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**Towards Context-Sensitive and Innovative Pedagogies for Enhancing English Language Engagement in Semi-Urban Regions: A Case Study of Kishanlal Public College, Rewari, Haryana**

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**Abstract**

Teaching English in semi-urban regions often comes with its own struggle and challenges. The teachers therefore have to factor in the reasons such as extreme lack of exposure the students to the language, cultural discord and disconnect and hence a feeling of alienation and disillusionment, anxiety on the part of the learner to open up with the teacher regarding their insecurities about the incompetence in the linguistic skills etc. before planning their English lessons for students of rural or semi urban spaces. This paper elucidates some of the context-sensitive and innovative pedagogical strategies aimed at enhancing student engagement in the English classroom and making English fun for the learners instead of them shirking the classes due to boredom arising out of disinterestedness and unfamiliarity. The case study is of Kishanlal Public College, the Rewari a district in the south of the north Indian state Haryana where the author works as an Assistant Professor of English. By highlighting teaching practices that were localized to suit the needs of the students and integration of folk culture, encouraging student participation, and employing digital tools, this case study is a revelation in how English language learning can be made accessible, enjoyable, and meaningful. The research strongly advocates a transitional shift from traditional rote methods to inclusive, learner-centered approaches that the learners with the socio-cultural realities of semi-urban areas can identify and relate with.

**Keywords:** English Teaching, Language Learning, CLT, Context Sensitive Learning, Classroom engagement, English Pedagogy in Semi Urban Regions.

**Introduction**

English language teaching and learning In India's ever evolving and expanding higher education sector remains challenging in the semi-urban and rural regions of states like Haryana where local dialects dominate in their influence and usage. Although the learners of these region have access to English language instruction now because of the increasing number of colleges, but the apathy and indifference of the students towards English classrooms is also a glaring fact. The students are invariably silent when asked questions and most of the times it looks like a one-way street in terms of classroom engagement. There is a lack of motivation due to outdated teaching methods and the monotony in the teaching pattern of the 'lecture method'. In places like Rewari where many students are the first-generation learners or come from the vernacular medium background, English is often considered a hard nut to crack, considered as alien and elitist, and therefore, traditional teaching methodologies

often fail to address the cultural and contextual needs of such learners. In colleges like Kishanlal Public College in Rewari, Haryana, English is often perceived as ‘the most difficult subject’ resulting in the hesitation and low confidence on part of the learners and passive teaching on part of the teacher. This paper seeks to explore how context-sensitive and innovative pedagogies can convert teaching English into an engaging and participatory experience, empowering students with confidence in the process. The thrust of the paper is on creating culturally inclusive, student-centric environments that facilitate language acquisition in making students more comfortable and proficient in an ‘alien’ English classroom.

#### Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

A lot of prominent scholars in the field of education have laid emphasis on the role of engagement in learning (John Dewey), the theory and concept of multiple intelligences (Howard Gardner) and constructivist approaches (Vygotsky) in the field of language pedagogy and acquisition. The transition from ‘method-based to post method’ pedagogies (Kumaravadivelu, 2006) has opened many avenues for teachers to adopt practices based on learner the needs and contexts of the learners. Kumaravadivelu has also given the three parameters of ‘practicality, particularity and possibility’ for making teaching learning ‘locally sensitive and globally aware’ specially in terms of rural and semi urban spaces. Vygotsky has underscored the role played by social communication and scaffolding, while Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences supports miscellaneous modalities in teaching and learning. John Dewey propounded the theory of experiential learning which also highlights the importance of student engagement through real-life contexts. Indian scholars like N. S. Prabhu(1987) have advocated the use of CLT (communicative language teaching) and task based learning ,particularly in classrooms where learners are from diverse linguistic backgrounds and are not exposed to English language in a large way. Some other recent work also calls for syllabus innovations that make room for regional and local identities and informal learning modalities. These and more understandings jointly encourage and advocate for a learner-centric and context sensitive strategies in imparting of instruction that move beyond textbooks of English and encourage active engagement.

#### Case Study: Kishanlal Public College, Rewari, Haryana

Located in the semi-urban district of Rewari, south of Haryana, Kishanlal Public College caters to a diverse group of learners, hailing from rural or semi urban backgrounds -many of whom are first in their families to go to college and come from Haryanvi-speaking households. Despite the compulsory prescription of formal instruction in English in their syllabi, most students lack the confidence the usage of the language beyond examinations. Key challenges include:

- Fear of speaking public speaking, particularly English.
- Over reliance on rote learning.
- Limited or negligible exposure to spoken English outside the classroom
- Teacher-dominated environment in the classroom.
- Lack of technology and multimedia as teaching resources.

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These challenges call for a need for a pedagogical model which is not ‘one size fits all’ and is rooted in local dynamics, oriented towards interaction, creativity, and an equal involvement of students.

#### Methodology

This qualitative case study has its basis the classroom observations, and student feedback collected through google forms. Some English language classroom strategies were designed and employed with undergraduate students. These included first-hand experiential activities, group tasks, personal experience sharing, and the use of local culture and mobile know-how. Outcomes were assessed through oral reflective journals, oral presentations, and feedback forms.

#### Pedagogical Innovations and Strategies

To make English engaging and context-sensitive for students at KLP College, Rewari, a range of innovative and participatory teaching strategies were employed. These approaches were aimed at not only made learning enjoyable but also bridging the linguistic gap between lived experiences and classroom instruction.

#### Integration of Local Culture

Comfortably bringing the elements of the local culture into the English classroom generates a supreme sense of belonging and pride in their roots among students. As one of the activities students were asked to bring to the class their favourite Haryanvi proverbs, one they all came up with the lists, they were made to discuss the meanings in their groups made by the teacher. The teacher made a list of the closest English versions of the proverbs chosen by them and in groups, the students picked the chits of English proverbs, and the teams had to guess which Haryanvi proverb was closest to the picked one in meaning or sense. The team guessing the highest number of correct answers won. Students were also encouraged to translate popular Haryanvi jokes into English and performed short skits based on them. This allowed students to communicate with vocabulary pertaining to the ideas of stereotypes, justice, family, society, rural life—concepts often absent from the prescribed standard textbooks. Students showcased a strong emotional connect with each other because of the similar cultural backgrounds and great enthusiasm while performing these tasks belonging to their own culture from their own regions. This took place with peals of laughter and great collaborative spirit among students, using English spontaneously – not because they were forced into it, but because they wanted to. The kind of low pressure and high interest environment Stephen Krashen advocates in his Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982) When mother-tongue content was used in the class as the basis, it created an environment for genuine learning supporting cognitive transfer, lowering the affective filter due to pride in their culture and it helped in enhancing cross-linguistic competence.

#### Drama and Role Play

Role-playing was incorporated profusely from their textbooks characters and real-life situations which allowed students the actual usage of English rather than just passively learning it. Activities like ‘play a character from your plays’ or enact the ‘Village Panchayat Meeting’ were held to make all the students take the centerstage without any inhibitions. Learning the dialogues and delivering them with ease on the stage was achieved while the students enjoying it thoroughly and throughout. ‘Interview with a local farmer’ made the

students practice question formation and debating various issues. This method was an integration of speaking, listening, expressions and body language. Without any fear of judgment, allowing the students free expression through performance, this helped making learning more collaborative and less intimidating.

#### Gamification of Grammar

Grammar games helped turn nervousness and monotonous classroom into comprehensive engagement and fun. As part of the Grammar Relay Race, the teams completed rapid fire tasks related to grammar correction as a relay. For example- 'Bingo Sheet' was done with Tenses in a fun way to revise different tense forms. 'Word Chain' helped strengthening vocabulary and spelling. Team competitions were held to which students responded very well specially the students who typically avoided grammar exercises began volunteering for the same in an enthusiastic manner. Errors were no longer a matter of embarrassment but became a point of laughter and learning. Deci and Ryan's (1985) influential work on Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination theory vouches for the success of gamification in the classroom which gives a boost to these two elements.

#### English Language Club and Peer Support

Creating an informal English language club aiming to turn into a low-pressure space outside the classroom worked wonders for the students. Weekly Open Mics were planned for poetic or prose recitations in English. Some mentorship sessions were planned for interview preparation, resume writing and grammar doubt tking sessions. Initially, students were also motivated to engage in healthy competitions by voting monthly for the 'Best Communicator'. Students gave feedback on feeling less judged and put under the scanner in these settings and showed increased initiative taking capability in using English informally.

#### Cinema and Media-Based Learning

Cinematographic adaptations of the plays and stories prescribed for the students were made available for them to watch in the classroom making it a pedagogical tool in bridging the gap between abstract learning and a visual storytelling and understanding of the concepts. A few of the activities in this segment were watching the cinematographic adaptations of 'The Merchant of Venice', 'Before Breakfast' 'The Envoy' 'Monkey's Paw' 'The Swansong' etc. with English subtitles. Post-screening discussions were held on the themes, costumes, cultural contexts of the plays etc. Krashen (2004) avers that the use of popular media 'provides authentic language input in context' helping students learn in a natural stress-free manner and reinforces listening, interpretation, and vocabulary acquisition.

#### Mobile and Digital Tools

Students' familiarity and ease of navigation with their smartphones was harnessed to bring language come alive even in their personal spaces. They were introduced to the apps like Duolingo and Hello English for practicing every day. A WhatsApp groups called 'English Buzz' was created for sending daily dose of English idioms, riddles, and mini challenges that the students were allowed to share with each other. Students were also encouraged to record a one-minute voice note on various topics like My Dream Job or My Village to share with their peers for feedback. All of it and more made learning very natural, spontaneous, peer-driven, and context-embedded. To address the digital divide and gap, those students without internet were encouraged to make offline recordings and activity sheets and discuss them in the club meet ups weekly.

#### Personalized and Reflective Assignments

These reflective assignments were designed keeping the learners interest in mind in giving them a kind of ownership of their expression, which in turn made learning meaningful. Topics like “Write a letter to your future self” created a lot of interest in students unleashing their imagination for their future self. It also helped them do an introspective reflection of themselves and some of them got very serious while doing this activity. The letters were shared in the class voluntarily with reflections and discussions. Other tasks such as Translate a folk song or family story into English made the students began to see English as a tool to conserve and express their own stories and narratives rather than just a foreign language skill to be learnt and memorized. They gave feedback feeling heard and when their assignments were read aloud in class and discussed among the peers.

#### Integration of Music

Music integration in the English classroom became very popular with students because of the instant boost and upliftment it gives, and students always responded very enthusiastically to music activities in the classroom. The most popular activity became the listening skill activity where the students were given some handouts with the lyrics of a particular song with some words omitted from it, students were made to listen to the song and fill the missing words in the handout. This made the students excited about the activity reducing the language anxiety. Music remains an underutilized tool which is of a very high pedagogical value which makes language learning highly organic rather than imposed. Studies in the field of language acquisition have supported this approach. Medina (1993) avers in the article “The Effect of Music on Second Language Vocabulary Acquisition” that music helps in second language acquisition by facilitating memory retention. Murphy (1992) agrees that the refrains in songs which are repetitive, are very ideal for language input and motivation. These theories do align with Krashen’s theory of comprehensible input due to music facilitating learning in a setting that is stress and anxiety free.

#### Conclusion

Teaching English in a place like Kishanlal Public College, Rewari, is not just about helping students pass exams, it is way beyond. It is all about changing how they feel about a language that they do not identify with, something that has been long felt distant and intimidating. This journey is a testimony that when we shift our teaching methods to fit the modules of the students—when we meet them where they are—learning becomes more of a joyful experience than a perpetual struggle. One of the most impactful takeaways from this case study is that English doesn’t have to be taught in a way that obscures the identities of the students. Rather, it should acknowledge the uniqueness in their persona and honour them. Adrian Holliday said back in 1994 that effective language teaching is not about importing a global formula but about adopting methods that adapt to the social and cultural realities of the students. That holds particularly true in semi-urban spaces like Rewari. Suresh Canagarajah has made a similar point in his call for more inclusive and grounded teaching approaches (1999). Why should our classrooms have to mimic elite urban models to be efficient and impactful. On the contrary, our strength should lie in being original and close to our roots—using what we already have—cultural narratives, peer collaborations, and even mobile phones—to make learning pragmatic and lasting . Although it comes with its own unique

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challenges- students begin with nervousness and hesitation. But something shifts when they see their everyday world being reflected in the English classroom. They start believing in themselves and become liberated from their fear of the language. Teachers, too, need the liberty and space to experiment with not so “standard” methods but far more meaningful ones. Diane Larsen-Freeman (2000) reminds us that teaching is not a rigid science but rather a creative, and ever evolving practice. The role of the teacher is no longer to control the classroom but to lose control and create a free space where learning happens naturally, through collaborated stories, laughter, mistakes shared with each other and building confidence together. In the end, English classroom in a place like KLP College should look like an invitation rather than intimidation. Through the methods rooted in culture, heritage, emotional engagement that is learner centred, students might not just ‘learn learn’ English, but might own it in the process. And when that happens, the language rises above merely a subject, but becomes a bridge—to achieve confidence, to harness opportunities and to the wider world which is students’ Oyster.

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