Review

Innovative ways of English language teaching in rural India through Technology

Binod Mishra
Indian Institute of Technology Patna, India.

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We live in a global world where our existence depends solely on our felicity of using English most often. Thus, getting well versed in English has become quite mandatory. While this does not pose a problem in metropolitan cities and towns, people in rural areas lack the skills to converse in English. There is still a major chunk of civilization devoid of the developments in terms of language and technology. English teachers teaching in rural areas often face the non-availability of required technical support and relevant atmosphere to teach English effectively. It is here that the role of innovative teachers becomes quite essential. An effective teacher, despite having limited resources, can prove himself as a tool. The present paper examines various resources and tools that can prove beneficial in teaching English as a foreign language. It will also throw light on the advantages and disadvantages of using teaching aids and will discover ways of how our pedagogical styles may work wonders at times. It has to be realized that despite all cacophony, it is ultimately the man who has to master the machines. Teaching is not only about the introduction of innovative technology but is also the desire to be created amongst our students. This desire ultimately converted into action can prompt an effective teacher to play a pivotal role in the entire process. The mere mention of teacher in a rural area reminds us of the teacher in Oliver Goldsmith’s poem “The Village Schoolmaster” whose ‘one small head could carry all he knew’. Things have changed today with the advances of science and the expectations of the global world. Today we need to have specialist teachers in every subject even in rural areas. This is because of the increased level of competition and the anxiety to survive and sustain in a fast changing world. Knowledge of English today has become a sine-qua non for getting a coveted job and hence the importance of English teaching and learning has become manifold. As regards English teachers, their roles are not confined now to a hard task master but they are expected to be facilitator, a trainer, a counselor, a manager and a supervisor. There has been a transformation from ‘talk and chalk’ and teachers today have moved from BALL to CALL and now to MALL.

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malady of learners who are forced to resort to traditional schools having teachers devoid of the familiarity with the effective language teaching strategies. Undeniably, many English teachers in rural areas are themselves not effective and fluent in using English. In many Indian states English language teaching is confined to the verbal rendering of lessons in regional languages helping learners to understand the content and not the structural nuances of languages.

It is not surprising to note that English as a subject at school level in Indian rural areas gains serious attention when learners reach their secondary levels. Poor grounding of students as regards vocabulary and structure disinterest them in paying attention to their English course. While teachers in their primary and secondary levels fail to complete the exercises or work-book sheets, students too shy away from these cumbersome tasks—resulting in their aversion to English. While lack of trained teachers in rural areas has become a reality, the engagement of teachers in various non-academic tasks (viz. data collection, census, election related works etc.) adds to the malaise. Teaching is a continuous process and teachers in rural India are often debarrled from attending workshops and seminars to acquaint themselves with new ways and methods. Many teachers find no time for self-evaluation, which perhaps could lead to some self-devised ways of enhancing their teaching abilities.

Schools and colleges in rural areas abound in natural bounties, much to the envy of urban populace. This also becomes a hurdle for many teachers to prefer teaching in rural areas. Natural disasters such as flood and draught, inadequate transport facilities and lack of other amenities also make even trained teachers reluctant to take an appointment in remote areas. Also, the slow pace of life and tardy speed of government policies and resources most often deter both teachers and students from garnering the benefits of advanced aids. In such a scenario an English teacher is bound to take resort to his old tools—namely books.

The Indian rural populace, which depends on agriculture and limited income, despite their avidity to provide their children with a qualitative life, end up sending them to government schools where English is not taught as a skill but as a subject. Both parents and students emphasize simply on passing examinations just to climb the ladder of a higher class. As a result, students continue to carry the lapses of English throughout their lives. But this should not be taken as student’s lack of intellectual progress rather than the lack of resources.

The endangering situation of English language teaching in rural areas is no excuse to allow this malaise. A majority of Indians as, Graddol (2010) observes, ‘believe in the transformative power of English’. The new reality has enormous scope and application. Graddol observes:

“Throughout India, there is a belief among almost all castes and classes in both rural and urban areas in the transformative power of English. English is seen not just as a useful skill but a symbol of better life, a pathway out of poverty and oppression’ (Graddol p.120).

In such a scenario where neither adequate resource nor tools are available, English teachers themselves have to devise innovative ways to make their students climb the staircase easily. The teacher has to take a solemn pledge to hone his students’ knowledge of English. This can be done with a resolve, as Patil says:

“I have to create opportunities for them to use English in meaningful, realistic, and relevant situations. Games, role play activities, information gap tasks, brain storming activities, riddles, puzzles, cartoons, anecdotes, jokes, songs and other low-cost and easily available teaching materials become handy” (Patil, 2008, p.07).

In a world governed by technology, both students and teachers in rural areas have high expectations. The spreading hands of technology in their everyday lives have enabled them to compete with others despite some unalterable truths. The arrival of computers, i-pads, cell phones, and innumerable gadgets has made them more enthusiastic. Who would not like to google and skype nowadays in an age of technology? The plethora of ambitions most often remain famished because of several reasons—known or unknown. There are various technological tools, which though can enhance English language teaching in rural areas, often have certain limitations.

An English teacher’s task in a rural area becomes more intimidating because of certain shortcomings on his part. While the syllabus makers are least bothered about the teacher’s predicament, the teacher himself feels responsible for the poor products that are been produced over the years. The various limitations like course completion, successful implementation of government’s schemes, lack of autonomy and lack of exposure add to his agony. Some trained teachers who strictly follow the grammar-translation method of teaching English find some solace by correcting his students’ written errors yet fail to instill in them the effective spoken skills. While some students because of their congenial home

E-mail: mishra.binod@gmail.com.

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atmosphere formulate and speak some sentences in English, they most often fail to bring the required effect. Here, the teacher’s role also comes into question. A good number of English teachers are not properly trained in terms of pronunciation and eloquence. We cannot ignore the fact that despite immense potential of our rural students, they most often fail to compete in life and career with their urban counterparts because of their poor background in English.

How should an English teacher respond to these challenges that hamper the growth of their students? The introduction of ICT in teaching English particularly in rural areas can be rewarding. Technology, which nowadays is a unifying force, can help in facing these challenges. These challenges have to be transformed into reality. While many state governments have provided technological support to schools and colleges in rural areas, it is an irony that despite bouts of enthusiasm initially, the fever frets away after some days. Efficiency in language cannot be guaranteed unless it is practised regularly. Government policies endeavour to organize training camps though with the help of several foreign agencies from time to time yet not much success results. Actually, these professional agencies with their professionally created audio-video clips exhort teachers but after some days of fun and frolic, the charm fades away. Moreover, such training camps are often very expensive and hence cannot become a regular feature. In many cases, the course modules of such agencies are not conditioned locally and its rigor appears intimidating than facilitating.

Since technology has changed our course of life, it cannot face a blanket ban even in rural areas. Let us discover how technology can facilitate teaching English in rural areas. One cannot guarantee a hundred percent success of teaching English through technology, yet can create awareness both among students and teachers through technology. While the most common technology in urban areas, like Internet facility may appear difficult, some easily available technological resources like radio, T.V, Computer, mobile phones etc. can facilitate teaching of English in rural areas. Now, the efficacy of these devices depends upon the creativity and desire of teachers. A technically savvy teacher can also encourage his students to learn English at their own will, of course, under the tutelage of elders in the family.

**Autonomy of teachers**

In an age of technological proliferation, the English teacher in rural areas also expects to be provided with adequate freedom of choosing his gadgets. While it may become difficult to provide every school with a multi-media language laboratory, one major secondary school can be made a centre where the students of the nearby schools can join one/ half day especially for English training along with their English teacher. A trained and expert English teacher from the adjacent town can also be appointed initially to train both the students and teachers alike. The trainer with his selected material (mostly based on regional cultural customs and festivals) can create amongst students the desire to communicate in English. The lessons/modules selected for these purposes should be interactive which could either be group discussion, group assignments, short films, short presentations etc. Such exercises, if repeated amongst students after initial training in other schools, can work wonders even without the use of technology. The teacher, acting upon the instructions of the trainer, may also organize such sessions every week in his school and get desired results. But a regular evaluation and feedback of students becomes imperative in this regard.

**VARIOUS WAYS OF TEACHING ENGLISH**

**Teaching English as a skill**

Job market today expects a candidate to have good communication skills to succeed and sustain in a global world. English teachers have to remain extra cautious of developing in their students the ability of four language skills namely—LSRW. Hence, the teaching of English as a skill and not only as a subject becomes indispensable. There is a growing consternation about English in rural areas that it is a language of the elite. What causes more agony is that even English teachers themselves are not free from this phobia. One has to remember that the task of an English teacher is not confined to mere vernacular rendering of a prose or a poem. The nuances of verbal melody, the proper pronunciation and use of patterns too are important. How many English teachers have the patience to hear his students recite poem and then correct wherever the latter go wrong? A sincere teacher can go an extra mile and play the recorded rendering of the poem and allow students to recite with the same style. Some over-enthusiastic teachers most often explain the poem and block students’ creative ability. Actually, they can be allowed to have their own explanation, if possible. They can also be allowed in groups to choose proper images and then after their discussion, write a short report and later present in the class. Such exercises, though may appear time-taking, yet are rewarding. These exercises help students enhance their four skills of language learning.

**Teaching English through radio**

Radio, which of late has lost its relevance in the glitter-glatter of other technologies, still can prove to be a
blessing in disguise especially in rural India. It is still an easily affordable device and English teachers can also benefit much from this device. To begin with, they can listen to English News on All India Radio regularly. As they get interested and accustomed, they can also switch over to BBC News, Voice of America etc. This will create around them an atmosphere of English and help them sharpen their listening ability. Regular listening to All India Radio morning news at 8.15 AM either at school or at home as an assignment to students can work wonders in creating an English atmosphere and helping them train their ears to get accustomed to proper sounds and pronunciation.

Teaching English through T.V

While radio can enable learners to imitate speaking and listening skills, its authenticity can be realized through television. T.V beautifully exploits audio and video facilities and can offer learners numberless opportunities of learning language with its proper manifestation. But while selecting a programme from TV, the teacher has to plan meticulously. The programme which is interactive in nature and based on our everyday activities motivates learners and in a way benefits both students and teachers alike. To name some shows --- Big Fight and Walk the Talk on NDTV and some other programmes on National Geographic channel can have tremendous impact on learners. While bringing these shows to the classroom can be difficult, students must be given these programmes as home assignments. These can later be assigned as both written and spoken tasks in the classroom. As teachers of English, we have to realize that authenticity in language comes through regular and adequate use. To quote Widdowson: “Speaking and listening are said to relate to language expressed through the aural medium and reading and writing are said to relate to language expressed through the visual medium” (Widdowson, 1978, p.57).

It is quite significant to refer to short video clips in the classroom. Many of us are often afraid that the fascinating part of the visual may affect the audio part. It is here that the teacher’s planning and his caution work wonders. The first important care to be taken is the selection of the video and its linguistic purpose. The teacher has to provide certain guidelines and tasks before he plays the video in the classroom. These instructions may include the following:

Select ten new words while you watch this video.
Try to pronounce these words as shown in the video.
Select five short sentences.
Remember at least three questions and their answers.

After the video play is over, the teacher may ask short questions and elicit their responses. He may instruct his students to repeat some words as pronounced in the video. Further, he may also ask of the synonyms and antonyms. Some students may also be asked to narrate the entire video. Another group of students may be asked to narrate some similar anecdotes from their memory. Students of rural India who are unacquainted with the wings of technology and have not set their feet are still told stories by the elders in the family. In addition, students may also be assigned to enact a situation where many of them have some role to play. The teacher may record such role plays and later analyze and interpret to make his students know their lapses. This will ensure more participation and the classroom may become noisy at times. We have to remember that making noise is also a form of communication since no sounds are meaningless.

Moreover, while students watching the video are most often lost in entertainment, we as teachers have to ensure that non-verbal symbols which normally are not taught separately can become a part of video watching. We can make them aware of the intonation part of speaking and non-verbal signals during video viewing. In Indian rural backgrounds where teachers themselves are devoid of these specific trainings, video can become a rich resource. The advice of Susan Stempleski in this regard is quite relevant:

“It is your job as the a teacher to get students to focus their eyes, ears and minds on the video in ways that will increase both comprehension and recall and add to the satisfaction they gain from viewing. The video will still remain entertaining, but the students will also come to recognition of how the medium can be used for learning” (Stempleski, 2010:365).

It has been found that the real communication takes place when both the sender and the receiver maintain a cordiality and co-operation with each other. In addition, the common frame of reference may work wonders in ensuring better co-ordination. A meticulous planning on the part of English teacher while selecting video has immense potential in providing a proper learning environment. Most Indian homes are abuzz with the stories of sacred texts. One can find opportunities galore in bringing to the English classroom the episodes of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, which not only will delight our students but will also add to the values amongst them. Also, language part becomes essential. For example, an episode from AranyaParva of the Mahabharata (http://www.periplusbooks.com/india_texts/yaksha/yp09.html) will be of immense help. Let us have a look at the episode.

Towards the end of Pandavas’ exile, they took pity on an agonized Brahmin who complained that a deer had taken
his Arani and fled fast. The Brahmin used to light fire with the help of Arani for performing Vedic rituals. The Pandavas decided to help the Brahmin and so chased the deer but failed. In this quest, the princes got tired and their throats parched. The youngest of the princes was able to discover water in a pond nearby and went to quench his thirst and bring some water for his brothers. But a frightening and intimidating sound suddenly surprised him when he started drinking the pure water. The voice warned him to answer his questions before he drank water. Unfazed, Sahadeo drank the water and fell fainting on the bank. The eldest of the Pandavas sent Nakul to find out the whereabouts of Sahadeo. But he also met the same fate since he too did not heed to the mysterious voice. Yudhisthir later sent Arjuna and then Bhima and they too met the same fate.

When none of the brothers returned with water, Yudhisthir himself started in search of them. He found all his brothers lying dead. He decided to drink some water from the lake. But when the voice warned him, Yudhisthir assured him that he would answer all his questions. Before putting the questions to Yudhisthir, the voice took shape and appeared as Yaksha. The Yaksha asked 18 questions = with philosophical and meta-physical ramifications. The Yaksha-Yudhisthir dialogue is embodied in the Madhya Parva of the Mahabharata.

The Yaksha was overjoyed to listen to the answers and asked Yudhisthir to seek the life of any one of his brothers. Yudhisthir asked for Nakul’s life. At this, Yaksha again asked why he asked for Nakul’s life when he could have asked either for the valorous Bhima or mighty Arjuna. Yudhisthir again advocated in favor of Nakul since he himself being Kunti’s son was alive. Dharma required one son of Madri also to remain alive. Satisfied and overwhelmed, Yaksha brought to life all the dead brothers. Yaksha- Yudhisthir conversation is a divine gem and an ocean of wisdom. It is difficult to talk about the entire conversation but some questions and their answers are quoted as follows:

Yaksha: What is heavier than earth, higher than heavens, faster than the wind and more numerous than straws?
Yudhishthira: One’s mother is heavier than the earth; one’s father is higher than the mountains. The mind is faster than wind and our worries are more numerous than straws.

Yaksha: Who is the friend of a traveler? Who is the friend of one who is ill and one who is dying?
Yudhishthira: The friend of a traveler is his companion. The physician is the friend of one who is sick and a dying man’s friend is charity.

Yaksha: What is that which, when renounced, makes one lovable? What is that which is renounced makes happy and wealthy?
Yudhishthira: Pride, if renounced makes one lovable; by renouncing desire one becomes wealthy; and to renounce avarice is to obtain happiness.

Yaksha: Which enemy is invincible? What constitutes an incurable disease? What sort of man is noble and what sort is ignoble?
Yudhishthira: Anger is the invincible enemy. Covetousness constitutes a disease that is incurable. He is noble who desires the well-being of all creatures, and he is ignoble who is without mercy.

Yaksha asked: Who is truly happy? What is the greatest wonder? What is the path? And what is the news?
Yudhishthira: He who has no debts is truly happy. Day after day countless people die. Yet the living wish to live forever. O Lord, what can be a greater wonder? Argument leads to no certain conclusion, the Srutis are different from one another; there is not even one Rishi whose opinion can be accepted by all; the truth about Dharma and duty is hidden in caves of our heart: therefore, that alone is the path along which the great have trod. This world full of ignorance is like a pan. The sun is fire, the days and nights are fuel. The months and the seasons constitute the wooden ladle. Time is the cook that is cooking all creatures in that pan (with such aids).

The episode will not only enlighten students but also orient them to try answering questions carefully with a proper command over words and sentences.

**Teaching English through mobile and projectors**

The primary purpose of English teaching today is to convert pupils into products and hence an effective communication skill comes into picture. Teachers in the rural backdrop of almost all countries where English happens to be a second language have to realize this fact. Our students need to be exposed to those skills which can make them employable. While rural areas lack in the required ambience, teachers can make much use of the easily available resources. Mobile phones which have become common even in rural areas can work as a panacea to many challenges of teaching English. True, that all students cannot afford cell phones, teachers can use their own mobile phones for the purpose of teaching provided the school provides them with a projector. Selection of required materials based on a country’s cultural faith and episodes of sacred texts converted into visuals can help students relate to their roots and in turn motivate them. One cannot deny the fact that visuals speak more than words. In Indian villages, teachings of Lord Budhha, Mahaveera, Gandhi, Tagore, and Mother Teresa can ignite the minds of young learners and benefit them. After showing them these clips, the teacher can assign them tasks of developing these into conversational paragraphs through role plays. Sincere teachers can also make selections and grading of these assignments and provide their students with meaningful suggestions.
Students often feel more attracted towards images and photographs. This can be converted into an opportunity by an English teacher. Let us allow our students to narrate stories in English in turns. While this can be recorded in a multi-media lab, teachers in rural areas can record these through their mobile and later play with the help of projector. Some selected recordings can be later shown and explained in the classroom. This activity will encourage other students also to come forward and prompt many others to participate. The teacher has to mark the lapses of students during their participation and later explain them in details focusing on pronunciation, lip and other body movements. Such endeavour of teachers can make every classroom very eventful and the English teacher will feel a sense of achievement.

Likewise, English teachers in rural areas can use advertisements to teach English.

### Teaching through advertisements

In an age where English teachers refer to the use of online teaching either through YouTube, social networking and other websites, it may still appear a romantic illusion in rural areas. However, there are other ways through which English can be taught with the help of advertisements. Since advertisements are audio-video, students tend to get more attracted towards them. Most of the advertisements because of their punch lines often can be easily remembered by students in rural areas. These one line tags can be assigned to students as pattern practice through which students can develop grammatically correct sentence formations. Some of these advertisements can also be a mix of code switching and code-mixing.

- **What an idea, Sirjee! --- Idea Mobile**
- **“I think, therefore IBM”. -- IBM ThinkPad**
- **“Let’s make things better” --- Philips**
- **We Make the Things that Make India Proud. --- L&T**
- **“Express yourself every day.” — Philips**
- **“Eye it. Try it. Buy it.” — Chevrolet**
- **“Have a break, have a Kit Kat” — Kit Kat chocolate**

While teaching English through advertisements involves our purpose of teaching grammar, teachers can also resort to some ads which are a queer mix of Hinglish. But a careful teacher of English can also assign the task of translation, which will make his students use his vocabulary and grammatical skills. Teachers have to be extra conscious while choosing catchy slogans from other languages lest it interfere with any culture.

- **Hungry Kya (Are you Hungry?) - Domino’s Pizza**
- **YehDilmaange more (Our hearts want more) - Pepsi**
- **Pal banaye magical (Make every moment magical) – Lays**
- **Hum meinhai hero (There’s a hero in everyone) – Hero Motocorp**
- **Kyaaap Close Up kartehain? (Do you use Close Up toothpaste?) – Close-Up**

Thus, the paper has made numerous arguments in favour of teaching English through technology and other means in rural areas. But as teachers of English, we have to remain strictly aware of students picking up haphazard spellings and short expressions inappropriate for Standard English. As teachers of English, we cannot forget the fact that digital language gaining popularity on our cells and blogs stealthily makes their presence on examination scripts. Short expressions such as CUall, Goodnite, RUOK, multi-tasking, lol, b/w, st” asap,CUSN, etc. cannot be considered part of standard English. The excessive use of technology may often irritate us as it is no wonder to receive unnecessary and untoward calls at odd hours.

### Conclusion

The discussion made in this paper does not intend to eliminate the use of text books in the classrooms. All technical gadgets or tools are mere substitutes to books. Of course, the substitutes are adopted as teaching materials just to make language teaching more relaxed rather than rigorous, friendlier rather than intimidating and more creative and goal-oriented rather than cumbersome and haphazard. Technology-integrated language teaching can, of course, be made more fruitful by the dual and combined efforts of the teacher and the taught. It is quite significant to note that ultimately it is the teacher (the man) who with his careful planning can control technology (the machine) since technical glitches may have well-defined remedies yet they stand far behind teachers who possess fountains of forgiveness and oceans of optimism. The teacher’s interference at the right moment in the classroom has appeared more remedial in all times and herein lies his innovation. The real English teaching can be realized not in the segregation of different units of grammar and composition but in its integration, says Widdowson.

### Conflict of Interests

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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