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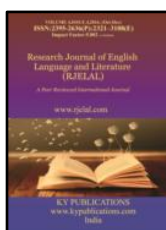
A STUDY ON IMPROVING THE LANGUAGE SKILLS OF RURAL INTERMEDIATE STUDENTS IN VIKARABAD DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

English has become highly essential to fulfill every day communicative needs. English is considered to be the Lingua-Franca, especially in a multilingual country like India. Communicating in English has become a symbol of social prestige in every domain of life. The knowledge of English has become essential for assessing the overall students' performance. However the Intermediate students in the rural areas of Vikarabad District aren't exposed to the culture that fosters language acquisition and hence lag behind. The present study deals with the rural Intermediate learners of Vikarabad, the problems they face and the various possibilities to learn language through Inclusive classroom and various language activities.

Keywords: Language acquisition, Inclusive classrooms, language activities, rural Intermediate learners

With the emergence of globalization, information and communication technology, learning English has become highly essential to fulfill every day communicative needs.. The use of English language became a part of official transactions since the British colonial intervention in the Indian administrative and academic initiatives, and hence it is recognized as a second official language in India. Apart from this, learning and communicating in English has become a symbol of social prestige, particularly in every domain of life. The knowledge of English becomes a yardstick to assess the overall students' performance. Therefore, people aspire to acquire effective communication skills in English. The experts of the National Curriculum Framework 2005, repeatedly emphasized the fact that: English is in India today a symbol of people's aspirations for quality in education and a fuller participation in national and international life. Its colonial origins are now forgotten or irrelevant, its

initial role in independent India, tailored to higher education now felt to be insufficiently inclusive socially and linguistically, the current status of English stems from its overwhelming presence on the world stage and the reflection of this in the national arena.(NCF, 2005).

Problems Encountered while Teaching English Language to Intermediate Students

The problems of teaching English to intermediate students in the district of Vikarabad are umpteen as the students have not been exposed to a culture that fosters language acquisition. They have been living in their ethnic culture with limited exposure to English. This section deals particularly with the problems faced while teaching English language skills. Due to the scarcity of resources, dealing with teaching and learning of English language in the district has become difficult. The study has based its data collection on the observations and teaching experience of a detailed

survey. The questionnaires for teachers and students were provided and some interaction sessions were held with some of the ELT teachers and learners of English in the Intermediate colleges. Classroom observations were also made. The study aims to understand the gaps at all levels vis-à-vis from the learners' perspective and the teachers' perspective.

Inability to use the Text Book and Other Teaching Aids Appropriately

The textbook used for teaching English at intermediate colleges is 'Internet-I and Internet-II'. It mostly gives due attention to teaching aural and oral skills. For teaching the listening skills, for example, it exposes students to some activities like 'listen and repeat', 'listen and tick', and also to some exercises like reading words, short phrases and sentences. As the course advances, students move progressively to more difficult tasks and activities. Such activities prompt the intermediate learners to interact with one another, negotiate the meaning and then to express themselves, etc. They go beyond mastering the basic elements of sounds. In such interactive and personal activities, the learners have to listen to a cassette, and then respond actively. Such a response may appear in the form of answering comprehension questions, filling in chart, giving oral answers, choosing the right option from a multiple choice activity, choosing the right picture, ordering events according to their occurrence, etc. The intermediate students are also provided with visual aids like pictures, maps diagrams, etc., to make their listening comprehension better and comprehensible. The intermediate students are also asked to give short speeches about familiar topics like family, daily schedule, friendship, describing people, etc. However, not everything goes as planned. Despite the good quality of the aural and oral tasks and activities, most of the students mostly fail to achieve the objectives they have been designed for. This failure to comprehend language and reproduce can be attributed to many factors.

Social Negative Attitude towards the College Level English Language Education

The root of the problem lies in the society's impression of the whole intermediate college level education. From day-today experience,

it is observed that the intermediate college level education is not encouraging towards making the students to face the outside world. The mindset of most of the people is in favour of 'earning', not 'learning'. The latter is viewed as a waste of time and a detriment for the interest and welfare of the family. Besides, most of the people who come from interiors of Vikarabad are illiterate, so they underestimate the value of education in the professional life and academic promotion. If these basic problems of the students and the resources available for teaching are constantly reviewed, then there can be considerable improvement of target language learning.

Inability of the Parents to Understand the Importance of English

There are still people living in rural areas who do not understand the importance of education. They are programmed that since they are labours, their children also would work as labours with them once they reach an appropriate age. Sending a child to school or college implies losing one earning member in the house. Although, efforts are taken by the state governments to educate the parents first on the importance of imparting education to the children, some people especially those living below the poverty line do not want to lose the earning of a family member by sending their ward to school. It is certainly a challenging task not just for the teachers but also the society to educate such ignorant people about the value of education and the prospects it can have. Hence, a multidimensional approach, such as government programmes, teachers, the local authorities and also some NGOs would enable change. Teachers can be facilitators in the classroom alone; their limitations cannot bring about a change in the mind-set of the parents. Teachers also have to be secular in their thinking with a view to inculcate the noble cause of education. If they approach with already existing prejudices on caste, social and economic background, then the purpose of imparting education is lost. Hence, a multi-pronged strategy would enable imparting education to a society that is besieged with several class and caste discrimination practices.

The Research Problem

The sole purpose of teaching English as Second Language in Indian schools/colleges is to enable students to communicate in English effectively with the real-world around them. However, in practice, the students' English proficiency, particularly of the rural students, remains rather inadequate. This may be attributed to various factors, including the English curriculum, the excessive use of mother tongue in instruction, the less number of hours of instruction per week (2 or 3 hours), over-dependency on textbooks, and the use of traditional teaching methods and materials. It is observed that most of the English textbooks, particularly at the intermediate level, alienate the tribal learners, as the lessons in such books do not match with the socio-cultural background they come from. Neither their culture nor their social life is part of their learning in the intermediate colleges either in English classes or in subject classes, thus resulting in poor performance in those subjects and target language ultimately. The intermediate students of the rural areas, unlike the mainstream students, obviously lag competence in the four language skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing.

If we analyze the syllabus and the curriculum of English textbooks at Intermediate level, we can invariably notice that these learners' culture and social life are cut off from such syllabus, thus when they are exposed to such lessons they find it strange and lose interest in the target language. They feel like fish out of water. The syllabus is quite suitable to the mainstream learners but fails to focus on the requirements of the learners vis-a-vis their culture and environment. Thus, there is a pressing need to understand the socio-cultural background of these rural learners and create tasks and activities, which are close to their culture and language.

The Need for the Study

An in-depth analysis of the present syllabus for Intermediate College reveals that it mostly caters to the language proficiency of the non-rural students, whereas the rural students are alienated from it, resulting in poor communication skills, thereby leading to unemployment. The socio-

cultural aspects represented in prose and poetry in the intermediate textbooks are from that of the target language; the tribal students are not quite familiar with the social and cultural life of those English people. Therefore, when such texts are taught to the tribal students, they do not show much interest in the language. The non-tribal students connect well with the target language culture and they grasp lessons quite fast and enhance their communication skills quite effectively, whereas the students from rural areas lag behind. Thus, there is a need to include the students' home culture into the target language, and integrate their socio-cultural life into their language learning. Teachers must also be sensitive to their socio-cultural background they come from. As the students are shy to speak in the target language, it is the duty of the teacher to encourage them to overcome the language phobia and focus more on them. Besides, these intermediate students should be trained in all the four language skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Scope and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to examine the socio-cultural relevance in imparting communication skills to the intermediate rural students in the District of Vikarabad in Telangana. The study also intends to enhance language proficiency of the intermediate students considering their socio-cultural background and incorporating their home culture into the target language. The main focus of the study is to help the intermediate students overcome communication problems in English Language, as this is the age at which their decisions influence their career. The students at this age are recognized as responsible youth of the society that bestows upon them certain social and moral responsibilities. Thus the objectives are:

- To understand the language levels of the students
- To understand and evaluate the problems encountered by the rural learners while learning English as a target language
- To understand the socio-culture cultural dimensions of such a society
- To understand the ethnic background of the group

- To have a secular and non-biased approach for imparting education
- To prepare a curriculum that is user-friendly

Scope of the Study

The current study is an experimental study examining the effectiveness of instructional models with relevant learning methods in comparison with irrelevant models. Further, this study implemented specifically prepared culture based materials on English communication skills for rural students of Vikarabad by the researcher, based on their special needs, culture and day- to-day life. The sample of the study includes 4 English teachers and 60 intermediate students. Data was collected through questionnaires and interviews with the students, and teachers. The study proposes certain teaching materials through which the students will be taught English language speaking skills based on day-to-day life, and English for Specific Purpose needs and with collaborative learning approaches. The students who were in the collaborative class sections would achieve higher learning outcomes of speaking skills. This study was preliminarily and empirically tested with the specifically prepared material, ESP needs and instructional models with the collaborative

approaches (methods). The results of the study suggest that culture and day-to-day life of the rural students in the English language syllabus is the most important component, and interaction is the most important factor for promoting English speaking skills.

Profile of the Sample

The participants for the present study are 60 intermediate students from Vikarabad district of Telangana. There are two groups of students 30 rural and 30 non rural students as sample for research out of a class of 70 learners. The researcher selected these students particularly because they did not respond to a single question when the researcher was informally interacting with the class, their backwardness in the English language communication skills and cultural difficulties were apparent. They remained silent, had inferiority complex, were insecure, feeling shy to speak in English. They were all first generation learners with Telugu as their medium of education. The sample consisted of 4 English teachers from different intermediate colleges. They were also given questionnaire and were interviewed by the researcher.

Table 1: Summary of Data Collection Process in Chronological Order

Tools	Participants involved	Time-Period	Duration	Research questions involved
Questionnaire	5 teachers and 60 students	September and October 2017	2 months	One, two and three
Pre-test	60 students	October and November 2017	One month	One and four
Classroom Observation	60 students	November and December 2017	One month	All
Post-test	60 students	November and December 2017	One month	All

NICOLE EREDICS (2014) suggested few things that can make the language classroom more inclusive:

1. A Large Table

A large table plays a major role for small groups of students. Having a table allows the teacher to bring students together and provide them with various types of instructional programming that meet the needs of the group. Apart from this, the learners can meet at the table to work together on projects, discuss about various things in the class or use as an alternate work

space. The table is usually placed in a prominent area of the room, and provides many opportunities for students to be part of the group.

2. Technology

Technology plays a pivotal role in the 21st century classroom. The use of technology provides accessibility to the curriculum and also allows the learners to keep up with the changing world. Whichever form it is used in such as computer, iPad, audio/visual equipment or assistive devices,

technology plays various roles in the language classroom.

3. Manipulatives

Inclusive classrooms provide curriculum for different types of learners. Since many learners show interest for a “hands-on” approach to help them understand lessons, NICOLE EREDICS further expressed about manipulatives that they can support this process by allowing students to demonstrate their knowledge, develop new levels of understanding and explore deeper concepts. Manipulatives can be easily grouped, placed into plastic containers and put on shelves around the room. Useful for all ages, manipulatives are an easy way to make a classroom more inclusive.

4. Visual Aides

Visual aids play an important role in the Language classroom.. Visual aides come in many forms and there should be a variety available in a classroom to facilitate inclusion. schedules, posters, number lines, charts, diagrams, graphic organizers and different types of paper such as lined, plain or graph are some of the visual aids which i. A visual aide can also be a SMART Board, television or iPad.

5. Positive Behaviour Management System

A positive behaviour management system supports and maintain a safe, optimal learning environment. It not only helps the teacher to reinforce the strengths of individual learners but also provides students with steps for presentable behavior.

6. High-Interest Leveled Books

Inclusive classrooms recognize that students learn in different ways in different rates. The language classroom is made more inspiring by adding a number of books not only connected to academics but also for entertainment, knowledge etc.

7. Job Chart

A well described Chart serves several purposes in a classroom. The presence of charts in the classroom not only makes learning easier for them, but also contributes in the successful running of the classroom.

8. Games

Card games, board games and classroom games play a major role in language classroom.

Games are used are to reinforce a new concept and also enhance the teaching skills of the students as only during these sessions, the students open up, interact and communicate with each other thus making the learning environment more lively.

Conclusion

With the introduction of the Inclusive classrooms, the learners from rural areas got more opportunities to enhance their language skills and at the end of the training session there was considerate improvement in the language skills and the learners communicated with each other in English thus proving that proper environment and effective teaching methodology helps the learners in acquiring the necessary language skills.

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