

A study of grammatical competence and fluency: A comparison between rural based and urban based students

At present, English is taught as one of the compulsory languages in almost all educational institutions in India, owing to its status as an international language. Considering the extremely large enrollment of learners opting for English and the enormous human resources involved in the teaching of it, it may not be an exaggeration to conclude that English teaching in India is the world's largest democratic enterprise of its kind. It is an observation that the attitude of the users of English in India has undergone many changes in recent years. English is no longer regarded as a symbol of an alien rule or as the language of a master. On the contrary, English has taken roots in the Indian soil as an unchallenged second language and is considered as "the language of opportunity, the window of the world, the language of higher education and the language of power, prestige and modernity." In spite of the perceived need for English in India as a language along with the innumerable opportunities thrown open to those who master English, one cannot just brush aside the problems it continues to pose to the society in general and the learner in particular. The learning of English inside the classroom has resulted in the achievement of varying degrees of competence – the two extremes being represented by those who gain the maximum and those who fail to gain anything out of the process respectively. This 'problematic variety' of learners of English in every classroom is so aptly described by N. Krishnaswamy et al., (p. 3) "They range from first generation school goers to children from families that have an impressive library at home, they range from children who rarely listen to English outside the English class to those who converse with parents, grandparents and sometimes even with the servants in

English of some sort! There are urban, semi-urban and rural learners, there are learners who have all along studied in English medium schools of various kinds and those who have studied in the regional medium with English as one of the 'subjects.' These learners who have varied socio-economic, linguistic and cultural backgrounds, obviously show varying kinds and degrees of competence in English."

The objective of this project was to study the status of the undergraduate students who studied in government and private schools in rural area, in urban area and to highlight the present situation of the rural students and to propose possible methods to teach English to rural students.

The aim of this project was to clarify and demystify the confusion surrounding the oral skills which have hitherto remained unexplored and uncharted in the language class. The skills of listening and speaking have so far remained the most neglected of the four skills of LSRW. One of the reasons for this is the greater emphasis given to the written skills of reading and writing.

The following factors affected the rural students' oral communicative competency most and lead to communication breakdown.

- a) Traditional methods of teaching
- b) Frequency of the four language skills
- c) Lack of communication strategies
- d) Lack of learning strategies
- e) Lack of exposure to the target language and its culture

A more basic and important reason however is the prevailing ignorance in the minds of the teachers/designers with regard to the handling of oral skills. As a consequence the average user of English in India is less competent of his spoken language than his written one. Since the skills of listening and speaking are sidelined or neglected, students ought to be given more training in these skills since they help them learn the language, grasp ideas and communicate better. However they require some special aids like good language lab with audio-visual software. In addition to this it also requires classrooms with smaller number of students where more individual attention can

be given to develop their language skills. Also students can be helped to overcome these barriers when teachers provide them various opportunities and give them a forum to mitigate their hesitation in speaking and help them to improve these skills within and outside the classroom.

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