



An Innovative Approach for Teaching English to Rural Students of Kalahandi District

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Abstract

India provides the status of a second language to English although it is a third or fourth language in some parts of India like Kalahandi, a remote district of Odisha. Even though English has a legacy of more than two hundred years, no effective method has been evolved to teach this language to the students of rural pockets till date. The methods and approaches befitting for urban students have failed in the villages due to various reasons like socio-cultural and economic factors of learners, non-availability of technical aids in classrooms, lack of motivation of parents and their children regarding acquisition of L2, untrained and unskilled teachers and irrelevant textbooks. The paper is designed to search for an effective method of teaching second language that would be productive for teaching the backward rural students of Kalahandi district.

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I. Introduction:

English plays a significant role in the Indian Education system. It has been ascribed the status of second language throughout India. There is an unexpected craze for learning English as a language as it is the passport to various opportunities. Even in the remote and hilly regions, the aborigines realise the importance and effectiveness of English language and they deliberately learn this language despite many hurdles. Rural students in India encounter many problems in learning this language in compared to their counterparts in urban locality due to locational disadvantages. Teaching English to the students of rural backgrounds is challenging and it needs special attention of administrators and teachers.

India is a country of villages. Seventy five per cent people of total population live in villages. But the village schools and education have not improved due to various regions. There is a big gap in teaching and learning of English between urban and rural schools. There are many studies which point out that there is a wide gap between rural- and urban education in various ways. The number of schools, teachers and infrastructure of rural regions are below the expectation. The location of schools in distant places, lack of adequate number of well -trained dedicated teachers, disrupted communication, poor and ignorant parents obstruct the learning process in rural schools. While the teaching methodology in these schools is primitive, the urban schools with adequate infrastructure and trained teachers adopt modern technology and methodology in teaching English and score over the schools of rural regions. The students of rural schools are shy, nervous and first generation learners. They are not well motivated and struggle very hard for the learning of English. The ambience of the language learning is not appropriate in the rural based schools and colleges.

II. Ambience of Teaching English in Kalahandi :

Kalahandi is a remotely located district of Odisha, once known for its backwardness is basically rural in its setting. As per 2011 census, out of total population 7.7% people live in urban areas where as 92.3% people live in rural areas. There are only one Municipality and two Notified Area Councils in the district. Some parts of the district are hilly with dense forest. It is predominantly inhabited by scheduled tribes and scheduled castes population (nearly 48%). The tribal people mainly live in the forest and hills which are inaccessible even today. Many hamlets located in the high hills are not revenue villages and there is no proper communication to these villages. The people of these villages are far from modernity and till date their life style is primitive. Modern

devices like mobile phones, computers, and electrical appliances are beyond their reach. Most of the people of rural areas of Kalahandi are either poor farmers or wage earners who are yet to be educated. According to 2011 census the literacy rate of Kalahandi is only 57.28 %. There are 2253 villages but 1649 primary schools and 36 colleges out of which there is more concentration of schools and colleges in urban areas. Thuamul Rampur, a block in forest locality does not have a degree college till date. There are 74 villages in Kalahandi which do not have schools in one kilometre radius. Students' dropout is a major challenge in such area. Teachers from far off places appointed in the schools are themselves not motivated and they think themselves alien to students and the environment. Many teachers do not attend their schools on all days of a week. Shockingly, it has come to the notice that some teachers employ dummy teachers to take care of the education in the schools by paying a nominal payment to the local unemployed youth having no requisite qualification and aptitude. The students are not regular in the educational institutions as they support their parents in the crop fields. In hilly regions, tribes have their own languages and in plain areas students speak a dialect called Kalahandia. A tribal student of Kalahandi has to speak his mother tongue the tribal language, Kalahandia, the second language, Odia, the third language and then he learns English which is fourth language. In such a situation, it is difficult to teach English as the student is not perfect in his state language. For the student even Odia is a foreign language in which he is not sound and he gets difficulty in learning it. In the classroom a peculiar situation arises so far language learning is concerned. Without learning odia properly the student starts learning English which is out of context for the student. Many teachers whose mother tongue is Odia are appointed in these schools. They do not comprehend the local dialect and tribal language which creates problem in teaching the students. Neither Grammar Translation Method nor Direct method is useful for these students to learn English. The students also find it difficult to comprehend the language spoken by the teachers. English as a language is taught in a foreign environment causing fear in the learners. The four skills of the language learning are not employed in the classrooms. The main aim of the language learning 'speech' is not given priority. Except reading and writing, other skills are ignored. Rote learning is the result of such teaching.

III. Overview of Rural English Language Teaching:

Rural students of Kalahandi are not as receptive as the urban students in the classroom. Their socio cultural and economic backgrounds are not suitable for foreign language learning. The parents are ignorant of English Language and they can't guide their children. It is found from the data collected by this researcher that most of the teachers of primary and secondary schools are not provided training in phonetics and the art of teaching English language to the students in the classrooms. The teachers and lecturers are not given ample opportunities to participate in the professional Development. The teachers encounter different problems of teaching English language in the rural classrooms of Kalahandi for which the training in the B.Ed. Courses are not sufficient. They need more training to cope up with the peculiar situation found in English language acquisition of the students. From a study of the high schools of Thuamul Rampur, it is observed that English is taught by the teachers without having English honours in their Graduation programme. On interview they admitted that they teach English in the age old method called Grammar Translation Method. But the students do not make out the lesson as they are not well versed in Odia. The students of these schools reveal that the English course is not completed due to absence of the teachers. The students are shy and nervous to ask the teachers for clarification of doubts. They need extra classes or remedial classes to understand the lesson. But the parents cannot provide money for special coaching. The doubts persist and the result is imperfect learning of the language.

A residential Government girls' school in Gopalpur of Thuamul Rampur Block is having ten classes where as it has only three classrooms. The school has 240 students and ten teachers (seven males and three females). The proportionate student- teacher ratio is not bad. But the data regarding English learning is shocking. Only thirty three per cent students of the school can write English, forty eight per cent students can read English text-books, six per cent can speak and irony is that only ten per cent students understand English. The majority students belong to the poor families of Kandha Tribe. This sample study indicates the flaw of language teaching in rural areas of Kalahandi district. It is high time to resolve the issues and take appropriate action for the learning of English language.

ASER Report: Pratham, a Mumbai based NGO works in the educational field and conducts surveys on the progress of education annually throughout India. It releases Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) every year and suggests various measures to the Ministry of Education for effective education. One recent report on the education of Kalahandi states that more than fifty per cent of the students in fifth standard of rural schools are not capable of reading an English text book of class three or four. This exposes the cripple rural education of Kalahandi.

IV. Overcoming difficulties in Teaching English:

4.1. Appointment of local teachers: The rural students of Kalahandi district face innumerable problems in learning the target language since English is not only a target language for them. They do not feel at home with the teachers with Odia as mother tongue. Therefore, eligible teachers with tribal language Kui should be appointed in the schools of hilly and forest areas where number of tribal students is more and in other localities teachers proficient in Kalahandia dialect should be given preference especially in the primary and upper primary schools. The students can at least interact with these teachers in their own language and will speak up their problems. The Government has started appointing teachers with tribal language which will certainly boost the confidence of the learners.

4.2. Special focus on four skills: It is revealed from various studies that the students are taught to appear the examination and not for the sake of language learning. In English test only writing skill is tested. The teachers do not bother to focus on other skills as they wish to see better performance in the Examination. Due to negligence of other skills the students are handicapped in pronunciation and speaking. They need an environment of English at least in the school campus which they do not get. The teachers have to use a unique method that would be suitable for the students. The students need to be trained in all the skills. The rural students are fond of stories and they should be told more stories in the classrooms so that listening will help them to speak.

4.3. Redesigning of text books: The prevalent text books do not generate interest in the learners as the form and content are not associated with their lives and surrounding. The direct method is not successful for this. There are many words which cannot be explained in isolation. The students belong to agrarian setting and natural environment. The culture and the society depicted in the text books are foreign to them. They will be more interested in the stories where their lives, society and environment are represented. The teachers cannot explain the 'banquet hall' to rural students as they have not seen it. The text books with rural content will inspire the learners to read the books.

4.4. Use of Technology : The modern theories of language learning emphasizes on use of computers, television, radio, mobile phones and other modern devices for language teaching. These appliances have already proved the effectiveness in language learning. The smart classrooms, language laboratories can create interest in the students of rural belt as they have not seen in their home. However, the government has to take initiative for this for setting up of smart classrooms in all schools. Infrastructure is a major problem till date. Although in hilly regions electricity is a problem, the solar energy can be used in these areas. The teachers need to be specially trained for using the technology.

4.5. 5T Schools and colleges: Government of Odisha has introduced a wonderful scheme of transforming existing schools to 5T Schools. It is an innovative approach in changing the trend of education. This can contribute to language learning in government schools. 5T can be explained as Technology, Teamwork, Transparency, Time and Transformation. It aims to do away with all the stereotypes associated with public schools. It envisages to:

- a. make classroom teaching adapt to the technological changes by not restricting it to only chalk and board.
- b. make the classroom environment interactive by tapping into student's interests. The new way of knowledge transfer assisted with appropriate technology and tools shall make learning easy for students.
- c. Smart classrooms are to be equipped with laptops, projectors, high speed broad band connection and 5.1 surround sound system.
- d. Apart from infrastructure, the other focus of the project is to enhance teachers' skills and build project ownership among the teaching community.
- e. Regular professional Development programmes for teachers especially in English, Science and Mathematics both in offline and online mode.

The transformation of schools programme was launched in 2020-21 session and till date more than 4000 Government high schools have been transformed. If all the schools and colleges of Odisha are transformed then Odisha will be a model state in education. These schools in rural areas will create interests in the English language learners and LSRW skills will be used by the trained teachers.

A 5T School of Odisha



4.6 Establishment of more Schools in rural Areas: Some parts of Kalahandi are inaccessible. Practically there is no communication from one village to another. A school is located in four or five villages. The students cannot go to schools because of physical barriers and distance. There is the need of establishing a school in every hamlet and village for the spread of education. The English language learners may be given special attention in the schools.

4.7 Special Coaching to English Language Learners: Since it is not possible to impart English Education to students of backward regions in an allotted class, the teacher should be directed to give coaching to the students after the school time for which the teacher should be given incentive by the government as the students cannot afford to pay for the extra class.

4.8 Special Monitoring for English Teaching: English teaching- learning needs special monitoring for desired result. The teacher has to give attention to every individual learner and test each skill. The head master and other administrative staff of District Education Office need to supervise the performance of the English teachers and the students. Periodical test of each skill should be recorded in the progress card of the students. The slow learners should be pointed out and taken care of separately.

4.9 Use of Different methods in the classrooms: A single method whether Grammar Translation method or Direct method cannot help the rural students of Kalahandi in learning English language as it is not the second language. The teacher has to be innovative in teaching the language by amalgamating project based learning, Free Voluntary Reading Method (FVR), storytelling method and music method in the classroom teaching. The English teacher should be student friendly to encourage the learners.

4.10 More Drills of the lesson in the classroom: The behaviouristic approach of language learning emphasizes on repetition and reinforcement of the items taught. The students have to practise in the classrooms individually and in groups. Unless the learner acquires an item completely, the teacher should not teach the next item.

V. Conclusion:

Teaching English to rural students of Kalahandi is a challenging task due to the reasons discussed in the paper. However, the new steps by Government of Odisha like 5T transformation of schools will contribute to effective learning of English in the rural environment. These days there is awareness on language learning among the people of backward regions also. Therefore, there is hope for the improvement in the English language learning. The dropout cases of the school goers have drastically reduced and the monitoring is systematic now. The government has started appointing teachers with mother tongue background and English as

honours in the schools. If the teachers of rural schools passionately follow the recommended methods and approaches for teaching English, the rural students will come up with flying colours in future.

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