who are adversely affected by these modern necessities of the corporate world. Considering above mentioned facts proficiency in English language has become mandatory for each and everyone aspiring to contribute for the development of the nation. Now the problem is that teaching foreign language to rural people is not an easy task owing to their poor educational background. Even the quality of English education in majority of institutions presents a very horrifying picture. Trainers of English do not realize that teaching of English is not just an art but a craft too. Teaching English to rural people not only requires the ability to express one's self in a better way but it also requires a lot of preparation, right attitude, systematic and logical approach and a lot of sincere efforts. Thus the present paper attempts to unfold the various challenges related to English teaching in rural areas. Here an attempt has also been made to explore the possibilities of evolving strategies to empower English teachers in order to find out the potential solutions for the arising challenges to English language teaching in those areas.

Keywords: Communication skills, Development, Education system, English language, Rural india

Introduction

In 2014 the ruling factor across the nation appears to be the mindset of people to bring about a change in the society to ensure the progress of India. In a democratic country like India we not only get freedom of expression but also right to education that is the root cause of progress. Right of children to Free and compulsory Education Act, 2009 clearly states that,

'every child of the age of six to fourteen years shall have a right to free and compulsory education in a neighborhood school till completion of elementary education that may prevent him or her from pursuing and completing elementary education.' It further adds that, 'No child shall be liable to pay any kind of fee or charges or expenses which may prevent him or her from pursuing and completing elementary education.'

In the light of above mentioned statement we can visualize the rosy picture of education for all but the reality is somewhat different as there is a vast difference between imparting education and that of 'Quality education'. We can't even imagine a developed country devoid of quality education. Now the question is that while talking about progress, secularism and good governance we tend to forget to discuss about quality education that is a major constituent in any nation's progress. At this juncture what we need to remember is that educating a child does not guarantee nurturing him according to his/her aptitude and ability though it is a major component that stands in need of thorough analysis so that we can focus on a child's ability at a very initial stage for all round development.

India is fortunate enough to have an unfathomable treasure in form of villages. Rich in culture and values rural people are a trademark of simplicity and sincerity. Here I don't mean to categorize urban people as shrewd or idle but what I wish to emphasize is that majority of the villagers are still like plain paper where you can scribe anything that you wish for. They are humble and hard working people and what they actually need is the right direction to move on. For paving the path of success for those people, the first step can be to provide quality education in English language to their children starting from primary level as it is truly said by ELT experts like Perren as quoted by Hans R Dua, 'since all must use English it is best for children to begin at an age when it is easiest, when there is no pronounced language-learning differential.'

Nowadays we need to be very much focused in context with education as it should not just be confined to complete the paperwork to justify quality governance rather it should be target oriented. It's high time when we need to analyze the complete picture of the education system of India instead of just collecting tits-bits of the distorted picture. So when we relate employment with education we need to analyze the prime factors of quality education that can surely help in the progress of nation. Here Quality education refers to the specific kind of education that culminates in the overall development of a child making him/her to be competent enough to successfully face the challenges of the professional world and to contribute for the betterment of human society. And as per my perspective it can only be possible when we focus on a child right from the beginning keeping in mind his/her aptitude and ability.

The prominent concept in modern India is an adoption of English in all walks of life as it remains to be the part and parcel of educational and economical growth of a developing nation like India. Though the Constitution of India emphasizes the use of mother tongue as it clearly states,

'It shall be endeavor of every state and of every local authority with in the state to provide adequate facilities for instruction in the mother tongue at the primary stage of education to children belonging to linguistic minority groups.' (Article 350 A)

But considering the requisites of the international market we can't ignore the importance of English language. Here I wish to clarify that I am not advocating a foreign language but with due respect to our mother tongue we should focus on teaching-learning of English language in rural India as an ill treatment of English language is proving to be a great obstacle in the progress of rural India.

Today we witness a cut throat competition across the world. The glimpses of 'survival of the fittest theory' can be seen everywhere and one who is devoid of communication skills certainly fails to survive and thus gets termed as 'misfit' in the corporate sector. So in that scenario we have to ensure that along with right to education we also get right to English language as in a multilingual and multicultural country like India we need a common mode of communication for overall growth and English can be the best possible solution to bridge the gap among different people. Though we can opt for our mother tongue provided it is accepted unconditionally across the nation but unfortunately in some parts of India people intentionally don't speak Hindi as they suffer from chauvinism. So in that case English remains to be the only option due to its booming presence across the world. Thus teaching English to rural people can be a boon to the economic growth of India as majority of India lives in the villages and they are the prime source of development.

Issues

Talking about the present scenario we find that three-fourth of our country men live in rural India. The nation can be strong and prosperous only when all villages are freed from illiteracy and poverty. Though the Govt. of India is committed to the cause of bringing about rapid and sustainable development in the rural areas but it still appears to be a difficult task. The pathetic education system of India make them incapable of succeeding in an era of globalization where English remains to be an essential ingredient of a successful career. It surely fails in terms of providing necessary interactive skills to rural people. In spite of the rigorous efforts on part of the govt. the English speaking ratio in villages remains chaotic. as it is rightly stated by National Knowledge Commission (NKC,2007),

'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.'

Thus in the absence of English friendly environment people don't take interest in English language resulting in future failure.

Now as we know that teaching foreign language to villagers is a complex process as they have a tendency to cling on to their mother tongue. Besides being weak in communication skills they are far away from any sort of exposure to the language. In that situation even the teachers fail to formulate any strategy to make them learn English. Thus it becomes really difficult to teach them the second language as both the trainer and the trainee remain to be unaware of the effective pedagogical strategies.

In an embryonic stage when they are taught English, it appears to be Greek or Latin to them owing to their poor educational and social background. Not only this but they also lack in their ability to grasp or to understand. Moreover an absence of basic infrastructure along with time constraints leaves them nowhere. They start taking English as a 'scary devil' with no

hope to succeed further. Added to their ordeal English is treated ordinarily like any other subject to be taught in the syllabus. Being bereft of skilled trainers and competent teachers the education system gets paralyzed. A miserable picture of English teachers in India can be seen in the words of Seshadri, (1997:206)

‘Most teachers of English in our schools are products of our university system. Obviously our departments of English don’t equip them with the kind of skills needed to teach English.’

Moreover most of the times all subjects are taught by a single teacher at primary level in the villages of India. The teacher not only lack communication skills but they also lack zeal to teach. Devoid of moral and ethical values the teachers prove to be a source of darkness. Once selected, they appear to be more concerned about the Govt. schemes to benefit them rather than imparting quality education.

Even the govt. works more on paper rather than in reality as most of times the schemes are run on paper only and we see complete mismanagement in terms of implementation of those policies e.g. mid day meal scheme was introduced to ensure good attendance, good health and to develop a tendency among students to stay back in the class room in order to reduce the drop rate of the students but finally it ended up in a fiasco as the focus shifted from the main objectives to the distribution of food and the unethical benefits related to that. So we see that it is really difficult to accomplish the real objective in a corruption governed society.

In a nutshell the reasons for poor English speaking ratio in villages are innumerable but ultimately the cost has to be paid by the villagers only as their dream of successful future turns out to be a hex. Though they hopefully wait for a savior who can turn their dreams into reality but it all ends up in a horrific state leaving them option less and clueless.

Remedies

Now the issue is that do we ever be able to turn the dream of poor people into reality where they will not only be perfect in academics in terms of technical competence and proficiency in English language but they also become competent enough to get 100% placement in the global market. Aye, where there is a problem there is always a solution too. While being in the field of academics I could see a no. of possibilities that can be helpful to improve the depressing conditions of rural people provided it should be executed honestly from initial level to make their dream come true:

- The first and foremost requirement is of basic infrastructure. Because where there is no classroom, electricity, chalk, duster and blackboard one cannot expect any sort of productivity, so the Govt. should primarily ensure the availability of basic infrastructure across the schools and colleges of the villages of India.
- Secondly we need a dream team of specialized and skilled teachers who are keen to take the task as a challenge instead of taking it as a source of livelihood. For that Indian Govt. can even ask NGO’s or volunteers who are ready to work for the betterment of nation. They should be trained thoroughly as per the need of the hour to meet the challenges of the given task.
- Now a day the whole process of teaching- learning has been digitalized. In 21st century rapid use of technology has completely transformed the entire process of

education. So deploying technology in teaching English will certainly prove beneficial as it'll not only make the teaching-learning process interesting and fun filled but it'll also fetch the rural people the necessary technical skills helping them to cope up with the modern trends.

- English language should not be treated as a scary devil rather it should be treated as 'Goddess' of bright future as the fluency in English has become a notable strength and it affects the people of all strata irrespective of their social and educational background. Keeping in mind that English language and success go hand-in-hand we need to change the mindset of backward people (backward in terms of poor knowledge of English language and effective communication skills) for their own betterment. For that we need to provide them qualitative learner friendly infrastructure where they get maximum exposure to English language.
- We also need to focus on the teaching material of English language, starting from primary to higher level, as focus should be given on communicative language teaching and ESP (English for specific purpose) so that it turns out to be beneficial in the real sense. Besides using technology in rural area can bring a revolution. Likewise urban areas the govt. can also set up language labs in rural schools. Use of computer, internet, CDs, cassettes can really be helpful. It'll surely arouse the interest of students and make the learning process quick and interesting.
- The Govt. should opt for zero tolerance in connection to the human and infrastructural resources as it plays a vital role in making the teaching process a success. Moreover the govt. should introduce multiple policies in order to have an increase in use of English language among rural people.
- An exposure to the outer world can also be helpful for arousing interest in English language. The students should not be confined to the four walls of the school rather they should be allowed to come out of their cell to participate in various activities and to have up-to-date information of the surroundings to understand the latest trends.
- The state of English in rural India can also be improved by enabling the villagers to improve their mental status and for that we need to make them realize the relevance of English language in the cyber age where it is somewhat impossible to succeed without being proficient in English.
- Providing learner-friendly ambience can also be helpful as they'll feel motivated in conducive atmosphere to put their best efforts. Different techniques can be used to inspire them and to extract the maximum out of them.
- Besides above mentioned facts moral and ethical values should also be invoked throughout e.g. Human Values that has lately been added as a subject in UPTU can be made compulsory for teachers too provided they should not only be judged on the basis of scores but also on the practical implementation of the theoretical knowledge. Here we must not forget that the dream of Developed India can only be achieved through candid citizens committed to their duties with a clear vision.

Conclusion:

In brief today what we need most is the honest and sincere efforts at every end to change the appalling picture of English teaching in rural India. Though we can't expect for an overnight miracle but the constant efforts can surely bring a revolutionary change in their way of presentation. Recently there had been a lot of controversy over the statement of a prominent leader when he quoted in a public meeting that 'Ye dil maange more' but analyzing this in context with the progress of India the statement appears to be perfect. We need more and more positive efforts in all sphere of life to make India a developed nation. The more efforts we put to make people literate, the more productivity we get out of those efforts. We certainly need to teach English language to the rural people so that they succeed to meet the ever increasing demands of the international market and contribute to the overall development of the nation.

Considering the alarming situation of rural India, it's high time when we need to establish English as a new model of development for rural India. Unless we focus on quality teaching-learning of English it'll be impossible for rural people to create a niche in the modern world. To sum up in the words of National Knowledge Commission, '...the time has come for us to teach our people, ordinary people, English as a language in schools. Early education in this sphere would help us build an inclusive society and transform India into knowledge society.'

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