

Crossing The Language Divide: First Generation Learners' Experience in Government English Medium Schools in Rajasthan

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Abstract

Nowadays, the Importance of the English language in our lives cannot be overlooked. Substantially, English has held a prominent place in Indian society and the realm of education. Owing to its esteemed stature English has evolved into a highly sophisticated language, evidenced by its extensive body of literature brimming with profound ideas and intellectual thoughts.

This study observes the linguistic barriers encountered by first-generation learners studying in English-medium government schools in Rajasthan. Although the Govt. of Rajasthan implemented well-organized plans and policies to enhance learners' English proficiency. But due to limited prior exposure and lack of academic support at home, these students often encounter so many numerous obstacles. The primary objective of this research is to highlight the impact of these significant challenges on the academic performance and self-confidence of first-generation learners. This research also explores the role of teaching methodologies in bridging the gap as well as shaping the classroom environment. The investigation emphasizes the requirement for active learning and effective teaching practices to build satisfactory outcomes and minimize these obstacles.

Keyword

Language Divide, First-Generation Learners, Language Barriers, Fear Factors, Rural-Urban Disparity, Language and Social Mobility.

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Introduction

Today's world, Education becomes one of the most needed for a man besides food, shelter and clothing. It is considered as one of the most powerful tools that can bring drastic change in one's life. Nowadays, the importance of the English language in our lives is unavoidable. English has a prominent position in Indian society and is considered as a highly demanded language. Although English originated in Britain but numerous countries all over the world adopted it as an additional and as an official language due to the influence of historical imperialism.

This language flourished gradually control over vast regions in India. English education was pivotal during the 19thC and early 20th century, influencing significant social reform movements.

The Government of India has initiated regulations, aimed at enhancing the educational opportunities in order to make them achievable for marginalized groups of children and those who have difficulties accessing formal education due to geographical factors or socio-economic circumstances. The Indian Government recognized that there are a lot of learners whose educational opportunities have been negatively impacted by a combination of disadvantageous conditions. A survey by the Indian television channel CNN-IBN in August 2009 disclosed that 87% of people believe proficiency in English is essential for a career, while 82% emphasized the importance of knowing their state language. Furthermore, 57% expressed concerns that the continuity of English contributes to the erosion of our native languages.

When it comes to Rajasthan, it is a region where a variety of dialects and languages are spoken. Due to limited exposure, family environment and minimal interaction in English, these learners frequently struggle with sentence formation, pronunciation and vocabulary. The larger group of children who come from households with no tradition of attending schools or formal education. Many such learners live in an environment that is not conducive to study in a situation where knowledge about how to access and negotiate schooling is constrained. Lack of affordable condition, poor facilities for study at home, illiterate parents and the compel to engage in work for essential to the economic well-being of a family are crucial factors that create challenges for first-generation learners in our communities. Teaching English to these learners needs a more fundamental understanding of the exact nature of the barrier and its complexity of dimensions for example, the teacher, learners, and classroom environment.

English is considered to be a very difficult, global language. It is essential for everybody if we want to make a career in today's multinational setups then we have to move towards English. Most of the rural students cannot speak and write

fluently in English as a result of their inhibition. With the process of education reform, we can move forward towards the quality education and this is the new deal for educators. They should change the policy of the traditional curriculum, focus on better models and rebuild study material towards the positive aspects of education which can give positive results.

'Mahatma Gandhi English Medium Schools are introducing the free English education for students from underprivileged and backward areas. These schools are becoming a boon for first-generation learners due to the harmonious blend of mother tongue and English language. In 2019, Chief Minister of Rajasthan Mr. Ashok Gehlot approved the conversion of one hundred and one institutions into MGEM Schools. These schools in Rajasthan are relatively new and progressive initiatives by the Congress government, launched with the aim of providing quality English medium education to students, especially from economically and socially disadvantaged backgrounds. For decades, children in Rajasthan, especially in rural areas, had no nearby access to English medium schools. English medium education was largely confined to expensive private schools, which were unaffordable to lower-income families. That is why, it created a wide gap between government and private schools' students in terms of level of employability, confidence, language proficiency, and so many things. A significant backdrop exists in Rajasthan Govt. schools, particularly in effective English language instruction, and the current provision. Language plays a crucial role in education. It is both a medium of instruction and a determinant of social mobility. However, for many first-generation learners whose parents have little or no formal education, the switch to creates a major language barrier. This divide manifests as diminished academic performance, lower participation and reduced comprehension.

Literature Review

"Effectiveness of mental modelling based on multiple strategy instruction for enhancing reading competency in English among upper primary school students" by Thomas Bincy, in his thesis, which was written about to compare the effectiveness of Mental Modelling based on Multiple Strategy Instruction and Activity Oriented Method of Instruction in enhancing Reading Competency in English among Upper Primary School Students.

Melekoglu and Wilkerson (2013) in an international journal, evaluated the lack of reading motivation that impedes upper elementary and secondary school students' curiosity to improve critical reading skills and strategies to be successful in school. Struggling readers often appear to have a negative attitude towards reading

tasks and manifest low motivation to read. There is limited research on reading motivation.

In the Thesis “The effect of communicative approach model in teaching English as a third language” Deshmukh Prakash A. English is a tool of common means of communication alongside the prior language. English becomes a third language when it is used as a lingua franca between speakers of widely diverse languages as in India.

Shresta Tej Bahadur (1990) has conducted a study on an investigation of the relative effectiveness of formal classroom instruction as opposed to informal natural exposure in the development of oral proficiency in English as a second language in Nepal. Ph. D., The University of Connecticut. The study was done in order to estimate the relative effectiveness of formal classroom instruction as opposed to informal natural exposure in the development of oral proficiency in English as a second language in Nepal.

Alvarado, Ann S. (1990), has conducted a study on Discourse style and interactive tasks in the classroom of English as a second language. Ph.D., University of Florida. Teaching English as a second language, communicative activities in pairs and groups are common. Yet teachers know little about the quality of the students’ verbal interaction tasks. This study deals with a qualitative analysis of students’ patterns of participation in several well-known tasks. The basic research question was whether and how students judged assertive (active) by their teachers (passive) when paired together. The investigator also had the questions like whether changing patterns affected the patterns of participation as active and passive speakers and whether passive speakers participated more with active or passive partners. The results showed that students would be verbally active indeed

A study of attitudes of the vernacular medium secondary school students of Mumbai region towards English language learning Thesis by **Farhiz P. Panthaky**, discusses the problem of teaching and learning English due to many reasons such as low exposure at home, cultural gap in content, preference for rote learning, lack of resources, and language anxiety. English is sometimes viewed as a difficult or a foreign language, leading to low motivation or language fear.

Emerging issues of teaching English in the metropolitan city of Mumbai with special reference to schools conducting personality development courses. Thesis of **Meshram N. G.** focused upon learning English to sharpen the mind and improve confidence, as concentration is the key to mastering any language. Personality development is incomplete without the ability to express oneself clearly,

thus strong personality and strong language skills grow together, each supporting and enhancing the other.

In the book **“The Practice of English Language Teaching”** by **Jeremy Harmer**. This book covers classroom techniques, which are specific methods and strategies teachers use to engage children, making learning interactive and effective. Lesson planning is the process of organizing material which makes teaching goal-oriented and time-efficient. He also discussed about assessment methods for teachers, teaching principles and practices.

In the book **“Principles of Language Learning and Teaching** by **H. Douglas Brow**. It's about text explaining learning theories for acquiring knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours. These theories assess how teachers choose the best ways to teach and help them understand the concepts and relationships. Cognitive factors affecting English language acquisition in learners with different backgrounds and motivational levels, help in storing new information and building confidence. Teachers can increase motivation by connecting lessons according to students' interests and enjoyable activities.

“Second Language Teaching & Learning” book by **David Nunan**, focuses on task-based language teaching, this is about the meaningful ideas by engaging learners in real-world tasks where language is as a tool. learner autonomy and how classroom activities can promote real communication and fluency.

“Language Assessment Principles and Classroom Practices” book by **H. Douglas & Priyanvada Abeywickrama**. This book covers formative and diagnostic assessment methods for language skills, with practice tools for designing tests and evaluating learners effectively.

In the thesis **“A study on problem-solving ability of higher secondary school students of Shillong”** by **Langstieh Molvaree**. Basically, in this study the researcher explores the concept of Problem-solving ability by providing multiple examples such as a – basic introduction to problem-solving, what it means, and outlining effective tricks to solve problems. The researcher presents a clear framework for addressing students' problems and emphasizes that it is an essential form of learning and highlights how students actively acquire concepts principles and rules through the process of solving problems in real-life situations.

Purpose of the Study

Such changes have brought a lot of educational opportunities and challenges for the first-generation learners in Rajasthan, especially in the transition of government schools to English medium in the framework of the Mahatma Gandhi

Government School (MGGS) initiative. Often the first to receive formal education, these learners are usually from a socio-economically disadvantaged and linguistically diverse background where the regional language and dialects are the primary medium of communication. The abrupt change from a familiar home language-based context to an English-medium education has resulted in a challenging language divide that impacts students' learning abilities, participation in school, self-confidence and overall learning experiences.

Language is not just a medium of learning but is also a key tool in cognitive development, social interaction, and cultural identity. If the language of instruction is not similar to the language in which the student is used to thinking, this can pose a challenge for students to understand, communicate, and learn. The literature suggests that language and culture have the greatest impact on children's learning when instruction is linked to the children's linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Cummins 68). In the majority of government English-medium schools, however, the home-school language gap ensues, as the first-generation learners find it difficult to make sense of the demands of the classroom and those of their home language.

This study aims to explore the socio-cultural and economic issues that affect the language divide of FGLs in the government English medium schools in Rajasthan. Parental education, family income, occupational background, linguistic environment at home and access to education resources are among the many factors that affect students' adaptation to English-medium education. Some scholars have suggested that linguistic and cultural differences in schooling may result in inequalities within educational systems (Bourdieu and Passeron 72). So, it is important to be aware of these contextual factors when designing policies and practices that are inclusive.

Another significant aim of the study is to look at the way teachers teach in a way that helps the students with their home languages and the language of instruction. In multilingual classrooms, teachers may do several things, including using code-switching, translanguaging, bilingual explanations, peer learning, and contextualized instruction, to help their students understand and engage. The importance of students' first language in facilitating the acquisition of other languages in contemporary educational research is that the strategic use of students' first language can improve the learning results. In the contemporary educational research, the use of students' first language is emphasized in the sense that it can improve the learning outcomes and at the same time can facilitate the acquisition of other languages. This study aims to map out effective practices that aid first-generation learners in acquiring language, through classroom review.

The study also tries to find out the distinct problems faced by the first-generation learners in the English medium government schools of Mahatma Gandhi. They can be faced as a result of limited English proficiency, content-related misunderstandings of the subject matter, lower interaction in the classroom, low academic confidence, exam-related stress, and/or social exclusion. Indeed, students from non-English-speaking backgrounds are known to experience feelings of alienation and anxiety in English-medium educational environments, which can have an adverse impact on students' academic engagement (Mohanty 97). An examination of these challenges will give an insight into the reality of learners' educational experiences.

In addition, this study aims to explore the classroom context and socio-cultural context of the first-generation learners to identify the factors affecting the learners' language learning experience. The learning outcomes of students are influenced by classroom culture, teacher attitudes, peer relationships and institutional support. Meanwhile, socio-cultural factors including family attitudes, community attitudes towards English, cultural capital, and linguistic identity affect student learning and school engagement. Vygotsky has stated that language development is a product of social interaction and cultural mediation; the classroom and community context are key to language development (86).

The overall objective of this research is to add to the current debates about educational equity, multilingual education and language policy in India. Government efforts to encourage the teaching of English have been accepted as the association of English with social mobility, employment and educational advancement. But the effectiveness of these programmes relies on whether they meet the needs of students with a variety of linguistic, socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. The study aims to identify the challenges faced by the first-generation learners in the government English medium schools in Rajasthan and make evidence-based recommendations to the policymakers, educational administrators, curriculum developers and teachers. The overall aim of this research is to gain insight into the challenges and opportunities within the framework of English-medium education for first-generation learners and to develop learning environments that are inclusive, supportive and linguistically responsive in schools. The results will inform pedagogic practices and policy interventions that foster equitable access to quality education for learners of all languages and socio-economic groups.

Methodology

In the present study, it takes a qualitative ethnographic research design was used to explore the experiences of first-generation learners studying in Mahatma

Gandhi Government English Medium Schools in Rajasthan. Ethnographic research is especially well-suited for gaining an understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions, interactions, and socio-cultural realities in their natural learning environments. The study aims to explore the negotiation of the transition from the L1 (home language) environment to the L2 (English) classroom context, so a qualitative in-depth approach is the most appropriate method to consider these experiences in their social and educational context. In general, the primary tools used in the research are classroom observation and semi-structured interviews to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the classroom observation and students' and teachers' personal experiences.

The study is carried out on selected Senior Secondary government English medium schools of the semi-urban area of Kota city in Rajasthan. The schools have been selected because they play a significant role in the State's commitment to providing access to English-language instruction to students from a variety of socio-economic and linguistic backgrounds. The schools chosen are well-suited for analysis of the challenges and opportunities faced by first-generation learners coping with the language of instruction (English) in a context where home language and home dialects are still predominant.

The study uses non-probability sampling technique which is the Purposive Quota Sampling technique in selecting the respondents as the researcher could identify the respondents having the characteristics that are directly relevant to the objectives of the study. Participants are purposefully chosen as first-generation learners and in government English-medium schools. This sampling method allows for the collection of data from people who have firsthand experience of the phenomenon being studied. The study is carried out with about ten students from each of the selected Mahatma Gandhi Government English Medium schools and one teacher. The student participants come from a variety of socio-economic and linguistic backgrounds, and the teachers offer insights on classroom practices, problems, and approaches used to meet the needs of students.

Data collection methods include classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and questionnaires. Classroom observations are carried out to review teacher-student interactions, language patterns, student involvement, teaching strategies and classroom climate. The observations provide evidence for the researcher to use in order to gain insight into the role of language in the education system and the efforts that teachers make to connect students' home languages with English. Field notes are kept throughout the process of observation to record the important interactions that occur and contextual information. Students and teachers

are interviewed to obtain in-depth knowledge about their experience, perception, problems, and coping strategies using a semi-structured interview technique. These semi-structured interviews enable the participants to voice their opinions without being restricted, while keeping the interview to the core themes of this study. A structured questionnaire is also used to gather data on students' socio-economic background, family educational status, home language practices, perceptions of the education system in English and problems they face during the learning process.

Thematic Analysis is used to analyse the collected data, allowing the researcher to detect patterns, themes and relationships in the responses. The data collected from the interviews, observations and questionnaires is systematically organized, coded and categorized based on the aim of the study. Special focus is placed on socio-cultural and economic factors affecting language learning and teaching, the strategies employed to help close the home-school language gap, and barriers to the learning of first-generation learners, and the impact of classroom environment and socio-cultural background on the educational experiences of learners. Multiple sources of data are integrated so that the results can be triangulated, thus increasing the credibility and trustworthiness of the results.

While the study is small-scale and narrow in its geographical scope (being only in selected schools of Kota City), the ethnographic approach yields rich, detailed and context-situated data on the experiences of the first-generation learners. The study does not attempt to generalize but to gain a more in-depth understanding of the linguistic, social and educational context for these learners. The results would play an important role in the discourse of multilingual education, language policy, educational equity and pedagogical practices of government English-medium schools in Rajasthan.

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