

ELT: ENCOUNTERING CLASSROOM CHALLENGES

Dr. Jagdish Janbandhu

Assistant Professor

Head, Dept. of English

Shri Mathuradas Mohota College of Science,

Umrer Road, Nagpur- 440 009

Maharashtra

Abstract

English Language Teaching (ELT) in rural area confronts a drastic panorama of competence, acquisition and proficiency since a long time. It is not true that the remedial measures have not been taken to overcome these problems with varied techniques and reliable methods. But, still it necessitates in an era of knowledge, information and technology to formulate effective strategies, on the part of language teachers, so that the learner should be made independent in language competence. As such, English Language Teaching for rural students requires a special attention. The present paper intends to focus attention on the practical situation in classroom in rural areas with suggestions for new teaching resources and their effective usage. English as an international *lingua franca* has gained a colossal repute worldwide. It has also obtained tremendous importance for being and becoming synonymous with human life as a whole. Teaching English in rural areas severely suffer from its acquisition, competence and proficiency. Therefore a crucial need of new techniques for learners remains to be adopted and implemented by the teachers of English language.

Keywords: language, acquisition, ELT, reception, proficiency

There can be no denying the fact that most of the rural learners ultimately fail to develop their language proficiency in communicative skills and language acquisition compared to their urban counterparts. The factors responsible for their lagging behind in such rudimentary areas as grammar, reading, writing and speaking vary from teacher's poor knowledge of the subject to the insufficient infrastructure, lack of innovative resources and improper reception by the learner. It becomes a matter of perennial interest, therefore, to constitute, adopt and implement some innovative techniques to cope up with the demand of the changing time and growing craze of English as a global language.

English as a foreign or second language (EFL/ESL) assumes a notion of fear and anxiety in the minds of the rural students that remain again a major hindrance in the language reception. Not all, but the majority of the students are suffering from this fear complex that revert them back from further language skills and proficiency. Though most of them comprehend the taught

topic in a given context, their lack of expression mingled with panic makes the matter worse. They falter or prefer silence while expressing easy ideas. It is true that most of these students come from non-English speaking families. Further, whatever knowledge of English they acquire since their previous education remains insufficient to cope with the existing situation. Consequently the zenith of mistakes in grammar (tense, affix, suffix, synonyms, antonyms, parts of speech), composition (report, letter, bio-data, application, dialogue, essay writing), comprehension (précis, unseen passage) inevitably occurs while evaluating them. I do not intend to put all blame to the students, on the contrary, it gives many teachers of English language an honest opportunity to introspect themselves to be able to find and rectify unnoticed lapses whenever and wherever possible. Causes of poor performance are many but the teacher can not curtail his or her responsibility. George Bernard Shaw succinctly inveighs, “He who can, does; who can not, teaches.”

To grapple sensibly with this quandary, it has been observed that every decade a new approach or methodology comes into vogue and all the methods have had their heydays. An eminent educationist, H. D. Brown observes on the changing perspective of ELT: “[...] as the schools of thought have come and gone, so have language teaching methods waxed and waned in popularity.”¹ So in the due course of time, the traditional changing paradigms give vent to necessities of modern approaches.

Pertinent to ELT for rural students many trends such as, Grammar Translation Method, Direct Method, Audiolingual method, Community Language Teaching that were popular in the past gradually vanished today and have been substituted by others. To pick up any one of them would hardly serve the best purpose possible. “Unlike the teaching of other subjects such as Maths, Physics etc., language learning, teachings are dynamic, fluid, mutable processes. There is nothing fixed about them.”²

Thus, the main focus of interest comes forth to acquire competence and proficiency in English as a language and not as mere a subject. It enhances further for mutual transaction that deals with culture, academics and commercial purpose intensely amounting to the large number of students of rural habitat. One of the rudimentary components that refer to make students independent in comprehension, composition and grammar require acquiring language skills. The acts of obtaining verbal and written skills need to pay close attention in a given situation. Listening remains a basic language skill but unfortunately it is not given much attention to. Reading and listening are receptive skills as they are used in receiving information; speaking and writing are productive skills. In the classroom students should not be mere passive listeners, rather they should become an active participant. Passive listening causes lapse in reception on the part of learner. Therefore the language teacher should be intimate with the students rather than intimidating them with his knowledge or eloquence so that they can feel themselves at ease while in the classroom.

Several activities and exercises can be taken to facilitate and promote language skills. Especially the use of interactive communication could be helpful. Since there is a wide variation in the skill levels of individual students especially when they come to college from diverse educational backgrounds, the tackling of this problem effectively, there can be smaller groups where the students can be guided according to their skill-levels. The smaller groups of students as per the practical exam pattern can enable the teacher to seriously focus on the students areas of weakness individually and enhance the chances of better results.

Many teachers of English in the recent times are lackadaisical in good speaking skills. Moreover, they are also products of the same system where writing skills take primacy over speaking skills. Then, there are hardly any mechanisms in place, to provide proficiency in the spoken aspect of English language. It requires an urgent need to have good teacher training modules which can address the teachers' training issue for developing their speaking skills and hone their knowledge of the spoken aspects of English language. No doubt, at some places, practical exam system has been introduced in some classes and in some other classes a paper dealing with the phonological, morphological and syntactic structures of language has been introduced but much more needs to be done in this direction.

Today, what the learners of English need most is to learn a language which enables them to cope with the real-life situations around them, where they can communicate with ease and confidence. For a long time, the teaching of English has been through literary texts. But more recently, the focus has been shifting a little towards communication skills, and perhaps rightly so. Those who wish to enjoy the literariness of various texts can study them for purely literary reasons. But for the majority of learners, English is relevant for a host of other non-literary purposes, because it is the global language. It's an apt time for the current English Teaching Programs that could seriously focus on this requirement and tailor the curriculum addressing these needs to learners.

There seems to be more emphasis only on writing part. But the spoken aspects of the language (pronunciation, sounds, accent, tones etc.) are not given due importance in the curriculum. Does it not look strange that even today, in most of the classes, the students are assessed on the basis of only written examination? Why can't they be assessed for their speaking skills as well? In the absence of a practical exam, the students don't take the need to develop their speaking skills seriously and focus only on the learning of answers which they can write and get good marks. Consequently, the present system continues to produce graduates and postgraduates in English who have good writing skills but hardly any confidence or ability when it comes to the spoken aspect.

The pressure on rural teachers to teach English is very high. All the professors and lecturers said that the present situation of "English teaching and learning in rural colleges" is really pathetic. Teaching in rural colleges is very difficult and challenging. The percentage of students who fail in English is considerably more in rural colleges. There are many suggestions for that. Some opined that the syllabus for the students of the rural colleges must be different and framed separately. Teachers must be well trained to teach it effectively. The students of the rural colleges must be encouraged to speak in English. To start with they can be interviewed. If they cannot answer properly, through translation we can make them understand and then make them repeat it in English. There are several other ways of using translation as a tool to develop speaking skill. It may help the student to overcome the fear of speaking English in public.

In language learning, reading is considered one of the most important lessons for the learner. Researches in extensive reading have shown many beneficial effects on students and claimed that when learners read, they not only learn new words, but they can also develop their syntactic knowledge as well as general knowledge of the world. Other recent studies have also shown that students who participated in extensive reading increased gains in the areas of vocabulary as well as in reading comprehension and reading fluency. One possible explanation for the increase is that students acquire new words incidentally through reading thousands and

thousands of words every day. Learning vocabulary this way may be considered more effective than rote memorization because through reading interesting texts, students learn new vocabulary and review old ones. By increasing the amount of reading, especially reading for pleasure, it can increase both vocabulary knowledge and reading rate, both of which are an important part of reading comprehensions. For example, if the class is reading a short story, the teacher can use class discussions as a form of conversation practice. Teachers can also have students do different kinds of presentations based on their readings.

Using various kinds of media in the class room has always been a challenge. Media provide both teachers as well as students with creative and practical ideas. They enable teachers to meet various needs and interests of their students. They also provide students with a lot of language practice through activities using newspapers, magazines, radio, TV, movies, books, Internet, etc. and tasks which develop reading, writing, speaking and listening skills. They entertain students and encourage reading English in general, both inside and outside the classroom. Extensive reading promotes the students with confidence, the motivation and the ability to continue their reading outside the classroom. Media provide huge information that motivates students to speak and help them integrate listening, reading, talking and writing.

With the help of new approaches like using media and films in the classrooms can help both teachers and students. These practical activities for teaching/ learning of English language proved to be a pleasant experience for the rural students. A picture not only tells a thousand words but it also helps students improve their thinking and observation skills, it promotes their imagination. Playing the video with or without the subtitles enhances visual learners. Radio (playing the audio) helps auditory learners learn better. Listening to the tape and then having the script is a clear combination that helps visual and auditory learners.

Students between 15-24 years age group are the most active media consumers. They spend on average about seven hours each day using internet, watching TV, watching movies, reading newspapers, listening to the radio. Multimedia uses combinations of text, graphics, sound, video and animation controlled, coordinated, and delivered on the computer screen. Multimedia encourages interactivity involving the user to get actively engaged in the presentation of information but not to remain a passive observer. As classroom teachers it is necessary to bring mass media in our classrooms to intensify learner's activity. We should understand the media, the messages it give and its influence upon us. Exploring this abundant information may create a continuum of the liveliness in the classrooms where students spend a lot of their time.

With the help of new approaches like using media and films in the classrooms can help both teachers and students. These practical activities for teaching/ learning of English language proved to be a pleasant experience for the rural students. A picture not only tells a thousand words but it also helps students improve their thinking and observation skills, promoting, at the same time, their imagination. Playing the video with or without the subtitles enhances visual learners. Radio (playing the audio) helps auditory learners learn better. Listening to the tape and then having the script is a clear combination that helps visual and auditory learners. Though English differs from the regional language, the teacher would be successful in teaching English by creating an appropriate atmosphere in the classroom with the able help of activity based approach. To sum up, through computer assisted language teaching, eclectic method, prevalence of student centered classrooms, conferencing, grammaring and through communicative language

teaching the desired aim of competency, proficiency, vocabulary in the teaching of English language could be effectively materialized in rural part.

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