

Challenges Faced by Tribal Students in Learning English as a Second Language

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Abstract:

Teaching English in India's multilingual and multicultural setting, especially in tribal areas, is challenging. English serves as a bridge to broader social and professional opportunities but is often perceived by tribal students merely as a subject for examination. Due to cultural differences, tribal learners may find English alienating rather than a skill for everyday use. This study explores the obstacles tribal students face in learning English as a second language and suggests educational and social remedies to improve their learning outcomes.

Keywords:

Tribal education, English as a second language, language pedagogy, educational barriers, cultural differences, curriculum development

Introduction:

In India, an estimated 80% of the citizenry, in varying degrees of rurality, face socio-economic challenges such as poverty, lack of infrastructural development, and marginalization that undermine their chances at quality education (Census of India, 2001). Tribal communities numbering about 8% of the total population struggle with the worst of these fortunate with limited access to education and resources (NCERT, 2007). Language is also a major deterrent for tribal students, as the wide gap that exists between tribal dialects and English adversely affects the students who are struggling to understand English and other academic activities (Kujur & Krishnan, 2019). The issues faced by tribal students learning English are discussed, emphasizing culturally responsive teaching methods that promote language development for tribal students.

Tribal Life and Culture:

India has a wide variety of tribal communities that hold oral cultures connected with myths, folk tales, songs, and poetry that integrate firmly with their symbolism of cultural identity (Chattopadhyay, 1978). While standardized languages employ scripts, there is a lack of a definite written form in most tribal languages, so the difficulty is compounded upon introducing English when a tribal student of oral tradition attends school. It rather tends to lock one into a paradoxical situation, Then the potential absurdity of the matter emerges: they may quickly feel cut off from their world and each other since English must be construed to be strange and very distant from the very lived experiences of these students (Bentahila & Davies, 1989). The tribal students are often out of sync culturally with the very formal education that they are receiving, for its practices and content do not have parallels in the cultural existence of the students (Shukla, 2007).

Significance of the Study:

English proficiency is turning out to be a serious matter of concern in academic advancement and economic mobility in India (Latha, 2018). Limited English proficiency is, however, still a formidable challenge for tribal students, coupled with systemic disadvantages and language barriers. In this case, understanding the educational obstacles these learners encounter would be significant in shaping culturally relevant teaching strategies and materials that reflect their unique linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Mishra, 2014). Tackling these challenges enables tribal students to gain empowerment to succeed in life academically or professionally.

Learner-Centric Problems:

For a great number of tribal students, English concerning their native dialect, regional language, and Hindi is neither the second; rather it is often the third or fourth language. The resultant linguistic confusion with ever-growing intuitiveness causes one to believe that English is unrelatable and very distant from their day-to-day life. This distance is all the more compounded by teacher-centered instruction, such as rote learning rather than a practical approach to language learning. Thus, confidence in speaking and understanding English, together with a sense of irrelevance for it in their daily lives, has become difficult for tribal students (Katore, 2017).

Language Teaching Situation:

Schools are usually resource-starved in most tribal areas, with not much time being provided for language learning. Besides, geographical isolation remains an ever-growing problem because students have to travel a great distance before reaching their scientific classroom (NCERT, 2007). The Multi-Grade Learning Centers (MGLCs), which aim to make primary education accessible to tribal children, are often driven by a single volunteer teacher attending to several grades. As a consequence, proper attention cannot be paid to the language taught in the schools, thus compromising English language instruction due to insufficient time and resources (Gahane, 2017).

Traditional methods and problems facing tribal students:

Many tribal institutions follow a translation method only, translating out of the English language into the student's native language. This has halted the development of a living language communicative competence method that does not improve the learners' communicative competence in practice (Prabhu, 1987). Very rarely used in the tribal areas are more rational approaches like the Direct Method with a focus on listening and speaking and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which deals with functional aspects of learning (Ahmad, 2016). These other methods ought to develop tribal students' conversational skills and practical understanding of English more effectively.

Responsibilities of the teacher:

In the teaching-learning of English for the tribal learners, the teachers act as a link in bridging the language being taught and the very culture that tribal learning faces. They help create a good environment for learning where students engage in even more meaningful daily interactions with visual aids, multimedia, and interactive strategies for making the teaching-learning of English relevant (Gahane, 2017). It is equally important to foster a positive attitude towards English and tackle the apprehensions of the students to instill confidence in them (Kujur & Krishnan, 2019).

Problems faced by the tribal students:

Generally, tribal students face a spectrum of issues such as linguistic isolation, little exposure to English, and the cognitive strain of juggling around multiple languages. Certainly, a landscape of English resources does not exist in the homes; even if it did, finances would have restricted access to private tuition or supplemental reading resources

(Shukla, 2007). This has, therefore, made English very challenging to these tribal learners who consider English as a distant language, too far away from their demands for immediate benefits (Mishra, 2014).

Problems faced by teachers:

Many teachers in tribal areas are usually found to be untrained in indigenous teaching methodologies; nor do they have the resources to meet the needs of unique students. A crowded classroom, less time for classes, and lack of specialization would hinder the teachers from effectively facilitating tribal learners (Purshottam & Dhingra, 2017). Teachers without sufficient training in cultural-responsive pedagogy may struggle to make English accessible and engaging to tribal students.

Problems in the Curriculum:

The curriculum employed in many of the tribal schools sees English as a subject of study for examination purposes rather than practical communication skills. It does not appeal to tribal students on an individual basis, as it is less culturally relevant and does not relate to real-life experiences (Kujur & Krishnan, 2019). Most of the exercises are written-based exercises, which could pose further anxiety challenges among students of oral cultures, thereby limiting their English engagement (Latha, 2018).

Strong Motivation for Tribal Learners:

A curriculum that will motivate tribal learners can be in co-operation with the attitude where tribal English students can look at English as a language for specific communication rather than only as an academic need to pass. Culturally relevant content, supportive classroom environments, and government-sponsored materials can change the attitude of tribal learners toward English. Programs like multilingual education (MLE) can also help provide opportunities to bridge the cultural and linguistic gaps that tribal students face (Gahane, 2017).

Psycho-Social problems:

Psycho-social issues such as self-esteem and weak cultural identity may cause tribal learners to disengage from the process of taking the English language course due to cultural alienation. If a culturally responsive and contextually supportive classroom accompanies their strong background, the mentioned problems may easily be avoided and a positive attitude

towards language learning will be developed (Barooa, 2016). Such teachers can sometimes use culturally inclusive materials and collaborative activities to engage their students better.

Why English as a Subject, not a Language:

The present status of tribal students viewing English as merely an academic subject is a direct consequence of the socio-cultural and economic barriers they face. Teachers, instead of helping students use English practically, concentrate on examination preparation, thus restraining them from engaging with the English language outside the classroom (Mishra, 2014). Moving towards English as a functional skill would sensitize the students to the context and worldview where it might be used.

Findings

- Spelling and Grammar Issues: Native language interference makes tribal students unfortunate scores in these areas.
- Socio-Economic Constraints: Financial limitations restrict access to certain books and resources for reading enhancement.
- Cultural Alienation: Cultural and linguistic distances alienate students from the language.
- Teacher Constraints: Overcrowded classes and limited time make for less effective in-language instruction.

Discussion:

Training in a mixed, integrated approach to the expected attained skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing was viewed as more supportive to tribal learners (NCERT, 2007). Teachers must be trained to deal with students who are psychologically and culturally sensitive, using culturally relevant teaching materials coupled with interactive learning. In addition, reforms in the curriculum that ought to have contexts closer to everyday scenarios, enabling practice for skills, will enhance the relevance and engagement in English for the tribal students (Gahane, 2017).

Conclusion:

Culturally relevant and contextual methods for learners need to be pushed toward improving outcomes for tribal children learning English. We need to shift away from examination-focused teaching practices to... aid student-centered approaches. Teachers,

administrators, and policymakers should join forces to ensure that English class offers an inclusive environment to allow for bridging to success in terms of educational and professional outcomes.

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