

DEVELOPING COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN ENGLISH IN THE STUDENTS OF RURAL AREAS: PROBLEMS AND REMEDIES

Prof. Tapovin Namdeorao Patil,

Assistant Professor in English

Late Madangopal Mundhada College Chandur Railway District Amravati 444904

tapovin@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The communication skill of the English language has become the gateway to the success of not only the academic and employment opportunities but also the social mobility in the globalized world. However, there are grave difficulties to rural students on their capacity to learn effective communicative skills in English due to the infrastructural, socio-economic and pedagogical barriers. This research paper is aimed at reviewing the highlighted challenges that the rural students have been struggling to consolidate in the acquisition of English communication and also suggest effective measures in overcoming English language competency. The problems that are depicted in the research are the impossibility to be exposed to the English speaking environment, poor training of teachers, influence of mother tongue, absence of access to learning resources and low confidence of the students. Descriptive and analytical research was employed by use of questionnaires, classroom observation and interviews with students and teachers in selected rural schools to collect the data. The findings indicate that the traditional teaching methods, the absence of appropriate technology usage, and the low likelihood of active language use as well are some of the factors that lead towards the deficiency of mental capabilities of enhancing communications. Communicative language teaching, use of audio-visual and digital tools together, teacher capacity building, student-centered classroom, and creating proper English-speaking schools environment are such remedial actions to be outlined in the paper. The study is an inference that interventions of the policy level and systematic

pedagogical changes are essential to bridge the existing communication gap between the rural and urban students in a bid to establish equal levels of educational attainment outcomes.

Keywords: English Communication Skills, Rural Students, Language Learning Challenges, Teaching Strategies, Indian Education System

INTRODUCTION

English is now an over-riding language of communication in education, administration, science, technology and international trade as it includes in the modern globalized society. The achievement of academic success, potential employment, social and economic development has turned into the matter of the competence in the English communication skills, i.e. the capabilities of listening, speaking, reading and writing. In India, the varieties of languages are enormous and the use of local language is being put in the priority in the day-to-day activities and so, English can be said to be a linking language, a gateway to higher education, and employment. Whereas it is important, there is a wide gap between urban and rural students when it comes to the English communication competence. The rural students continue to face serious adversities in the acquisition of good communication skills in English that affect their faith, grades, and future career negatively.

Kingston (2007) has indicated that English is typically delivered to the country students in an environment that does not support language learning. There is the introduction of traditional and examination-oriented teaching methods into most small schools that subscribe to the notion of rote teaching rules of grammar and content in text books as opposed to the

practical use of language. Students themselves, as a result of that, are able to reproduce answers in written forms only to fail in conveying the information orally in the real life. Limited exposures to English outside the classroom are also factors that such problem is developing. However, with their urban counterparts, the rural students do not encounter English sufficiently at home or even in community, even through media and thus when they do, they learn language as an abstract concept but as something scary, rather than something natural and continuous.

The socio-economic factors are also quite exigent in slowing acquisition of English communication skills to the rural learners. Many students also lack good economic backgrounds where they lack access to good education and learning resources as well as access to digital ones. The lack of professional infrastructure in schools, lack of trained English educators, excessive population of the classrooms, lack of language laboratories or audiovisual materials in choosing the language hinder the opportunities to learn on an interactive level. Moreover, motivation of the learners who are first-generation and their self-confidence in using English is not usually given at home, and this affects their success in school. The dominance of the first tongue that is imperative in cognitive development both in the academic and social facet is generally disruptive in pronunciation and sentence structure and fluency of the English language.

Other complications include psychological barriers that place pressure to the rural students. The fear of failure, fear of being socially rejected, lack of self-confidence does not give the students the chances to experience active participation in English speaking exercises. In the case of rural schools, they cannot always provoke experimentation and free of communication in the classroom setting and, therefore, passive forms of learning are observed. Strict syllabi and assessment pressures constrain teachers and they may focus more on curriculum coverage and less on creating communicative competence. The

students have therefore viewed English as a science to memorize rather than a science to practice and master.

It is in this context that the given study will help to uncover the specific concerns of rural students in the process of learning the required English communication skills and propose the most plausible options to address the identified concerns. The conclusion of the study will contribute to the study of learning of the rural English language in India through a structural and psychological entrance. It also targets offering realistic recommendations to teachers, learning organizations and policymakers so that to generate accommodative and supportive learning subsystems. The necessity of increasing the level of English communication skills among rural students is not only an academic problem, but a highly significant step towards achieving the social equity and empower the learners and their active involvement in the globally connected environment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The vast number of literatures examining the problems associated with teaching and learning English in rural cases in different countries makes it possible to identify the recurrent problems of the infrastructure, teacher willingness, motivation of students, and socio-cultural constraint. All these studies provide a decent theoretical and empirical background in the analysis of the problems that plague the rural students in mastering English communicational skills and what systemic problems influence the teaching of language subjects in non-urban areas.

Belatrech (2018) has researched the problems of working of novice EFL teachers in the rural areas of Mostaganem and found out that the inexperience and rural environment influenced the efficiency of teaching greatly. The lack of the proper training, management in the classroom, a poor level of English skills among the students and their exposure to the actual use of English were the issues that the research identified. As the results suggest, beginner teachers are likely to struggle with

adapting the modern ways of communication in the rural schools, resulting in teacher centered instructional processes, and the deficiency of student-teacher engagement. The importance of special professional training of the rural English-teachers is pointed out in the study.

Febriana et al. (2018) discussed the issue of problems experienced by teachers in a rural school in Indonesia and reported that biggest contributors were low quality of facilities, lack of teaching resources, and lack of motivation among the possible students were identified. As the teachers had no multimedia materials and language laboratories, it made them follow traditional approaches to teaching. The importance of the study has been highlighted that the rural students are not actively involved in the use of English language even who are not in classes and this fact negatively influences the speaking and listening competencies in rural students. The observations may be referred to the general literature that evidences the importance of exposure and practice in achieving communicative competence.

Hossain (2016) provided a detailed report of the case concerning English language teaching in rural Bangladesh where the structural, pedagogical, and socio-economic problems were identified. The research provided has noticed that there is little teaching of English as a practical language but a theoretical course hence students cannot speak English in a fluent manner. Hossain had also argued that the way of ensuring delivery of higher quality of English education in the rural regions was through communicative teaching style, teacher training and policy level reforms. The relevance of the paper is particularly achieved due to the fact that it incorporates both the issues and opportunities and presents an all-encompassing image of what rural English language teaching is.

In his work English language teaching in rural India: Issues and solutions (n.d), Ghosh (2018) demonstrated that there is a number of problems in teaching English in rural settings.

The research finds out infrastructural inadequacy, insufficient supply of trained English teachers, inadequate teaching resources, and socio-economic limitations to be some of the big obstacles that impede effective language acquisition. Ghosh highlights the fact that, in many cases, students who study in a rural setting are exposed to very little English beyond the classroom, and hence are unable to use it in their day-to-day conversations. Solutions that the paper will put forward include community-based learning programs, teacher training workshops and with low-cost digital resources that could help to make the learning activities have a more immersive and interactive nature in rural learners. This paper has highlighted the need to have context-specific measures in improving English learning among students in rural contexts.

In their article, Gupta and Singh (2015) in the title Strategies of improving spoken English in rural learners are specifically addressed to the skills of oral language that are not used in teaching English in rural areas. The authors suggest that studying grammar and vocabulary as rote does not prepare the students to be able to communicate effectively in their life situations. They propose effective interventions such as role play activities, group discussions, language clubs, and learning peer activities. The research highlights that spoken English skills are developed at a higher level when the environment being used is supportive that allows engagement as well as extensive use of language in meaningful situations. These are the strategies that are incorporated with the contemporary communicative language teaching strategies that make rural students confident and fluent.

In their article, improving communication skills in rural students: Pedagogical perspectives, Rao and Devi (2016) discuss the pedagogical approaches based on which it is possible to raise the level of overall communication in the rural students (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) among rural students. They claim that conventional

teaching approaches, which rely on lectures, are inadequate, and propose the introduction of task-oriented instruction, project, and multimedia-based approaches to develop more learner-oriented one. The authors also emphasize on the role of teacher's attitudes and motivation in enhancing positive learning environment. According to their findings, even with regular practice, the positive effects of pedagogical innovation on the language competencies of rural students can be measured.

In their book *Approaches and methods in language teaching*, Richards and Rodgers (2014) present a detailed theoretical framework of teaching English language. They review the different teaching techniques among them the Grammar-Translation Method, the Audio-Lingual Method and the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). The authors say that communicative approach is especially useful in the process of developing the ability of the students to speak English in practice, but not learn the rules and vocabulary. This reading gives teachers an idea of how to arrange the lessons in such a way that they would be accurate and at the same time, fluent, a strategy that could be of great help when designing rural-based English courses that would have the role of sharpening the real-life communication skills of the students.

In the article, Sharma (2017) in *Teaching English in rural schools: Problems and prospects*, the authors focus on the conceptual and methodological issues in rural English teaching. Issues that Sharma puts to the fore include student demotivation, lack of parental support and incompatibility of curriculum design and local realities. This study recommends that, the methods of using culturally relevant material, teaching local languages alongside English as well as offering trainings to teachers can go a long way in enhancing learning outcomes. In his work, Sharma stresses that the gap in the communication skills between rural and urban students' needs to be addressed in terms of a

holistic approach, which includes the measures of curriculum adaption, training of teachers and introducing the innovative methods of teaching.

Overall, the evidence of the literature review is that the acquisition of the English communication skills in the rural environment is constrained by the interconnecting factors that involve users such as teachers, learners, institutions, and policies. Though many researchers focus on the challenges teachers might be encountering, still, they all exhibit the problematic issues, which are directly connected with the possibility of students to train and to master communication in English. Another remedial measure which targets students is not mentioned in the literature and their context learning is a gap in Indian rural setting. This gap is aimed to be bridged by the current paper that attempts to pinpoint the problems faced by the rural students and giving realistic, learner-centered, solutions to enhance their English communicative abilities.

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the major problems faced by rural students in developing English communication skills.
2. To examine the socio-economic and educational factors affecting English language learning in rural areas.
3. To assess the role of teachers and teaching methodologies in enhancing English communication skills among rural students.

Hypothesis

H₀ (Null Hypothesis): There is no significant role of teachers and teaching methodologies in enhancing English communication skills among rural students.

H₁ (Alternative Hypothesis): Teachers and teaching methodologies play a significant role in enhancing English communication skills among rural students.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research design employed in the current study is descriptive and analytical in a way that the researcher would be able to examine the issues and solutions that have been

presented in relation to the development of English speaking among rural student. The structured questionnaires and informal interviews conducted on students and English teachers of the chosen schools located in the rural settings assisted the researchers to collect the main data. Observations in classrooms were also made in order to understand the methodology as well as student involvement in teaching. Research journals, books, policy documents and internet academic materials were used in gathering the secondary data. The appropriate statistical instruments used during the analysis of the gathered data were percentages and mean scores, and qualitative interpretation in order to make practical conclusions regarding the role of teachers and teaching methods in enhancing the English conversations skills in the rural area.

Descriptive Statistics: Role of Teachers and Teaching Methodologies

Statement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Teachers encourage students to speak English in the classroom	120	3.92	0.74
Teaching methods focus on communication rather than rote learning	120	3.85	0.81
Teachers use interactive activities (role-play, discussions, group work)	120	4.01	0.69
Teachers provide constructive feedback on students' speaking skills	120	3.88	0.77
Teaching	120	4.05	0.72

methodologies increase students' confidence in speaking English			
Overall effectiveness of teachers in improving communication skills	120	3.94	0.75

Displayed as the descriptive statistics in the table indicates that, the role of the teachers and methodologies of teaching is robust and favorable to enhance the English communication abilities of the rural students. The measures of the mean adopted in all statements exceed the balance of 3.00 meaning that there is generally a consensus on the statements by the respondents. The most important statement has the highest average score of 4.05 and this is why the teaching methods encourage students to be confident when speaking English; that is the reason why learning activities facilitated by instructors and students oriented ones are relevant. The interactive sources of teaching that involve role-play, group discussion and classroom interactions showed a high mean value (4.01) as well, denoting that participative teaching method have a crucial role to play in developing communicative competence. The positive response of speaking skills among the students through the encouragement to use English in the classroom by teachers and their offer of constructive feedback also supported such skills because the mean score of 3.92 and 3.88 were obtained respectively. The average of the standard deviation of all items is on the lower side and this means that the respondents are consistent in perceiving. The findings, generally, are able to provide empirical findings to the alternative hypothesis and support the fact that teachers and effective teaching methodologies play a big role in

improving the levels of English communication among the rural students.

One-Sample t-Test

Test Value = 3.00

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Role of Teachers and Teaching Methodologies	120	3.94	0.75	0.068

One-Sample Test

Variable	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference
					Lower
Role of Teachers and Teaching Methodologies	13.82	119	.000	0.94	0.81

The results of the One-Sample t -test indicate that the contribution of teachers and strategies used in teaching is significant in enhancing English communication skills of rural students. The mean score (3.94) is far higher than the test score (3.00) and this implies that the respondents like the role of teachers and teaching methods. The value of the t 13.82 at the level 119df is significant with the level of Insignificance (Sig. (2-tailed) value of 0.000. This is a determination of the fact that the difference between the mean scores is not accidental. Further, the difference is 0.94, which is not only mean but also the confidence interval of the difference is small; that is, it

varies within 0.81 to 1.07 indicating the strength and consistency of the effect. In its turn, this makes the null hypothesis not acceptable and the alternative hypothesis accepted, to demonstrate that teachers and effective teaching method are the most dynamic elements in cultivating the English communication skills among rural students.

Discussion

The study results clearly propose that any pedagogical style and practices are very vital in the cultivation of English communications skill among students in the rural contexts. The statistically significant results of the One-Sample t-test justify the alternative hypothesis and align with the literature on the topic of the rural EFLT in general. The higher average score demonstrates that the students think that the teaching activities of the educators can influence to improve their self-confidence, fluency, and overall communicative ability in the English language. This restates the essence of the importance of the teachers as the language learning facilitator more so in the rural setting where majority of the classes are the only place where most individuals get exposed to English.

These results mean that interactive and learner-centred instructions will be worthwhile to develop communication skills. The strategies of solving problems that appear to reduce the anxiety and trigger the engagement of learners are group discussions, role plays, storytelling, and interaction in the classroom. The fact is as a result of previous studies that have emphasized the concept that there is more efficiency of communicative and task-based models over the traditional grammar-translation techniques in villages. The greater extent to which teachers can enable a friendly classroom environment, and can demonstrate to the students that there is nothing wrong in laughing and making mistakes in mastering English, the more they would be encouraged to communicate in a constructive way.

It is also important depending on high influence of teachers during teacher training and professional development. It has been

known that the rural teachers have been limited to the fact that they have less resources, more children in a classroom and are not supported by the institutions. Regardless of these challenges, the study indicates that the communication skills of the learners can be enhanced by positive influence by the effective pedagogical practices. This confirms the thesis stance that there is a major effect that can be made on learning outcomes by increasing teacher competence regarding on-going training, introduction to the most recent teaching practices, and availing teaching aids.

Overall, as it has been demonstrated in the discussion, supporting the role of teaching and applying the appropriate teaching strategies is essential to address the issues related to delivering the education to the rural students who must train English communication skills. Empowering the teachers, support of the school institutions, and the practices of classrooms friendly to the learners to develop an inclusive and equitable language learning form the basis of the interventions that should be formulated towards creating a sustainable change.

OVERALL CONCLUSION

The present research paper has reached the conclusion that there are immense implications on the development of the English communication skills among the rural students in the teaching by both teachers and the teaching methodologies used in the classroom. This is also a challenge to the rural students because there are many factors such as the lack of contacts with the English language, lack of confidence, deficiency of learning content and traditional modes of teaching that are not conducive to successful language learning. Regardless of those constraints the study findings indicate that when teachers are trained or when teaching and communication with the learners are focused on lessons, the English communication skills of the students may be improved significantly.

The statistical procedure is effective in showing that the motivation provided by the teacher, the interactive process, and the focus on the practical application of language positively lead to the confidence and fluency levels in English among the students. The fact that alternative hypothesis is accepted is another testimony to the fact that role of good pedagogical strategies in development of communication skills in even strained resource rural environment. Here, it is critical to transfer the accent on the rote learning and the impact of exams and methods of language teaching to the experience and skill-based ones.

The other fundamental aspect of the research is the contribution of frequent training of instructors, positive classroom climate, and the institutionalization of innovative instructions. The education reforms and policies ought to target more at giving the rural schools more power in English language pedagogy so that they can have adequate resources, technological facilities and platform of professional development of the teachers. In short, there is a need to address the situation through enhancing English communication among rural learners to realize educational equity, high employability, and successful integration in a globalized society. The teachers, the institutions and the policy makers should collaborate to bridge the rural urban divide in competency in English language and also capable of achieving inclusive and sustainable education development.

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