



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Linguistic Hurdles: Challenges in English Language Learning for Rural Students in Rural and Urban Degree Colleges

Sowrabha. K., Assistant Professor of English, Maharani's Arts College for Women, Mysuru.

Abstract

English, regarded as an international language is no more confined to England and has now established an official status on a global scale. Due to colonization, English has taken roots in native languages in several countries. This linguistic transformation and prominence can be observed in colonial nations including India. As Randolph Quirk points out: "There are now something like 250 million people for whom English is the mother tongue or first language... most people who speak English are not English and were not born in England...". The proficiency demonstrated by Indians in English can often compete with native speakers, a testament to the profound integration of English into the fabric of modern Indian society. The education system has been thoughtfully shaped to accommodate this linguistic duality, with curricula seamlessly interweaving English with regional languages. Across states in India, students embark on a bilingual journey, where English assumes the role of a second language, while certain institutions even bestow it with the distinction of a first language. With English dominating globally in education, research, administration and workplaces, and technology connected the communities, the proficiency on English language has proved to be advantageous at several fronts. In an increasingly interconnected world, the ability to communicate effectively in English has become an essential skill for success in education and the workforce.

Keywords: language, students, bilingual, communication, global language

As English continues to solidify its status as a global lingua franca, educators are faced with the task of imparting this language proficiency to a diverse array of students, each hailing from unique socio-economic, cultural, and geographical backgrounds. This article delves into the challenges that teachers encounter while teaching English to students in both rural and urban college settings. The journey of English language education is marked by distinct obstacles that demand innovative pedagogical approaches and a deep understanding of the dynamic nuances within each context. This is an effort to gain valuable insights on the contrasting education landscapes in Karnataka, a southern state in India while we examine the challenges and strategies to overcome them.

Context

Proficiency in spoken English has emerged as a prerequisite for success across diverse domains and sectors. Yet, acquiring this proficiency remains a challenge in several places where regional languages play a key role.

In my role as an English lecturer across rural, suburban, and urban colleges, I've come across a diverse spectrum of students, each characterized by their unique attitudes, backgrounds, and societal roles. In government colleges, a considerable majority of students hail from socially and economically underprivileged backgrounds, demonstrating immense determination to integrate into the mainstream educational system. Many students from economically disadvantaged families carry additional responsibilities by engaging in part-time work, a reality that inevitably impacts their educational pursuits and gradually erodes their enthusiasm for academics. The intersection of financial struggles, familial responsibilities, and societal norms creates an intricate web of obstacles that undermine the pursuit of English language proficiency.

These circumstances align with a poignant assertion from one of India's Education Commissions, which underscores the pivotal role of English in higher education. The Commission emphasized that "For a successful completion of the first-degree course, a student possesses an adequate command of English, be able to express himself with reasonable ease and felicity, understand lectures in it and avail himself of its literature... English should be the most useful 'Library Language' in higher education and most significant window on the world".

As we traverse the educational system across these diverse settings, it becomes increasingly evident that nurturing English proficiency is pivotal for students to transcend socio-economic barriers and access a world of opportunities. Recognizing the challenges faced by underprivileged students and the transformative potential of English, teachers often devise strategies to empower students to harness the English language as a tool for personal growth, academic success, and job opportunities.

In the pursuit of higher education, a growing number of students are embarking on their degree journeys later in life, often in their late 20s and beyond. While this decision reflects a commendable commitment to personal growth, it also presents a unique set of challenges, particularly when it comes to excelling in English. Many of these students aspire to become good at the language, especially English, but they face problems that come from their earlier school days.

Challenges to learning English language:

Enrolling in government colleges, students hail from both suburban and rural backgrounds. A significant portion of their guardians engage in occupations such as farming, factory labor, domestic work, or garment industries. A significant proportion of these students originate from families with fragmented structures, often raised by single parents or distant relatives. Unfortunately, many a times, these circumstances deprive them of the love, support, and moral guidance that a stable family environment can provide, which also affect their living and learning. Despite these challenges, scholarships, waived tuition fees, and access to hostel accommodations play a pivotal role in sustaining their educational pursuits.

In the formative years of schooling, students from both rural and urban areas encounter a deficiency in English education, often arising from a lack of qualified English teachers. The implications of this deficiency are especially pronounced among government college attendees, a majority of whom are socioeconomically disadvantaged. The ability to communicate in English fluently and confidently is a source of personal pride. This proficiency encompasses the acquisition of a multifaceted skill set, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing, complemented by a solid foundation in grammar. While a minority of students grasp the significance of these components, many struggle to fully comprehend their implications. Mastery of vocabulary, precise word usage, adept comprehension, critical thinking, and a profound understanding of subject matter are prerequisites across various domains. It is rare to encounter students possessing such comprehensive skills in both rural and urban areas, though a few exceptions do exist.

A. Challenges of rural students in rural area degree colleges:

- **Limited Exposure to English:** Substantial number of students in rural areas have limited exposure to the English language outside the classroom, making it challenging for them to practice and develop their language skills in real-life contexts. The lack of opportunities to interact with English speakers or engage with English media (audio, visual and print) make them dreaded and apprehensive. This prevailing apprehension not only inhibits students' willingness to participate in English dialogue but also reinforces a mental barrier that obstructs their progress in language learning.
- **Lack of Resources:** Rural colleges may have fewer resources, including books, technology, and language learning materials, which can hinder effective teaching and learning. This exacerbates the learning challenges in manifolds along with their financial constraints at home and to access these resources.
- **Cultural and Linguistic Diversity:** In some rural areas, there might be less cultural and linguistic diversity, leading to a lack of exposure to different accents and dialects, which are important for well-rounded language proficiency. The scarcity of exposure to the English language casts a shadow over the confidence of students when it comes to engaging in English communication. The apprehension and hesitancy arising from these challenges often give rise inferiority complex. The repercussions of this inferiority complex extend beyond language proficiency, influencing self-esteem and self-perception in other academic and social contexts as well.
- **Motivation and Relevance:** Some rural students may struggle to see the immediate relevance of learning English, especially if their career aspirations or local environment don't require extensive English skills. This can profoundly impact their attitude towards language learning, leading to avoidance behaviours and further inhibiting their willingness to engage in meaningful English language practices.
- **Attitude towards learning and exam performance:** a disconcerting trend persists where students prioritize exam performance over comprehensive language mastery. This trend often manifests as a reliance on memorization techniques, where students memorize phrases and sentences without necessarily grasping the underlying grammatical structures or communicative nuances. Consequently, students may demonstrate impressive exam results while lacking the practical skills necessary for effective communication in real-world scenarios.

B. Challenges of rural students in urban area degree colleges:

- **Diverse Language Backgrounds:** In urban colleges, students come from various language backgrounds, contributing to a rich linguistic diversity within the classroom. This diversity, while enriching, also presents a challenge as students may have varying levels of proficiency in English due to their native languages. This can lead to differentiated learning needs. The non-availability of teaching and translations in native/ regional language also affect the learning capabilities among rural students. They may also develop hesitancy, exhibiting reduced confidence and heightened anxiety when it comes to their academic performance and learning.
- **Competing Priorities:** rural students commuting to urban colleges often lead demanding lives with multiple responsibilities, such as part-time jobs, family commitments, and a diverse range of academic subjects. Balancing these obligations can leave limited time and energy for English language learning outside of classroom hours and commute.
- **Language Overload:** In urban areas, students may be exposed to multiple languages and dialects in their daily lives, leading to potential interference and confusion when learning English. While this exposure can broaden students' linguistic horizons, it may also lead to cognitive interference and confusion during the process of learning English.
- **Large Class Sizes:** Urban colleges may have larger class sizes, making it challenging to provide personalized attention and feedback to each student. This may, sometimes, hinder student participation in peer collaboration and effective use of technology for a conducive learning.

- **Technology Dependency:** While some students may have better access to technology, there could be a risk of over-reliance on digital communication, potentially affecting face-to-face language practice. Those with limited or no access to technology/ digital learning, face issue of equal learning opportunities. Without a balance, both may affect their ability to engage in direct, spontaneous English communication.
- **High Expectations and Competition:** Urban colleges often foster a competitive academic atmosphere where students feel pressured to excel in various subjects, including English. This heightened competition can lead to added stress and performance anxiety, potentially impeding effective language learning.
- **Cultural Sensitivity:** Urban classrooms may include students from various cultural backgrounds and traditions. The learning environment has to finely balance the cultural sensitivity, inclusivity and respect to all, as this enables them to feel comfortable, safe and welcome to college and learning.
- **Exposure to city lifestyles:** the newer exposure urban lifestyle, fascination to experience it, and overly use of mobile and digital gadgets also diverts the learning interests of students in initial years.

The complex interplay of the challenges calls for a deeper examination of the dynamics surrounding English education in both rural and urban colleges. In this exploration, we could explore the impact of regional linguistic dominance on students' attitudes, motivation, and ultimately, their linguistic journey. By understanding these challenges holistically, teachers, college administration, and policymakers can pave the way for more effective strategies that foster genuine language proficiency and empower students to navigate the linguistic landscape with confidence and competence.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the tenets of success are undeniably intertwined with unwavering dedication, a fervent quest for knowledge, and the systematic nurturing of one's career, personality, and skill set. As we contemplate the multifaceted journey towards achievement, it becomes evident that a spectrum of pragmatic recommendations can illuminate the path forward.

To begin, one can harness the power of contemporary tools such as Google Podcasts and the BBC Learning English's "6-minute English" program, harnessing the auditory realm to instil linguistic nuances and fluency. Equally pivotal is the exploration of pedagogical methodologies, with the Grammar Translation approach emerging as a compelling avenue for language acquisition.

Amidst the hustle and bustle of daily life, carving out dedicated moments to consume diverse written content stands as a cornerstone of language enrichment. The practice of meticulously noting down intricate vocabulary is akin to sowing seeds of linguistic growth, while the strategic employment of pronunciation-focused dictionaries metamorphoses language learning into a dynamic, immersive experience.

Furthermore, integrating recently learned phrases into sentences creates a seamless blend of knowledge and application, enhancing their understanding of how they fit into different situations. Reading aloud, a technique that in a way helps to truly master language skills. Additionally, the world of movies with English subtitles offers a unique opportunity to transform them into effective learning environments, enriching their ability to comprehend what they read and hear.

Yet, in the ever-expanding panorama of language development, the nourishment of proficiency is not confined to formal resources alone. The practice of perusing newspapers, magazines, and tailored materials attuned to personal interests engraves a unique signature upon one's linguistic odyssey.

By adopting these varied approaches, a profound transformation takes shape, allowing individuals to develop a strong mastery of the English language. Through every spoken word and understanding of context, limitless possibilities come into view, enabling individuals to surpass language barriers and confidently traverse the global arena.

References:

- Agnihotri, R. K., & Khanna, A. (2007). Teaching of English in Multilingual Contexts: Second Language Learning in India. In J. Cummins & C. Davison (Eds.), *International Handbook of English Language Teaching* (pp. 511-524). Springer.
- Brown, H. D. (2007). *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*. Pearson Education.
- Choudhury, G. (2015). Challenges of Learning English as a Second Language (ESL) in India: In Search of Solutions. *Creative Education*, 6(11), 1100-1108.
- Crystal, D. (2003). *English as a Global Language* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- C. Paul Verghese (1989). *Teaching English as a Second Language* (2009 ed.). Sterling Publishers Pvt Ltd.
- Das, J. P. (2006). Indianisation of Education: Past and Present Trends. *University News*, 44(35), 17-22.
- Graddol, D. (2006). English Next: Why Global English May Mean the End of 'English as a Foreign Language'. British Council.
- Gupta, P. D. (2016). Teaching English to Rural Indian Students: Challenges and Strategies. *Language in India*, 16(6), 155-166.
- Kumaravadivelu, B. (2006). *Understanding Language Teaching: From Method to Postmethod*. Routledge.
- Mohanty, A. K. (2009). *English in India: From Colonial to Postcolonial*. Multilingual Matters.
- Pennycook, A. (2001). *Critical Applied Linguistics: A Critical Introduction*. Routledge.
- Phillipson, R. (2008). Lingua Franca or Lingua Frankensteinia? English in European Integration and Globalization. *World Englishes*, 27(2), 250-267.
- Shamsi, T. N. (2018). English Language Learning in Rural India: Challenges and Remedies. *English Language Teaching*, 11(4), 56-62.
- Singh, A., & Thirunavukarasu, M. (2013). Challenges Faced by the Students in Learning English and Recommended Solutions. *International Journal of English Language & Translation Studies*, 1(1), 35-46.
- Warschauer, M. (1998). Technology and Second Language Learning. In J. C. Richards & W. A. Renandya (Eds.), *Methodology in Language Teaching: An Anthology of Current Practice* (pp. 303-318). Cambridge University Press.