

Teaching English in Indian Rural areas with the help of Information Technology

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Abstract:

This paper gives an overview of changing scenario of teaching methods in general, and English in particular due to Information Technology in a multilingual country like India. People are able to witness how Information Technology is gradually changing the traditional chalk and talk method of teaching. IT has specified ample of opportunities and numerous benefits to teachers and students by launching new-fangled pedagogical techniques. A computer teaching methodology like CAI (Computer Aided Instruction), which is very active in western countries and in some eastern universities, is also beneficial in teaching languages effectively. Virtual universities are the new emerging concept where high-speed access will provide off campus students with two-day interaction at T.V, Video, Multimedia, software access and on-line home work/question-answer sessions/tests/mock tests etc. This facility is also available for those who are interested in learning English Language. The older and the younger generation wonders, “Is there really any necessity of teachers in forth-coming years?”

Another milestone in effective delivery of education is “distance Education” which is possible through electronically mediated instruction including satellite, Video, computer, audio graphic etc. This has revolutionized business and executive education. This provides better service to citizens bringing transparency, cut-down travel and stay expenses. This paper also mentions how the perfect fusion of science and literature is possible in this modern era, which was a dream once upon a time. At the same time one should not forget the concept of totality of education where the aim of education is to produce a human being who is moral, upright, kind and compassionate.

Key words: action heroes, C.A.I, changing scenario, English teaching, human compassion, Indian English, Information Technology, rural India

Introduction: India is a multilingual country having major languages approximately 1500 to 2000. ‘Unity in diversity’ is not just a saying here, it is highly prudent phrase with abundant understanding during the time of crisis. The warmth of the relations, ecstasy in celebrations of festivals and marriages, cuisines, music, films everything has capacity to unite

India. One important factor worthy to mention here that English as a language has a greater capacity to bind people though has not acquired an official status. It has played an important role in bridging people of different communities. Thus it has evolved as an inevitable part of Indian life and order by performing the best role as a link language throughout the breadth and width of the country. It is spoken not in the accent of Queen's English but in the accent of Indian English. Thousands of English in India are accepted without any remorse. A sense of pride clasps every Indian when addressed in English could it be individually or in a crowd. So instead of lamenting the presence of this language as a threat to other vernacular languages, the educationists in India should find the way how this overriding language can be transformed into a language of hope for thousands of people who are poverty-stricken. This language can be an eye-opener to many poor and illiterates and is able to teach ample of knowledge about career opportunities in local atmosphere. It might help them to realize that poverty is not inherent fate but is man-made. The fact remains regarding their ignorance about many jobs which can be created with the help of their entrepreneur skills around them. As a consequence their ability is not measured in terms of productivity and that leads to grim poverty.

In 2007 National Knowledge Commission observed, *“There is an irony in the situation. English has been a part of education system for more than a century. Yet English is beyond the reach of most of our young people, which make for highly unequal access. Indeed, even now, more than one percent of a people use it as a second language in schools.....But N.K.C believes that the time has come for us to teach our people, ordinary people, English as a language in schools. Early action in this sphere would help us build inclusive society and transform India into a knowledge society.”*-

A very different view can be held with the worldwide survey in 2010 which claimed that the highest number of English speakers is in India. Thus India contains a weighty proportion of the world's speakers of English as a second language. Yet when a relevant question is raised, what percentage of English Speakers belongs to rural area? The appalling answer is awaited. Just a thin percent in some rural areas knows to read and write. Everyone concur with the fact

that any country cannot become developed unless the development of its rural base. For a country like India, where almost sixty percent of the country's population lives in primitive conditions, it becomes even more important. At the same time teaching and learning English in the Indian situation has been a daunting and challenging task as it is not the first language. Then, "Why not use Information Technology in rural areas to teach English"? Perhaps this is a question of much relevance.

Generally in Urban India, people aspire to have quality education and English turns out to be an apparent symbol for that. It is taught not for the students who want to learn language and literature alone, but it is taught as a part of personality development. It has become a language of power, pride and prestige. The foremost expectation by the urban students regarding English class in India is to improve their spoken language, preparation for interviews, forceful presentations of ideas, improving listening skills, leadership qualities, negotiation skills and preparation for various competitive examinations. The students also expect that the teacher should introduce spoken exercises, written assignments, projects, group discussions, conversational classes, situational dialogue and official drafting and others. In some parts of India especially in metropolitan areas students are exposed to competent and skillful teachers who impart these students the necessary language skills which in turn help students to acquire language with ease and comfort.

The recent decade at least has helped students with ample of opportunities to learn the target language. C.A.I (computer Aided Instruction) is very active in western universities and in some eastern universities where languages are taught effectively. Virtual universities are the emerging concept where high-speed access will provide students with interaction at T.V., Video, Multimedia, software access and on-line home-work/question-answer sessions/tests/mock tests etc. Though traditional teaching method of using chalk and talk still remains as a popular method in India, gradually I.T has opened the mind of India. Computer Aided Instruction (CAI) is very popular in North America without much changing traditional methods. All these can be great beneficial methods in teaching English at rural places. Even the

faculty is responding in designing and developing value added, O.H.P transparencies, 35 mm slides, video programmes and computer software for teaching, seminars and project work. Today we have E-mail and Internet facilities for net working to teach communication. We are access to many literary cites with help of I.T. We can access free software downloads, learning materials, tests, games and lessons. We can find on-line teacher. All these can help rural folk gradually.

Another important milestone in learning English is **Distance Learning**. It is one of the important dimensions of education where experiment with I.T has benefited. Here teaching takes place in any college, and the university is situated elsewhere. United States Distance Learning Association is the “**delivery of education or training through electronically mediated instruction including satellite, video, audio graphic, computer and multimedia**”. In a way there is a paradigm shift from teaching method to learning method. Language Laboratory is another novel way to solve the problems of vocabulary, expression, grammar, pronunciation and translation. After setting Language Labs, it is observed that communication skills are improved and even average student in the class-room could take interest in learning English effectively. Even reading and writing skills are enhanced which boosted up the confidence of the students. This also can be a framework for rural education in English.

Now the main concern of this present paper is “how these opportunities should reach our rural places?” Is it possible by introducing computers in those areas where people live in grip poverty, where two times square meal is impossible? Few examples here and there can surely answer this riddle. It was possible when few Indians realized that their selfless-effort with the help of I.T could transform the lives of those areas. The magic was not in the computers but the man behind computers. Here are few examples. One of the few government initiatives in education has clicked recently. Conceptualized and promoted by the late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1985 to provide the brightest and the best rural children, C.B.S.E affiliated Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas (J.N.Vs) have proved this experiment successful. They introduced I.C.T (information Communication Technology) into class-room education. Today almost 95%

teachers and students are computer literates with good communication skills. This was possible because the leaders from blue chip I.T companies including Intel, Microsoft, and Wipro etc have taken keen interest in improvising these schools. These enterprising revolutionaries are the real catalysts of change thus contributing to the welfare of the common man. These I.T industries played major role in the miraculous transformation of rural students into the countries most I.C.T savvy students with good skills in talking English.

I have witnessed an incident where a computer expert from America has transformed thousands of lives belonging to a slum area of Mumbai. He provided eight to ten systems in the area and was an observer for the happenings. Initially children and young men were hesitant to touch the screen and the mouse. But later most of the learning occurred on its own. The entire area which was known for its underworld activities was soon abuzz with computer literates with good communication skills. I read about a teacher who took loan for the car, but bought computers to his class. I have seen teachers carrying L.C.Ds, C.Ds to help their students in the villages. A recent article in The Hindu talks about a group of young men from Bangalore who are engineers, doctors, teachers and NGO who travel every Friday nights to the rural places of Mandya, Shimoga districts to teach English and computers free of cost to the rural folk and then return on Monday to resume their duty. What wonders me is that these men are between the age group of 25 to 40. In fact in the opinion of the previous generation, this age group earn and spend lavishly forgetting their morality, ethos, integrity and social responsibility. These examples are a kind of eye-opener to all of us. Passion, Purpose and perseverance is what drives the **action heroes** to change the system from within. The giant step of these action heroes should be followed by ordinary citizens who can help India to visualize greater dreams of our father of nation, Mahatma Gandhi who said, “**India lives in villages**”. The power to bring change rests with everybody. A small assistance by government in supplying electricity power may not shatter the dreams of enthusiastic young men. At the same time this is not the job of legislators, bureaucrats, lawyer or activists alone. This is the job of common people too, who can make a positive contribution to the society with their selfless service and unflinching

resolve. The problem of 'digital divide' is just a problem like 'Haves' and 'Have-nots' and the solution rests when contribution flows from 'haves' to 'have-nots'.

Hypothesis: The analysis of all these points concludes that English in India as a second language is more powerful and more moving than any other language which definitely helps as a link language to elevate the standard of living in rural areas. Even translation of many Indian regional writing into English would help every rural folk to realize the essence of India. This happens because English is evolving as one of the most popular languages of India as Indian English. Today despite many problems language continues to be the major obstacle in this globalized world. So the contents if translated surely help any individual to reach the speakers of other languages. This surely strengthens the democratic principle 'unity in diversity'. This may also help in placing vernacular languages on the world map.

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