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DEVELOPING ENGLISH WRITING SKILL OF RURAL LEARNERS



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Abstract :

Language is the most vital aspect of our life. It is used for varied purposes. We use it to express our inner thoughts and emotions, make sense of complex and abstract thought, to learn to communicate with others, to fulfill our wants and needs, as well as to establish rules and maintain our culture. It is defined in myriad ways. Whatever may be the definition, the language is considered as 'skill' rather than a 'subject'. It has four basic skills namely, listening, speaking, reading and writing. Among these skills listening and reading are called receptive skills and speaking and writing are productive skills. All these skills are complementary to each other. Developing these skills is, no doubt, a hard nut to crack for the teachers of English. But writing skill needs extra initiation and exertion on the part of the learner. In such circumstances, it really becomes a challenge for the teachers, teaching specially in rural areas. The present paper proposes to highlight the barriers that come in the way of developing writing skill of such rural learners. It also suggests some remedial measures to overcome these obstacles.

Key Words:-Rural learners, language skills, writing skill, techno-friendly classrooms

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INTRODUCTION

To learn any language means to acquire four skills viz. listening, speaking, reading and writing. Among these skills listening and reading are skills of comprehension whereas speaking and writing are skills of expression. Each individual varies from the other as far as his or her learning abilities are concerned. And if it is a case of rural learners, it becomes a herculean task for the English teachers to develop these skills.

“Practice maketh man perfect” says Bacon and it is very much applicable to writing skill. Writing skill is not an inherent quality; one needs incessant practice to acquire this skill. Positive motivation on the part of the teachers and conscious efforts on the part of the learners can develop rural learners’ writing skill which thereby can help in enhancing other language skills. If we look into the present scenario regarding language-skill development in rural schools and colleges, we come across many barriers.

BARRIERS IN DEVELOPING WRITING SKILL OF RURAL LEARNERS:

Lack of Motivation: It has been observed that in the schools and colleges where the medium of instruction is Marathi or Hindi, English is considered as the most difficult subject. Besides, the learners get little motivation from their English teachers to eradicate this misconception. So in the schools itself the phobia for English takes birth and at home this phobia gets nourished due to the indifference, illiteracy and short of awareness of parents.

Misconception among Teachers: Being a teacher teaching in Marathi or Hindi medium schools or colleges and seeing the condition of the rural students, the teacher himself feels that the text in English should be translated into their mother tongue so that the learners can comprehend it easily. But here he forgets his real role as a genuine teacher. Another misconception that prevails among teachers in rural areas is that they believe in preparing their students merely for exams. Being exam-oriented they train the learners for reading and writing. They think that doing this, they will definitely develop these two skills. But the fact is that all the four skills are interrelated. Listening helps students to enhance their writing skill also. The more they listen, the more they will learn and the more they learn, the more they will be able to express themselves in writing as well as speaking.

Importance to Quantity rather than Quality: In the schools and colleges of rural areas the classes are mostly overcrowded. Here the importance is given to the number of students rather than quality of students. The less facilitated and much crowded classrooms become hindrance in the way of imparting quality education to the learners. In the cyber age, where immense technical and technological innovations in the field of teaching- learning process are taking place, the condition of the classrooms of rural schools and colleges is deteriorating. In such scenario, the goals of teaching English as a second language, are left untouched.

REMEDIAL MEASURES TO OVERCOME BARRIERS:

Building Confidence in the Learners: Confidence is much needed in attaining any kind of goal. This also applies to the development of writing skill of rural learners. To eradicate the deeply rooted fear of English in rural learners, the classrooms should be made comfort zones where learners would experience less anxiety and much comfort. At the same time teachers should establish cordial relationship with the learners. Once they entrust their teachers, they would listen to them and would do the given tasks with all interest.

Emphasis on Application of grammar: Grammar is an immanent part of language. Without learning it we cannot learn any language in real sense. So while teaching various topics of grammar more emphasis should be given on application of it. Students should be enabled to make use of tense, concord, narration etc. by themselves. After teaching the rules of grammar, learners should be given opportunities to use the acquired knowledge. For this, grammar tasks like formation of meaningful sentences by using jumbled words and phrases, use of appropriate verb forms, dialogue completion by using different types of sentences, etc. can be taken.

Improving Vocabulary: Vocabulary plays very crucial role in enhancing writing skill. We acquire it gradually. It needs time, patience and practice. It can be increased by reading thoroughly and jotting down new words. Learners should be motivated to use dictionary. Even though there is no correlation between spellings and pronunciations, rural learners can be helped in learning spellings with the help of minimal pairs. For example Light-night-might-fight-tight-sight etc. or cake- wake- fake -make -lake etc.

Enhancing thinking skill and creativity: In exam-oriented teaching much emphasis is given to the learning of facts by heart and memorizing and producing the same in the exam paper. Besides, completion of syllabus is the sole aim of English teacher. So, limited activities are given to the learners to avoid extra work and exertion. In both the ways the creativity with thinking skill is smothered which badly affects their writing skill. In such circumstances group tasks can prove to be more fruitful. To quote, “One job of the course designer and the teacher is to select topics and tasks that will motivate learners, engage their attention, present a suitable degree of intellectual and linguistic challenge and promote their language development as efficiently as possible” (Willis 1996). Group task is an effective tool for acquiring as well as generating knowledge. It helps in enhancing writing skill along with other important life skills like

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decision making, interpersonal skill, emotional skill etc. One of them can be to ask them to narrate the stories of their favourite movies in English. Actually, movies have always caught attention of everyone. Every now and then, students feel fascinated to speak of their favourite movies. As it is a group task, they would feel free to discuss and write. In another task, they can be asked to attempt a translation of the stories they have already read in their native language. While assigning these types of group activities individual participation should be assured. In such activities teacher has to play dual role- one of the monitor and other of the motivator. The techno-friendly classrooms can inculcate more interest in rural learners and can make group activities effective. This would definitely help them to brush up their writing skill.

Assessment of given tasks: Without assessment no task is complete. To quote Race, "We can't plug a knowledge-meter to our learners and measure how much they know- we can only measure what they show of what they know. We can't directly measure the learning which has happened inside learners' heads. We can only measure what they produce as evidence that they have learned successfully" (66). In such situation, assessment of all the given tasks is very much essential. But while assessing the task or giving feedback to it, an utmost care should be taken. The teachers should not discourage the learners in any way.

CONCLUSION

Teaching English as a second language in rural areas and meeting with its goal is really a challenging task for English teacher. Besides, writing is difficult skill for learners. This multiplies the efforts of the teacher. He has to shoulder varied responsibilities. The first and foremost duty of a teacher is to be a good facilitator. He should facilitate his students with conducive atmosphere so that they would break the shell and come out to strive for enhancing their language skills.

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