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Multiple Interactive Learning Methodology to Enhance English Language Learning of Tribal Learners

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Abstract:

The low English proficiency rate of Scheduled Tribes is a serious peril to Indian education. It is noteworthy even to Tamil Nadu, the state with relatively high rate in professional competency. The intensity of the problem is reflected by the dropouts of the tribal learners in high school, posing a phobia in English. The increase in the number of failures and dropouts in the schools of Sollur, Masinagudy and Kotagiri is identified as a major cause for the aversion of learning English. A Pilot study is carried out in Sollur, the most academically diffident tribal hamlet of Nilgiris District. The lack of adeptness in English language is recognized as a major barrier to the education of Tribal learners. The unsuitable syllabus and the conventional pedagogy of English develop an unpromising approach in learners towards learning. The fear of learning a foreign language is one of the factors to prevent their higher education because English language is a mandatory at higher level. It is clear that tribal learners cannot associate their English lessons with their own lifestyles. They undergo cultural shocks, emotional instability and academic irrelevance with school curriculum and teaching of English language. Though the Government has provided good resources, smart classrooms and scholarships for the betterment of learners, the responsibility of their educational upbringing lies ultimately in the hands of teachers.

The paper is based upon the pilot study conducted to understand the problems in acquiring English as a second language by tribal learners with special reference to teaching English through MILA pedagogy. It describes the language learning problems of tribal learners and suggests ways to make learning interesting, interactive and fun through culturally oriented

study material. A large number of underprivileged groups of population in India remain unable to be a part and parcel of the Country's development. The result is that they feel ruined and refuted in their own land. It is severe in the case of Tribes, who are socially and economically marginalized. This deprivation of the group by the society is reflected in their educational backwardness. In spite of various privileges offered by governments to encourage tribal learners, a vast majority of tribal population remain far behind in education. Though children get enrolled in schools at the early age of six, less percentage of students complete grade ten.

Keywords: tribal learners, Indian, education, English language.

Need and significance of the study

Education is crucial to development as it provides the individual adequate skills for participating in various socio- economic endeavours. Education enables human beings to understand the psychodynamics among the substantial levitation surrounding them and help them to transform their acquired knowledge into deeds. Realizing the importance of education, the Government of India formulated various measures to promote education. Article 45 of the Directive Principles of State Policy emphasized the role of State to provide free and compulsory education to all children up to the age of 14 years. Though, there was a gradual increase in general literacy rate, educational status of the underprivileged groups, in particular, of the scheduled tribes is in pathetic condition.

Being illiterate, the tribal people are devoid of most of the benefits rendered by Government and the non- profitable concerns run by missionaries. Due to illiteracy, people of these communities are totally ignorant of basic principles of health, law and order, career guidance, inheritance of property and so on. Many tribes refrain from sending children to school due to the fear of losing their legacy occupation such as snake hunting and so on. Children on the other hand have an intuitive phobia on learning English. The increase in the number of failures and dropouts in the Tribal Residential School, Kunjappanai is discussed. The observation has impacted the Researchers to undertake a study on the *Educational backwardness of Tribal learners of Kottagiri with reference to English Language Learning and Teaching*.

According to *Israel (1998)*, recognizing the community as the unit of study is an

important principle of any research. A pilot study is carried out to diagnose the tribal learners' proficiency in English. It was scrutinized that the schema level was a little low in all the four language skills. According to *Richard. M .Dorson (1965)*, "in the objectives to study about a society, a historical perspective is essential in an analysis of past and in planning the future". The knowledge of past is important to understand the present and predict the future. Teaching an English lesson or a grammar component with the help of the tribal history would actually eradicate the fear of learning. The study of folklore is one of the means to understand the folklife. The observations and data collected in the Pilot study are being discussed.

Objectives of the study

- To study the culture of the Irula community through the folklore
- To use the folklore, books on tribal culture, paintings on their lifestyle as resources for teaching English
- To understand the difficulties the tribal learners go through in the acquisition of English as a second language

Methodology

A pilot study is conducted using Exploratory Action Research to explore, understand and improve the teaching and learning of English using the cultural assimilations as a resource. The investigators conducted a diagnostic test on the four language skills and observed that the scores of the tribal learners were relatively lower than the other students. A visit has been made to the Palada Tribal Research Centre, to know more about the tribal culture and their lifestyle. A number of folklores, rich in tribal culture were collected from the centre to be used as teaching aids.

Irula tribes of Kottagiri

Irula is a Dravidian tribe spread over the three state of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Kerala, whom are also known as *Eruvalla, Iruliga, Illiga, Kasova, Urali, Kadupujari* and *Velliga*. The term Irular is derived from the word *Irul* meaning darkness. *Ethnologue (Languages of the World), 16th edition* reports the population of the Irulas as 200,000 (2003). Irulas are rigid in their customs and manners. The Irulas mark the threshold between nature and culture,

representing co-existence, harmony and symbiosis between man and wild.

Kunjapanni, near Kotagiri, a hamlet of the Irula tribe is nestled in the dense woods of the South-eastern slopes of the Nilgiris. Each hamlet or “Motta” along a wooden trail, has houses but not more than 10 to 14 families. The residents cultivate crops like millets, plantains and pumpkins in small patches close to their houses. Agriculture is the chief occupation of tribes and they manage to make a sustainable living with it, despite the free roaming wild animals in the region. They are fearless in trapping snake, frogs and bandicoot for their flesh, which is also their traditional occupation. The tribes are centred on wielding their prowess over the wild. The dialect of tribesfolk is known as *Aadivasibasha*. It remains only in its spoken form without a written script. For the tribesfolk, the transmission of oral literature from one generation to the next lies in their cultural dogma. “The local language acts as an instrument for the transmission of their culture and heritage.” (*Dr. Pauline Das 2013*)

Tribesfolk in Nilgiris

The tribes and the other backward classes comprise half of the Nilgiris’ population. The Thodas, the Badagas, the Kurumbas, the Irulas and the Kotas are the original inhabitants of the Nilgiris. While the towns in the district represent a mark of modernity, the people in the villages largely followed the tribal life styles.

Thodas

Thodas are the ancient tribes in India. Their outlook resembles the ancient Greeks in their culture. The Thodas live in Mandoozes. The name ‘Udakamandalam’ is assumed to have its origin in the word, Othaikalmandi – meaning the ‘single-stone dwelling’. Apparently, the early Thodas lived in the rooms or huts made of a single stone, and that is how the name must have come to usage. The Thodas rear buffalo, which is the symbol of their clan, and they sold the milk. The number of buffaloes he possessed judges the wealth of a Thoda. Thoda women smear the butter on their hair. The locks of hair are curled by this process.

The Badagas

The Badagas outnumber the other tribes in Nilgiris. It would appear that they had migrated to the Nilgiris from Mysore during the reign of the Deccan Sultans several years ago.

Badagu is their language, which however does not have a script. Songs, dramas, dance and many more contributions by the Badagas have been very popular in recent times. Over 75 percent of this tribe lived in the villages, which are known as Hatti or Halli. While agriculture is their main occupation, there are also professionals like doctors, lawyers, and engineers, besides government employees in this tribe. Some are even working abroad.

The Kotas and others

The Kotas are the large inhabitants of Kotagiri – which had assumed its name after the tribe. They were experts in making the farm implements. They were expert archers and hunters once, but over the years the traditional occupation stands as a past glory. Most of the other tribes, viz., the Paniyas, the Kurumbas and the Irulas live in the forests even today. Some of them work in the tea estates in the Nilgiris. Besides farming, these tribes also know hunting. They hunt animals for their living and also as a pastime.

The Kurumba tribe is said to practice witchcraft. If someone, especially a girl, fell sick soon after the kaali festival, the Kurumbas are suspected to have done black magic to the person.

In the Irula tribe, there is a strange practice. They would lay the newborn child on a big, wild leaf for a day or two and dry it in the sun. Thereafter, the child is washed and laid by the side of the mother.

Tribal values, culture & practices

Culture

Four tribes, isolated together, mutually interdependent, yet culturally distinct, are simultaneously exposed to alien custom. The culture of each takes a different course of adaptation to the new circumstance. The four peoples lived in constant and close contact with each other, yet were culturally and linguistically segregate. Any village of one tribe was, and still is, within a short walk of villages of each of the other tribes. But the four cultures have relatively little in common. The complex Toda ritual and social organization had only vague parallels in Kota life. While Kota dress and housing are similar to that of the Badaga, other phases of the two cultures bear but little resemblance. Both Kota and Badaga admired and respected the Todas, yet in spite of the high prestige rating of the Toda, the others took over very few Toda traits and those

unimportant. A third bar to intertribal diffusion is the matter of prestige symbolism. A unique tribal trait tends to be interpreted as a symbol of group status. Any attempt to imitate it by another group is violently resisted. For example, Badagas wear turbans, Kotas do not. When a few Kotas once took to wearing turbans, the Badagas felt that the Kotas were getting above themselves. Some of the Badagas ambushed and beat up the Kota offenders, tore off their headgear, and effectively blocked the borrowing of this trait. This situation is typical of conditions which prevail throughout India.

Each caste and tribe has its own unique configuration of custom, represents a distinct cultural compartment. Diffusion is impeded by barriers against intimate connections and symbolic considerations of group status. All the factors which made for frequent contact without acculturation in the Nilgiris are still valid.

A society with little gender and class discrimination

The traditional tribal system allows equal rights and participation for both men and women. There is no other human group in the world in which women's freedom is upheld to this extent, avoiding all discrimination in work. The women are given freedom to find and choose their own life partners. Divorce and remarriage are accepted by tribal society. There is no dowry system among them. Men and women enjoyed equal rights to property. Female infanticide is unheard in this society.

The Tribal Associations

The Tribal Association (or, the Adivasi Sangham) provided the much-needed medical relief to the tribes inhabiting the Nilgiris. And the Association is given assistance by the State government and the other Tribal Associations abroad. Besides, the State and the Central governments have their own schemes and projects for the benefit and uplift as also education of these aboriginals. Despite the sincere efforts made by these agencies at the economic and social development of these tribes, there desired much to be done yet. With the passage of time, rapid urbanization and the strides in education, some of the primitive customs of these tribes have been on the wane.

The wealth of Nilgiris

The various tribes that maintained and preserved their own distinct cultures and traditions constitute the real wealth of the Nilgiris and add to the beauty of the hills. Its tribal songs, music and dances are well known. The different tribes and their unique cultures greet and present a delectable picture to those who visit the panoramic and enticing Nilgiris. And these hills provide a good field for those who aspire to study – besides the abundant Nature – the life, the customs and the cultures of the various tribes inhabiting them for centuries.

Socio-cultural structure

Like all other sector of socio economic life, educationally the tribal people are at different levels of development. But on whole, formal education has made very little impact on the tribal groups. In the light of the past efforts, it is not shocking because prior to 1950s the government of India had no direct programme for the education of the tribes. With the adaptation of constitution the promotion of education of Scheduled Tribes has become a special responsibility of the Central and State Government.

Tribes have been living in isolation for centuries. The main reason of this isolation is lack of communication. To develop their academic status and economic conditions English language communication is inevitable. Failure in English communicative skills forces them into pathetic situation of the entry of prospective explorators and other anti- social elements taking advantage of the innocent tribes. However a section of the tribes have enhanced their potentialities in all fields with the aid of English language and the privileges bestowed by the Nation's welfare schemes. By teaching English to the other section of under- developed tribal learners, by their own culture and language will place them in the heights of success all their life.

Tribal songs and dances

There are songs and folklores and folktales existing in Irula Language in oral form. The Erla Naya language has components of grammar and usage. This primitive language has developed naturally in human society as people acquired the language logically by using nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, clauses and all the basic components of language in their verbal communication.

The Irula songs and folklore are based on agriculture which is their priority occupation, though some of them prefer hunting venomous snakes, frogs and rats. One of their songs is named as 'tene paatu' or 'came okka paatu'. These millet songs are sung by the Irula men and women while they are sowing, weeding, harvesting and removing millets from harvested fields. These songs are also sometimes sung on a pipe or a flute accompanied by a drum.

'Pee' means 'God' or family deity. 'Pee paatu' are songs on family deity. 'Pee paatu' songs are classified into two kinds on the basis of their contents. One is about deities, and the other about nature. The same line is repeated after every alternate line for some peepaatu songs. Another characteristic is that the words 'gunjmaada', 'punje' (worship), 'mallige' (jasmine), marulu caami (possessed God), kettiyakkala (younger sister) are found at the end of every line of the song. (Dr. Das Pauline 2013)

Strategies to enhance the English language learning of Tribal Learners by M.I.L.A.

The proposed new pedagogy is an activity based student centric teaching- learning methodology, enhancing student participation and motivation inside the classroom. The periodically scheduled continuous internal assessment tests help in identifying and providing special attention to slow learners. This system of teaching is an activity based learning system comprising of two hours language period, which are divided into 6 segments. This system uses an approach of 20 minute of teaching time followed by a 20 min activity time to understand and learn the concept letter. It also keeps the brain active throughout the session.

Activities such as jigsaw, POGIL (Process Oriented Guided Inquiry Learning), mind mapping, game based learning, critical pedagogy, peer- led team based learning, role play and scale up not only keep the students interest in the topic but also help them break down and easily understand challenging topics and reproduce the concepts easily. This system also helps the teachers to evaluate and assess the understanding of individual students regarding a particular topic.

The Irula tribesfolk is a rich resource that can be used to the maximum as teaching aids for the 20 minutes activity. The tribesfolk play a vital role in transmitting the history, cultural

traditions, and the way of living to new generations. Tribal songs and dances are the main culturally oriented study materials that can be used to teach English more effectively. This method would be more interesting for the tribal learners as their customs and traditions are handed down for the acquisition of a foreign language.

Conclusion

In an ethnographic research, to study about a community and their adversity, it is vital to analyse their problems in various perspectives and also suggest a measure that could help the people. The study of the cultural nuances of tribesfolk has enabled the researchers to look at it as a rich resource with its culturally indigenous material to acquire the language skills of English. Being the possessors of a wealthy culture, tribals would have the ingenious interest to adapt and tune to the prospects of a foreign language as English through their own culture. Certainly, initiatives have to be taken to evolve culturally specific study materials for the tribals. A learning environment has to be created in the classroom that nurtures the curiosity and a sense of easiness to learners through their own culture. The skills of language are equally important to the tribal community as it is for the larger world community. Practice and preparation in the cultural traditions intertwined with language learning helps the learners to understand and use English in all walks of life. Tribal history is the history of the world. Tribal culture has several components that are useful and fascinating to the other mainstream people. This ultimately makes the learning process much easier. The values and virtues of the Irula tribes can be contributed to the present-day world at large.

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