



COMMUNICATIVE ENGLISH: AN INSIGHT OF YOUNG LEARNERS IN RURAL INDIA

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India is a developing country where two third of its population still lives in villages. Most of the rural young Indians get through the primary level of schooling, secondary school level and the higher education without having really acquired the skills of English language. In the seamless world we live today, language skills have become critical. English being the widely spoken language across the globe, 'English Speaking Skills' has become an area of attention amongst the countries of the world. India definitely had the advantage of reasonable level of spoken English skill amongst the youth, who attended formal schooling system. However, there had been a widespread opinion that the quality of communicative language skill in general, English in particular requires serious attention. The academic world is unanimous in finding out methods for enhancing the quality of learners when they communicate in English. The experts are also of the opinion that teaching English, as communicative language needs to be customized, depending on the requirements of the learners who are essentially diverse in nature. It is totally a different case with the young crowd having urban background as they are exposed to usage of English language in many ways. Naturally, the young learners from the towns and cities do well in competitions involving deployment of the skills of English language. Learners from rural India fall short as the result of its inability to get the required exposure to communicative skills in English language.

Let us look at the possible fallouts concerning the young learners from the rural area who are unable to develop the skills of English language.

1. The young learners from the rural India suffer from inferiority complex due to the colonial hang-ups prevalent in India. The mind-set of the people is that if a person is unable to use English language for various reasons, he/she is inefficient and incompetent. Most of the people do not understand that cognitive ability has nothing to do with acquisition of any language, let alone English. The young people from rural area in India are at par with or they are even better than their counterparts from Indian towns and cities as far as their cognitive ability is concerned. Young learners from rural area in India lack behind while using



English language than the learners staying in urban area. As a result, they develop low self-esteem and feel hesitant while expressing themselves in English.

2. The young learners from rural India cannot do well in a level playing ground situation when they are set against those from the cities. In the context of globalization, competition at any level involves efficient usage of various skills of English language. To succeed in any competition, the young people are required to use English language effectively. Students from rural areas pay a heavy price for the lack of expression in English language in such a situation.

3. Job opportunities are aplenty for the young people from the cities. Access to Internet and other media interactions makes this possible for them. Besides, knowing English very well makes the difference all the more. The young people of rural areas are not well prepared to face the challenges of this kind on the job opportunities' front for the simple reason that they do not have sufficient exposure to English language usage.

4. The young learners from rural area studying science face uphill task of presenting their ideas effectively in English. They come across two major hurdles- one at the school or college level and another while pursuing related professions. Large number of young learners from rural areas study core subjects like science and mathematics up to the secondary school having their native tongue as the medium of instruction. Once they enter +2 level, generally called pre-university course or pre-degree course, they have to study subjects such as Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics, Biology, Electronics and Computer Science in English. The student's cognitive ability is never in question but grasping intricacies of challenging subjects having English as the medium of instruction is not an easy task for them. Failure to express themselves adequately and effectively in English exposes them to the danger of non-recognition of their talent and skills. The same is true when such young people take up jobs and research work. English language acts as a villain in an otherwise uncomplicated success story.

Let us now look at the possible causes for the present stalemate.

There is one factor which is mainly responsible for non-performance of students from rural areas in English. It is the lack of exposure of English language usage at home, in the schools and at the college level. We could take a close look at each of these areas.



1. Majority of the parents from the rural areas are not well conversant in English. Most of them cannot use English language. As the result, they cannot expose their children to English language usage. They are more interested in the wages the young learners will earn for the family rather than taking extra efforts to learn a foreign language.

2. Most of the children from rural areas study in schools and colleges, where, medium of instruction happens to be vernacular. English is taught hardly for an hour each day on working days. The pattern of high school English language is making students lazy. The students do not like to go through their text books; they rather refer to readymade guides. In examination, they write lines to lines from the paragraph as answers to the questions asked to check composition. It naturally mars their skill of reading and understanding. The teachers at the primary and secondary level are not adequately sufficient (not all). They are not willing to update or upgrade themselves.

3. The young people are motivated to learn English, but they lack opportunities to learn it at every stage. They realize the importance of English language. They know how useful English is. They perceive it as a tool of empowerment. Despite it, the young people are deprived of an opportunity to learn English due to the lack of conducive atmosphere in schools and colleges. Lack of facilities like electricity, library demotivates the rural learners.

4. At schools and in the colleges, English texts are taught. Students are prepared to write answers in English. Barely half the number of the students get through the examination in English. Even those who get through the examination in English, would have hardly learnt to use English in real life situation. Most of English language learning happens in a limited and mechanical way. The real learning of English does not take place. Students reach undergraduate course without having learnt proper usage of English. It is a big social problem causing a rift between rural young ones and urban. Students with little self-esteem and with no definite purpose in life drift along nursing inferiority complex for having not learnt communicative English. Hence their inability exposes themselves effectively. The entire system of education from primary education to higher education gets the blame for the unfortunate stalemate. Generation after generation of students pay the price for the 'system's fault'.

The following remedies can be considered to solve problem.

The matter, since it is too urgent and pressing, calls for solutions. Many young learners from rural India, wants to learn communicative skills of English



language. Most of them are motivated to learn the language as they are aware of the rewards waiting for them once they become good at expressing themselves quite well. But unfortunately, the present system of education is quite callous about them. Teachers and the system in which they work are not all that resourceful at this point of time. We might look at the possibilities of correcting the current state of affairs by initiating certain remedial actions.

1. Starting from class-1 at the Primary education, the young ones must be exposed to the communicative skills of English language by the trained teachers for a particular period of time every day. Authorities of the school should, of course, take care that such an exposure will be fun for the little ones.

Communicative skills of English language get internalized into the personalities of the little children over a period of time. This corrective course of action will boost the confidence of the young people from rural areas of India, which will ensure the first step towards eliminating rural-urban divide that exists at present.

2. Single commands in English, simple tasks to be completed by the children at home and talking to the students in an engaging manner in English, day-in and day-out, would create a lasting impression on the little children at schools that using English language in a day-to-day real situation in life becomes a habit with them. They will feel at ease using English in such an atmosphere. Students from urban areas pick-up English easily mainly due to the atmosphere in the school. Children from rural areas must not be deprived of such an opportunity to pick up communicative skills of English language.

3. Trained teachers play a big role in making the students from rural areas learn English. The school infrastructure must include trained and resourceful teachers who happen to be committed to the course of teaching good English to students. Teachers should have great concern for the students. Commitment and concern for students are the key operative words in bringing out the best in students of rural areas.

According to Schaeffer, one aspect of education is socialization—the life-long process of learning the attitudes, values, and behaviour appropriate to individuals as members of a particular culture. Socialization is the result of interaction with others—family members, friends and even strangers. It also results from exposure to books, films, television and other forms of communication. When learning is formalized and explicit, teaching -learning process is conscious, it is called education’.

Teachers should understand their responsibility and interact with students in such a manner that the students will approach them without any hesitation.



Understanding the social background of the student and exposing them to different tools and means of knowledge, is the responsibility of the teachers.

4. Science core subjects such as Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics, Biology, Electronics and Computer Science would be taught in detail from the +2 level and onwards. The need to teach communicative English intensively at this stage is required for students coming from rural areas. This would help them grasp, understand and share the concepts of the science subjects all the more easily. The students will also be able to interact in English with the teachers and their peer group without any inhibition. The students will be able to get rid of the dread of English language by developing communicative skills in English language in them. The students with the knowledge of English can easily acquire the skills of using internet services in order to acquire more knowledge.

It is really sad that though the students are sufficiently motivated to learn English they are not provided with necessary infrastructure and environment to learn it. These students are not exposed to communicative skills of English language unlike their counterparts in the towns and cities. Students in the rural areas do not lack cognitive ability but they lack the skill of interacting in English due to non-exposure to usage of English language. The colonial hang-up & the resultant mind set of the people create a sense of insecurity among the students of the rural areas. It is a very big social problem and it needs to be addressed soon. All of us, especially teachers teaching English, should take the blame for the prevailing situation, and should move towards evolving methods to teach effectively the communicative skills of English language. Otherwise we will all be responsible for creating a sick society for the posterity where the bulk of the young people from rural India will be nursing inferiority complex and they suffer from low self-esteem with disastrous effect to the society. Young learners from rural India should not be blamed for not succeeding in life due to lack of knowledge of English. The onus is on all of us and we must initiate action to teach the young learners at the early stage. Teaching communicative skills of English language has to be continued for the first 12 years of school life so that the young learners from rural India face life boldly and savour the fruits of globalization. As Mr. Bhaskar Ghose has rightly pointed out in his article in the 'Frontline' dated July 30, 2004.

“English is there and we need to recognize that it will be there for many years to come and play a vital role in the evolution of India as a major economic and political force in the world. And in other areas as well-creative writing, for example, in which Indian writers have won world renown and respect.”



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