

Teachers' Role to Teach English in Rural Mixed Ability Class



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ABSTRACT

'Mixed ability' or 'heterogeneous' are the terms usually used to describe classes made up of students of different levels of proficiency. Whatever may be the content, it is ultimately teaching how to acquire language skills. However, bright students may feel held back, whereas weaker students may feel pressured. When there are students having mixed ability in the same classroom, each individual can bring different and new ideas to the process of teaching-learning situation. Since they are from different cultural backgrounds having different world-views and values, it may take enough time on their part as far as acquisition of language skills is concerned

Key Word: Teacher, Rural, English, Student, language-skill, Mixed-ability.

Introduction:

Teaching English to the rural learners requires competency on the part of a teacher. The English language, which is taught in India, is of British origin. The story of English in India began in 1835. It is Lord Macaulay, the law member of the council of Governor General and president of the Board of Education, presented his celebrated minutes in favour of English education. Through English Education, he desired to produce a class of person-Indian in blood and colour but English in taste and intellect.

However, before Independence the English language played a multi-dimensional rule. Soon after Independence, there arose a controversy regarding retention of English in India. The place of English in schools and university curriculum became the major issue. Better teaching-learning situation of language depends upon curiosity of the learner in general being it a subconscious process. The behaviorists reduced language learning to imitative behavior.

As teachers of English, we spend a considerable amount of time in teaching our students to speak and write English correctly. Yet, errors appear on the part of the students throughout school and college education. We often feel frustrated in our efforts, and keep wondering why it is so difficult to treat errors. We must remember that students generally start learning a second language (i.e. English) only after they acquire the first language.

Objectives:

In any teaching-learning situation of English as language, three conditions seem to be vital. They are:

- * To teach English as a subject in a mixed ability class.
- * To apply appropriate methods and materials of teaching to achieve the goal.
- * To test systematically to ensure whether the goal is

realised or not.

It must also be realised that English teaching means teaching acquisition of language skills. They are mainly Comprehension skills and Productive skill. Comprehension skills are- Reading and listening. The teacher should take care to teach the student for real life purposes. The major objectives behind teaching these two skills are:

1. To enable students to understand feelings of other.
2. To gather information.
3. To review what one understands
4. To appreciate the writer's/speaker's work.
5. To become faster in reading the foreign language (i.e. English).

Teaching the two other skills is also an integral part in this respect. They are (Productive skills) Writing and Speaking. The sole purpose of teaching these two skills are:

1. To express feelings without stammering.
2. To inform or make other familiar with.
3. To record or plan
4. To argue or refine what one understands.

Besides teaching these skills, Grammar teaching has some basic aspects. They are- Grammar for communication, as discourse, grammar as games and fluency oriented grammar teaching.

Material & Methods:

In present study, we applied analytical method based on field study reports, interviews and intensive reading of relevant books. However, before attempting to discuss about rural undergraduates, it is pertinent to consider who the students are and from what background. Generally, the Indian rural inhabitants include the poor, the ethnic minority groups, the STs and SCs, the immigrants and the socially, economically, politically and locationally backward people. Some common

problems attached with the rural students are low motivation level, low self-esteem, poor readers and slow learners and so forth.

Now the question arises why the rural underprivileged learn English. It is because English in India plays an important role of entire education system. It forms a major subject for selection tests for prestigious jobs. In addition to this, English in India is associated with elite culture being it a high status symbol. Hence, command over English on the part of the rural students will definitely raise their social status.

While the rural learners' need for English is great, their proficiency in English is found to be very low in comparison to their urban counterparts. Observations reveal the following major problems on their part:

- * Fear of English as a subject of study.
- * Load of the language and poor receptive skill (reading and listening).
- * Inappropriate textbooks and lack of foresightedness.

Despite these problems, English is taught in India with great enthusiasm. Such problems are not confined to schools only, but also prevalent in colleges. It is seen that rural students, mostly, have poor vocabulary stock. An undergraduate learner can hardly learn one word per day. Again, even if they learn, they cannot use them properly.

In English medium schools, students get proper exposure to English as a medium of communication (interaction). Hence, they learn from the very early stage of life. However, in vernacular schools, the subject is taught, as it is included in the syllabus; whereas learners learn it to pass the examination. Similarly, though the matter cannot be generalized, most of the school level English teachers have inadequate knowledge of the English language. Their pronunciation is also faulty. Moreover, oral work is completely ignored in schools. Therefore, the learners do not get any opportunity to hear or speak the language. The entire emphasis is on passing the exam through cramming or parrot learning.

Whether it is English or any other language, it must be remembered that language is primarily a speech. Hence, oral work is important in the classroom. An English teacher knows that language is a system and not a collection of words.

Results & Discussion:

Today there are more English teachers, more English students and Indian English writers, a stronger English press and a powerful English media than the British left the country. English is perhaps taught best when it is the medium of instruction. This explains why more and more people want English medium schooling

for their children. English medium schools have become synonymous with good teaching, better discipline, accountability, etc.

Before going to teach English in a mixed ability class, it is necessary on the part of a teacher to remember three words i.e. Method, Approach and Technique. 'Method' implies an overall plan for the orderly presentation of language material. 'Approach' is flexible. It is a set of correlative assumptions dealing with the nature of language. While 'Technique' is, a device for getting the result aimed at. Hence, technique must be consistent with a method and therefore, in harmony with an approach too.

The past trend of teaching English followed Grammar-Translation method and direct method. Whereas, the new trend adopts the Structural Approach, the Bilingual method, Student-Activated, Multi-skilled approach, the Linguistic method, the Practical method etc.

As far as the undergraduates (10+2) are concerned, English is taught to them for the following reasons;

1. Help them understand the spoken and written language.
2. To speak English fluently and making it a habit without hesitation.
3. To express idea, share thoughts anywhere with ease, confidence and comfort.
4. To involve them in creative literature.
5. To enable them to read books, journals, periodicals with better understanding.

For better teaching-learning situation, in a class of mixed ability, the use of pair and group work is essential if the teacher wants to involve all the members of the class. A fundamental technique here is the use of questionnaires and interviews. By pairing off weaker and stronger students and involving both in the preparation and implementation of the questionnaire, the teacher should ensure maximum participation of all the students. A second area of activity is project work. This can work successfully using mixed groups where the stronger help the weaker. Groups that are at approximately the same level and assign different tasks that are appropriate to the level of each group. A third area is that of homework. If the whole class is set for the whole class the same homework task irrespective of level, then the teacher may expect very mixed results. As with progress tests, the purpose of homework should be to consolidate class work. Moreover, variety in the types of working groups, and an open discussion of the class situation will also help to deal with some of the difficulties that are present in mixed ability classes. Overall, an appeal to all senses, contingency plans, in-class activity, open ended plans, personalizing the tasks,

games, competitions and dramatization, extra homework, portfolios, group-work activities, Self-access centers may be much effective in a mixed ability class. Principles like habit formation and imitation, practice and drill, oral approach, situational approach, exposure to the language, motivation etc is important. These principles are very much effective while teaching English. In order to solve the problems of mixed ability, teaching should appeal to all senses, all learning styles and all intelligences like linguistic, logical, visual, rhythmic, intrapersonal, interpersonal and so forth. Students' are to be involved in the process of the establishing whole-class, which makes the class more attractive.

Findings:

Findings reveal that as far as Indian students of vernaculars are concerned, acquisition of speaking or conversation skill is a tough job. Though it is one of the most remarkable skills in this era of globalization, they lag behind in many respects. Hence, in a classroom of mixed ability student, task centered fluency practice is to be used more and more. Traditional question-Answer session is not fruitful for better results. To develop oral skills of the students, group work is beneficial for it provides a framework whereby each learner can have maximum participation. Generally, in a teacher-oriented class, the learners do not get adequate time for participation. Group work gives a chance to a shy or dull student also to draw benefit. Group work also provides an opportunity for peer teaching. The role of the teacher in order to teach a class of mixed ability

student should be planning based. At the same time, he should work as an organizer, a disciplinarian, a monitor, a prompter, a consultant, a co-communicator, a fellow participant, and above all, a strict controller.

Conclusion:

Thus, in a classroom, the role of teacher at first is to find out the effective strategies and to implement an active, interesting and interactive process of learning for the learners based on their ability. Teachers should develop a healthy and congenial relationship with the students and it is always advisable to strike a balance between emotional and intellectual relationship with them. The teachers should teach, shape, motivate and recreate minds capable of facing day-to-day challenges and to overcome the problems in the modern scenario confidently.

Suggestions:

Thus, for betterment of the English language teaching to a class of mixed ability class both as a subject of study and medium of communication, the following suggestions may be put forwarded:

1. The teacher should understand socio-economic background of the student concerned.
2. Effort to create an urge among students for acquisition of English language skills (receptive and expressive).
3. Introduction and application of latest IT devices (i.e. audio and video- including language labs).
4. Teacher may adopt strategies like - Word - Building, Experiential Learning, Reading and Comprehension, Mind Skill Exercises etc.

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