

A Review On Challenges And Issues Faced By English Medium Students In Rural Areas

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Abstract:

English as a language has been used in India for more than a century, but it continues to pose challenges for many of the non-native speakers. This paper attempts to bring in the issues related to the Problems of teaching English in rural schools of India. Majority of students read English only for the sake of examination. They are not known how to recite poems but they well known how to memory it. Actually rural students have fear on English. On the other hand many teachers don't have long vision about students' life. They focus only on examination.

Lack of Exposure in English

Plutarch says, "The mind is not a vessel to be filled, but a fire to be kindled". Students of today even after twelve years of school study lack mastery over English, where English is also a medium of instruction. Teaching of English needs a sea change for the benefit of the learners in schools. Bilingual method is adopted in language classes, because majority of the students hail from rural areas, do not have any exposure to the effective use of English. English is mostly taught only as a subject, not as a language. It is a well-known fact that language is a skill which cannot be taught or learnt. Instead a skill can be acquired by means of constant practice. One, who practises language constantly with a great zeal

and zest, gets more chances to acquire mastery over the language

The difficulty of deciding which language should be the medium of instruction has caused problems in the delivery of quality education in India.

Parents, even in rural areas, know about the huge importance of English in the present day globalised world. The failure of government schools to respond effectively to the aspirations of parents and students has given opportunities to private schools to thrive. For example, in Uttar Pradesh, the enrolment in rural government schools at elementary level has declined from 17.2 million in 2002-03 to 15.9 million in 2015-16. The enrolment in rural private schools has increased from 2.7 million to 13.8 million in the same time period. Both vernacular and English medium private schools have been able to convince parents that they are giving importance to learning in and of the English language. However, finding quality teachers who can effectively teach subjects in English, at salaries near minimum wages is an uphill struggle for schools in low-income areas.

The problem of low fees translating into below par teacher quality is more acute in rural areas of major states such as Uttar Pradesh, Madhya

Pradesh and West Bengal. The National Sample Survey (71st Round) data shows that in 2014, the median school fee in the rural areas of these states was Rs 117, Rs 250 and Rs 180 per month, respectively.

A majority of the teachers are paid just around Rs 4000 per month as salary in rural private schools, which makes it extremely difficult to attract reasonably qualified talent. The difficult language used in text books compounds the problem of recruiting quality teachers. English medium text books have been written keeping in mind English medium schools in urban areas. These books are not suitable for students or for teachers in rural areas. These factors lower teaching standards in English medium schools in rural areas, resulting in students performing way below their potential.

The challenges faced by English medium students in rural areas go beyond the quality of teachers. Another major problem faced by students in rural areas who want to study in English is the lack of English medium schools beyond elementary level in these locations. As a result, after getting education in the English medium till class 8, a large proportion of students are forced to opt for the vernacular medium.

Among the major reasons for the relatively low number or lack of schools at the higher secondary level which use English as the medium of instruction is largely due to the inability and unwillingness of parents in rural areas to pay the high fees needed to fund the high operational costs of such schools. Although the problem appears less serious at the elementary level, the fact is that schools

assess their own students, which then makes it easier to hide shortcomings such as under-qualified and untrained teachers. As state-level boards take over the assessment process post the elementary level, investors and promoters feel less confident about opening English medium secondary or senior secondary schools.

On the other hand, if students pursue their studies in the vernacular medium, it becomes very difficult for them to compete, after class 12, in premier institutions, especially after the introduction of the semester system at the graduation level.

The language used in vernacular medium school text books does not help students in higher education or in the job market. These books have been written with the assumption that students will continue their higher education in the vernacular medium. In the present day semester system prevalent at the university level, students have to write their examinations in English within two months of obtaining admission in college. This poses impossible challenges for ill-prepared students, adversely affecting their job prospects – particularly in the social sciences, which heavily rely on proficiency in the language used for expression of thoughts. They find it very difficult to grasp the intricacies of the subject in such a short period of time and write their answers meaningfully in the English language. Poor performance in higher education or in the job market gives impetus to the idea that school education should be in the English language.

Way forward

Discussions on the language of instruction are mostly restricted to mother tongue versus English in India. However, given the nature of job markets and resource constraints, we need to transcend the issue of whether to teach in the mother tongue or in English. As the Indian economy integrates further with global markets, the importance of English is bound to continue to increase. We need to equip our students to navigate with ease between vernacular mediums and English. However, improving the availability of quality teachers in rural areas to carry out this task would be very challenging in the short and even medium term, especially with current textbooks.

The government should take the initiative to get the existing vernacular medium books re-written. There is a need to differentiate between words which are commonly used (in the mother tongue) and terms which require explanation. In the new books, technical terms should also be mentioned in English. Some of the textbooks use English words sparingly; however, teachers and students generally tend to gloss over these words or terminologies. The usage of English words should be increased significantly and evaluations should be designed in such a way that students are

- Problem in understanding the abstract idea
- Psychological, financial and environmental interference
- Learning method
- First generation learners

Remedies

Building a rapport among learners in classroom

Importance of English should be explained

encouraged to learn both the vernacular and their English translations simultaneously. The effort that students would need to put in learning or retaining technical terms (which are not commonly used) would be nearly the same, irrespective of language. Learning technical terms in English will smoothen the students' transition from vernacular medium to English medium, which will make it easier for them to adapt in senior classes and in job markets.

To reduce the language divide, the government could go a step further and make similar adjustments in English medium textbooks as well. For example, these should also include translations of technical terms in the vernacular. This will enable students to better grapple with textbooks, even if the teaching quality is poor. The ease of navigation between English and vernacular languages will create the right conditions for acquisition of knowledge as well lay a strong foundation for the emergence of a more egalitarian society.

Challenges faced by the rural students

- Mother tongue influence
- Pronunciation difference in language
- Lack of interest
- Lack of practice
- Lack of motivation

Using different methods of teaching

Building confidence among students

Improvement in teaching facilities

Problems with teachers in rural areas

The main problem India now faces is that all the pedagogical innovations are fit to improve the quality of urban education while the rural learners and their education remain largely neglected. With 65 per cent of the population residing in rural India, education there truly deserves much more attention, especially when it is plagued with so many problems - dearth of teachers, teacher absenteeism and poor quality of teachers.

1. Non-permanence of teachers is demotivating

Most of the schools in rural areas are run by the government. They appoint ad hoc teachers, instead of permanent ones, who are poorly paid as compared to the huge remuneration of a full-time Trained Graduate Teacher (TGT). Moreover, promising career prospects, which is quite a motivation booster, is almost nil for the non-permanent teachers. This leads to dissatisfaction, eventually resulting in a dearth of teachers because they move away to more permanent jobs.

2. Late or blatantly absent

Lack of accountability of teachers and school authorities has raised the rate of absenteeism. School Development and Management Committees (SDMCs), comprising parents and members of the local community, have been entrusted with the responsibility of overseeing teachers and their duties. However, research suggests that the committee has hardly seen success.

3. Non-teaching duties

Moreover, non-teaching duties like election invigilation often keep teachers away from schools. Furthermore, teachers often have to report for duty far away from their home. With an inadequate transport system in rural India, the distance only adds to their woes and often results in absenteeism.

4. Exemption from TET

Several states have exempted candidates from Teachers' Eligibility Test (TET) as only 20 per cent of the aspirants clear it. This wrong move, in an attempt to quickly fix the issue of dearth of teachers, has deteriorated the quality of education in the states even further. However, quality of teachers is a major concern not only in these states, but across the entire country.

5. Lack of quality teacher training

There are many private teacher-training institutes in India, but the quality of the training they provide is unsatisfactory. Continuous professional development is a motivator for teachers, and enough attention is needed in this regard.

Government initiatives

Attuned to the Modi government's Digital India initiative, a couple of projects have been introduced in the school education segment.

- For instance, E-basta aims to make digital education via tablets and computers accessible to learners in rural areas. Digital learning can help develop critical thinking skills. The project aims not only to benefit learners

in learning concepts, but also to make them comfortable with technology.

Steps are already being taken to introduce digital aids in preschools. Though digital aids can never really replace teachers, initiatives of these kinds can make quality content available to them.

- Again, Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA), in partnership with state governments, is dedicated to enhance the capacity of all teachers in Information and Communications Technology (ICT).

Many teachers are not tech-savvy, and the teacher-training courses never really prepare them to handle digital aids in classrooms. Such schemes can go a long way in keeping them motivated besides improving their competence.

Non-government initiatives

eVidyaloka, a non-profit organisation, connects rural learners and teaching volunteers through digital classrooms. The passionate teachers are a varied bunch, consisting of housewives, IT professionals and retired defence personnel. The eVidyaloka team organises Skype classes according to the availability of volunteers and batch sizes.

Although there is a shortage of teachers in our country, a huge number of college pass-outs remain unemployed. The organisation tries to properly channelise the supply in the sector where there is a demand. However, frequent power cuts and poor internet connectivity in

rural areas affect the productivity of the classrooms.

Conclusion:

With the support of government and non government organizations we all together can help in raising the standards of English as a language at the school 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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