
Overcoming Speaking difficulties of rural English learners

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Abstract

This paper deals with the major challenge in the Indian English teachers teaching in the rural areas in the globalised world where communicating in English has become a necessity. The paper discusses the challenges of the students from rural areas studying in rural medium in speaking in English. In addition it also discusses the challenges of the teachers teaching to those students in the rural disadvantaged classrooms. It proposed some suggestions for teachers and students for the enhancement of speaking abilities of students.

Introduction

The present era of Globalization with the advent of information technology revolution has created a plethora of employment opportunities for the youth across the globe. This in first place has helped the youth of the first world countries in addition to the youth of third world countries. However for countries like India which possesses the largest human power in the world the change has also exposed a major drawback. The lack of human resource that possesses the

skill of English speaking is the cause of the major worry. The present global economy which provides greater opportunities in service oriented economy demands the working force who can communicate across the globe. In other words it favors the youth who is equipped with communication skills in English.

Importance of English in India

English has attained greater significance in the world in general and in India in particular.

English is the doorway for access to vast literature of world knowledge. It also provides us opportunities to update the existing knowledge in all the fields including science and technology, social sciences and humanities and arts. English is the popular medium of education, the language of higher studies and research and the language of communication both in real life transactions at various levels as well as the online media transactions.

It is essential for an international communication apart from local communication in formal

official contexts in government offices and private corporate spaces. In the context of globalization the significance of English has moved beyond the purpose of communication to commerce and business and the opportunities that it creates.

Graddol (2010) brining the context of India and assessing the people's opinions says, "Throughout India, there is a belief among almost all castes and classes in both rural and urban areas in the transformative power of English. English is seen not just as a useful skill but a symbol of better life, a pathway out of poverty and oppression" (Graddol p. 120) In addition to being the lingua franca of the world, to meet the demands of the present day job market it has become must for the students to learn English. It is in this context that the above opinion of people has to be read as the popular one. India with a greater work force consisting of youth has a significant immediate necessity of developing English speaking youth population.

Defining Speaking

Speaking is an important skill. Of all the language skills: LSRW, speaking is very significant and complex to master also. Brown (2001) states that the litmus test for a person who has successfully acquired a language is

fulfilling its pragmatic goals which primarily involve speaking. According to Nunan (2003:48) speaking is a productive oral skill consisting of producing systematic verbal utterances to express meaning. Speaking is defined as "the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols, in a variety of contexts". (A. L. Chaney and T. L. Burke, 1998. p.13) In short, speaking involves a communicative process to express one's own opinions, feelings, to tell instance of life and stories to others etc. Speaking is a means of output for our thoughts, expressions and feelings. In continuation Hornby (1995: 826) defines speaking as making use of words in an ordinary voice, uttering words, knowing and being able to use a language, expressing oneself in words, and making speech.

In sum it can be stated that speaking is a communicative process involving a source and receiver. It needs to be highlighted that both perform not just one role but two roles alternatively. Byrne (1984) as cited in Nurlaili (2002:5) notes that speaking is a two language process between speaker and listener and involves productive and receptive skills of understanding.

Shumin as cited in Richards and Renandya (2002: 204) says that speaking a foreign

language requires more than knowing its grammatical and semantic rules. Speaking requires the knowledge of both the language features and the knowledge of information processing. It can be summed that the prime aim of speaking is successful comprehensive communication in addition to being pronunciation and grammar of the language.

Objectives of the Study

- a. To investigate the reasons that rural students face in learning English?
- b. To study the problems of the rural students in speaking in English?

Methodology

To address the above mentioned objectives, a large body of literature is reviewed to document the problems of the rural students who study in native tongue medium. In addition to the literature review a few English teachers teaching in rural areas have been interviewed informally to know their personal opinions on the problems that they face in teaching English to the students as well as the problems that the learners face in speaking effectively. They are also asked about the proposed solutions to address the problems impending. Informal group discussions have also been conducted with students to know their reasons for their ineffective speaking in English.

Problems of rural students from local medium background

India's total population is 121 crore. Of India's total population, 83.3 crore live in rural areas while 37.7 crore stay in urban areas, said the Census of India's 2011 Provisional Population. This means that almost 70% of the total population lives in rural areas. This information by inference conveys that the residence of almost 70% of learners/students is rural India. This piece of information raises the main challenges for the English pedagogy of the country as the rural India is ridden with many problems in comparison with the urban area. The problems of with particular reference to teaching and learning of English are studied and identified by many scholars.

Some of the problems of rural students identified by T. Bhaskar David (2013) in learning English are

1. Crazy for English language that is Market driven but not welfare driven
2. The socio-linguistic context of India which is pluralistic at the ground level make it difficult for policy planning
3. Colonial mindset that makes the Indian academic dependent on the western and

other countries academia for theoretical and conceptual inputs on ELT, no independent indigenous ELT

4. Ineffective teacher who do not possess knowledge about updated English pedagogy, and teacher training that does not equip the teachers with the latest developments in the ELT
5. Imported methods that are developed in monolingual first world countries such as Britain are not suitable for Indian context. For example CLT the most popular method does not suit for Indian ESL classroom which is culturally and linguistically diverse
6. Materials that are used in the classroom consisting majorly of Textbooks are ineffective as they are disinteresting
7. The classroom teaching that is exam oriented but not skill oriented
8. More over with the India gigantic population the lack of facilities is also marring the teaching of English.

Comparing rural students with urban students, Gomati, B.S. (2014) states differences in terms of advantages of the urban kids in comparison

with the disadvantages of rural learners in learning English.

1. Rural students lack the 'privilege of exposure' to target language.
2. They lack 'special training' for the improvement of different skills; LSRW individually.
3. Teaching in rural areas is 'exam oriented' but not skill and knowledge oriented.
4. They lack encouraging atmosphere for learning as well as practicing the English language in the classroom.
5. Classroom teaching is dominated by the use of conventional methods predominantly focusing on reading. She also added that the conventional methods and traditional monolingual functioning of classroom does not tap the available resource that is their mother tongue.
6. The other factors that affect the rural students learning speaking English are their family background; including parental education. She opines that due to majority of parents being illiterates the students do not get any educative guidance at home.

Ponmozhi, D and A.Thenmozhi (2017) studied the problems and the difficulties faced by the rural students in learning English at High school level situated in Cuddalore district of Tamilnadu. They concluded that ‘a significant relationship’ existed between mother’s education, parent occupation, parent income and class strength and English learning difficulties of learners. They also observed that ‘the Parental Occupation was relatively strong indicators’ of English Learning difficulties. While the other variables such as father’s education, mother’s education and class strength were ‘a moderate indicators’. They stated that a correlation exists between parental occupation and education and quality of family life that there by affects learning of English of children. They also found out that the inappropriate teacher - student ratio is one of the factors that force learning difficulties denying individual attention to the learners. They suggested focusing on individual attention and remedial measures to reduce the English learning difficulties of rural students.

Traditionally the students of rural areas have been exposed to language within the premises of the school through textbooks and the teacher. Through teacher and textbook the learners are predominately exposed to reading and writing. While there are very poor opportunities for them

to speak and even listen English outside the classroom. Even the minimal exposure that they get is confined to limited skills taught using conventional lecture method.

The extra guidance that the students can get is from their parents which the students in rural areas lack. As the parental education background is very little in many cases parents are illiterates, so the students are denied a major educative support at home.

In addition to these in terms of exposure the students in rural areas lack the opportunities to get exposed to English media such as newspapers and English TV channels.

Proposed suggestions

Learning to talk in the foreign language is often considered being one of the most difficult aspects of language learning (Brown and Yule, 1983). That too considering the rural learners mentioned above in learning to speak in English the gravity of the problems thickens. Given this complex situation and the immediate requirement of developing English speaking youth, following are the few suggestions proposed that can tackle with the problems of the rural students of the India for enhancing better English speaking of the students.

Lack of atmosphere is cited as the foremost hurdle to overcome for enabling better speaking, so it is essential to create an English learning friendly atmosphere in the Indian rural classroom. First and foremost factor that needs to be changed is the method. As the conventional lecture method lets teacher do the talking reducing the learners to passive listeners. The classroom as a reform measure needs to adapt interactive communicative methodology which focuses on developing learners' communication involving the learners in the classroom activities and communication. Thereby it provides learners opportunities to speak in the classroom at the same time providing them teacher guidance in learning better. This has serious implication on materials and methodology used in the classroom. In order to make a communicative interactive classroom, the materials have to be mended so as to include more activities that necessitate the learners to process information and produce it in the classroom. Moreover this turns the classroom into a space of learning as well as the turf of practicing.

If the right speaking activities are taught in the classroom, speaking can raise general learners' motivation and make the English language

classroom a fun and dynamic place to be (Nunan, D.1992).

Another important aspect is the lower motivational levels of the students. This can also be catered by creating a student friendly and learning centered classroom. In this context it is essential to remember Patil's (2008) personal experience: "I have to create opportunities for them to use English in meaningful, realistic, and relevant situations. Games, role play activities, riddles, puzzles, cartoons, anecdotes, jokes, songs and other low-cost and easily available teaching materials become handy" (p.07)

The major concern for the rural classroom is the opinion of teacher who believes in monolingual classrooms and treats learner's mother tongue as interference. But studies in multilingualism have shown that mother tongue is an untapped resource that students bring into the classroom which is left unexploited. So use of mother tongue can also help to motivate the learners and lessen the stress and anxiety levels in the classroom before and while speaking.

The major advantage of the present day technology revolution is that it makes various sources and mediums of communication available in the classroom. This includes use of audio visual material in the classroom. This also



refers to use of internet in the classroom vis-à-vis online material. This helps in generating motivation levels for the learners to engage in the classroom activities and enable better language learning.

Conclusion

The rural India comprises 70% of the population. As an inference it suggests that the population which is away from development constitutes majority of the population. One of the means of access to modern development is getting access to the modern day opportunities which can only be possible through English. English is here to stay. David Crystal (1997) very emphatically says, “There is no reason to believe that any other language will appear within fifty years to replace English as the global lingua franca”. The stride in space technology, telecommunication, the remote controls cordless phones, satellite communication, cellular phones, internet computer technology all these are self-evident of this fact. Without adequate knowledge of English it is very hard to understand and absorb the developments in this field. (p.7)

If the rural classrooms can try to better the classroom context by using some of the

suggestions above, the dearth of English speaking students can be fulfilled.

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