



Contemporaneity of Language and Literature in the Robotized Millennium

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The Predicament of English in Higher Education portals: Rural students and challenges

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Abstract

Living in an age where English is inevitable and has been the need of the hour there is no scope of dispelling the language. There are a slew of factors that promote English to be the Language of the future. English has decades ago detached itself off its Neo - colonial tag. "The view that learners and non-native speakers of English are victims of linguistic and cultural imperialism is not shared by everyone" (Pg,16,Jeremy Hammer). Henceforth the establishment of English and its continuing predominance is certain and there is no point in ignoring the language based on imperial overtones. English language has established itself in such a way that a plethora of job opportunities come along with learning it. As Former Professor of English Prof.N.Krishnaswamy observes "English has become the global language that would give the students a lot of opportunity and also mobility" (MEMR,The Hindu, 31st, July, 2019). Not only does it play a vital role in acquiring a decent job among youth but also helps in socio-economic upliftment and workspace recognition as well. Ineptitude to communicate in English only pushes students to the brink of their academic and forthcoming professional career. When it comes to learning English in class rooms in Colleges at higher education portals student receptiveness and attitude towards the subject is very much accountable to the effective learning process. For a teacher who is green into teaching /with minimal experience the challenges encountered are many. The hypothesis of this research paper is framed in accordance with the following questions: What does English play in real life? ; How do students understand its role actually during college/higher education period?; Who are the students who face challenges in learning English?; What are the predominant issues in Teaching and Learning English at Higher Education level and how to enhance efficacy in Learning and Teaching English with special focus on Rural students and Teacher Autonomy/Agency

Key Words: Rural Learners, employability, Social upliftment, Naiveity, academic disconnect, Task based Learning, Teacher Autonomy, Revamping Teacher, Learner roles.

1. English and its diverse functions

English is basically a language performing diverse functions in our lives and has also become an acutely integral language breaking geographical, linguistic boundaries as it's the only common language widely spoken between nations and it has been the language of the the technology till date. English reigns unabatedly in global platform as the language of the future too. Whilst Albert C.Baugh and Thomas Cable analyze "Because English occupies such a prominent place in international communication, it is worth pausing to assess its intrinsic advantages" they further add on how "English shares with other major languages of Europe the ability to express the multiplicity of ideas and refinements of thought that demand expression in our modern civilization (Pg, 9,HOEL). This is the scenario and against this backdrop that the students need to be properly oriented about its importance and its varied functions. Adding to this there is another question on who are the students who are naive in understanding its importance? Specifically its students from socio-economically marginalized sector who are naive in understanding its importance. English opens the gateway for social upliftment also. A student who has good command over the language is sure of succeeding an interview and be placed and eventually climb the social ladder. A student doubtless has an edge over his competitors in an interview with his powerful communication skills. This is an age of knowledge and technology and English invariably serves as the backbone of Knowledge acquisition. A good education is impossible without English today. Education and English complement each other. As Educationist and Linguist G.N. Devy puts it "A good education will not only help our youth get jobs and build fulfilling careers it will also lead to the widening of our collective imagination and the shaping of the way we think ,for all the reasons it ought to be an important concern of our time"(CW). This can happen only with English language acquisition in the present context. But sadly the fact that the rural sector of students are the ones who are always distanced from the privileges of English Language is very much alarming. Linguist D.N. Devy is one voice that unineruptingly portrays the plight of marginalized students who are often made to be at the periphery of English Learning benefits: In the words of Devy: "I have so far argued that in India higher education has managed to lose touch with lifestyles and histories of exclusion of the communities and therefore one is not able to fully access the idiom through which life is perceived outside our campuses (CW)). For the sake of understanding this paper attempts to segregate the students of higher education as a. Rural b. Urban and c. Semi urban. Students from the rural sector

are the core group who lack opportunities and amenities in learning and thereby are ignorant of the importance of English in present context. They are mostly first generation Learners from economically deprived sector who have had schooling in vernacular language .Quite surprisingly even the so called English medium Students from schools who are the Semi urban students who enter higher education also are highly incompetent in English communication .The first category the Rural Students are the ones from Socially, economically, linguistically, deprived backdrop who lack amenities and opportunities to English acquisition whereas the second category of students that is the semi urban students are mostly students with mediocre backgrounds who are deprived of exposure to English communications. This does not make much difference in the little edge they have over the rural students. English is just a language to boost the score in School days and most importantly the traditional “route” learning used even for languages needs mention here. “A recent Aser study backs up this conclusion: it found that a quarter to half of eighth standard children in Tamilnadu could not read or understand even simple English sentences. However in failing to test the actual language skills of children, state exams do little to flap up these huge short comings” (MEMR) same is true with Higher education particularly when it comes to rural students. Lack of adequate training and platforms for exposure to the language in terms of Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing in English is the primary reason for incompetence. It’s also easy for teachers to spot out students from Rural Sector. They are mostly Introverts, who lack self-confidence and are fearful, shy and above all academically disconnected. These characteristics have been recognized as predominant traits of rural and even many of the semi urban students as well. Teachers play a vital role in bridging this academic disconnect of such students. Further Prof Krishnaswami observes that “the dominance of western content in English made students scared of the language”(MEMR, The Hindu, 31st, July, 2019)

2. How do Rural students understand the role of English actually

Though English has triumphed and established itself as the “Lingua franca” among nations it has still been recognized only as the language of the elite. Access to English Language learning is still an unfulfilled desire to many. Students particularly from rural sectors and semi urban sectors still don’t have the right opportunities, amenities and exposure to the language compared to its usability in society. English language learning is still an issue to rural students who have had their medium of education in their vernacular language till schooling. Most of English language learning during school days is done through the route learning method to boost their scores in public examinations. Hence understanding the language at higher education level in colleges and universities becomes challenging. Even after their entry to higher education portals their receptiveness towards the language remains the same. Most of the Rural and semi urban learners are acutely naive in understanding the importance of the language in their life. The inability to use the language in classrooms and everyday lives leaves them in lurk. Most of them try to alienate themselves in classrooms due to lack of competence and confidence. Academic disconnect is the only escape to such students who express anxiety and frustration in learning the language within the classroom. Proper orientation regarding its role, usability and impact in their lives is not provided to them. Language acquisition is challenging when a language is faced at its advanced level without proper basics. Pathetic among these two categories are the Semi Urban Learners who have had their medium of education in schools in English and still don’t have the ability to communicate well as is expected of them. The only solution to these learners are to.

3. Teacher autonomy /Agency

Every change in a class room begins with a teacher, a teacher is one who facilitates teaching and amplifies students thinking and creative prowess similarly a class room is the space for exploration and innovations. Teacher autonomy is an efficacy centered towards self-direction in professional development. An enjoyable learning experience begins with the teacher within the larger frame of the classroom. A teacher is capable of instigating interest in Language learning through appropriate choice of teaching materials that would tap the learning process. Teaching in Indian class rooms is quite challenging due to varied linguistic bifurcations that are a major constraint in teaching. Teaching materials are varied .From newspapers to visual aids there are a plethora of resources that teachers could make use of based on the syllabus. Teachers at first place can begin with short stories, cartoons, songs and movies, with subtitles so that it promulgates the gravity of interest to learn the language. Most of the rural learners need simple, easy to understand exercises that are not only useful but also interesting. The primary role of a teacher is to be a facilitator so a paradigm shift of teacher to student participation gives larger scope for a learning. Unlike the traditional teaching pedagogy of preaching in classroom where students are most often active listeners participating in the larger ritual called teaching. Adhering to Task based Learning brings in student activity in a classroom. Task based Learning has at its core the idea that students learn better when engaged in meaning -based tasks than if they are concentrating on language forms just for its own sake. This happens since learning is enhanced through performing the communicative task. Creating a suitable learning ambience is equally an important factor towards effective learning as Students psychological state of the mind promotes receptiveness. In the words of Jane “You must learn the language freely to learn to speak it even if you make a lot of errors (1996:7). A stringent academic climate is a poor platform for Language acquisition. Conventional Teaching Methods are always unproductive. Learning happens with less stress, more free and in a highly positive environment. A Teacher facilitates in breaking such rigid barriers of teaching structure and provides a conducive space for learning to take place. Task- Based methods are most successful and result in high productivity towards language acquisition among Students particularly the Rural and the Semi urban. Assigning tasks out of the classroom like interviewing people, word games, library visits, campus tour and the like are Task -based activities which would tap interest in learning. In such methods there is a paradigm shift from the teacher to the students where students are given opportunity to have control over their learning process. They also learn to communicate through the how, why, where and when of the tasks they are involved in, through communication and interaction and thereby making learning practical and interesting. The

need for revamping of Teacher and learner role has been a persistent issue till date. This reorientation of classroom roles may facilitate the development of Teacher autonomy or in broader terms teacher development. Learner autonomy too is pivotal in effective learning process. A student who makes an optimum use of class room space, the given activities and is self-reliant in learning becomes proficiency. Another major step towards efficacy in teaching is the preparation of course materials. Teachers could go an extra mile in analyzing and preparing teaching materials that cater to the needs of the students and their competence. Prof Krishnaswami stresses on the need to be culturally appropriate. In his words “My philosophy is that materials should be based on our own culture and context”. He also adds that “when students get puzzled over the content of shakespeare and Milton, a story of Ekalaviya will make them more involved”(MEMR,The Hindu, 31st, July, 2019

Abbreviations

MEMR -Making English Language Teaching Effective

CW -The Crisis Within

HOEL -A History of The English Language

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