

Teaching English Literature at the Undergraduate Level in Rural Areas**Manish Prakash Dunbale**

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Abstract: This paper focuses on the challenges and opportunities of teaching English literature at the undergraduate level in rural area. It examines the unique socio-economic, cultural, and infrastructural factors that influence the teaching and learning of English literature in these regions. The paper will also discuss about innovative pedagogical strategies, the role of technology, and the importance of contextualizing literature to make it more relevant to rural students. It will also offer recommendations for the policy makers, educators, and institutions to improve the quality of English literature education in rural settings.

Keywords : Teaching English Literature, Barriers in teaching of English Literature in Rural areas .

Introduction:

English literature is a cornerstone of humanities education, it fosters critical thinking, cultural awareness and communication skills. However, teaching English literature in rural areas presents unique challenges due to lack or limited resources, cultural difference and no proper infrastructural facilities. Teaching of English Literature to the students of the undergraduate class in the rural area can be a challenging job. Most of the students who take Special English for their U.G. Specialization are from local Marathi medium schools. Not even form English or Semi- English medium schools. The students are of the impression that studying or perusing a degree in B.A. English will help them to understand and speak English fluently. But this is a big misconception. If taking an example, the College where I teach English Literature to undergraduate class is situated in the rural area in Nashik District. In this college most of the students are from rural areas nearby Dindori and have farming background.

Objective:

This paper's aim is to identify the barriers to effective teaching of English literature in rural undergraduate programs and propose solutions to enhance learning outcomes.

Challenges in Teaching English Literature in Rural Areas:

There are many challenges faced by the teacher to teach English in a rural area. Right from lack of well stocked libraries and an access to literary or authentic books. Less or non-availability of digital resources and no proper internet connection. Scarcity of qualified and experienced faculties. Many students in the rural areas opt English as a second or foreign language. There is also no connection between western literary themes and the student lives in rural areas. Many are afraid of English language. The teacher has to use translation method in the class room. The classroom of the villages are poorly equipped they lack audio-visual aids. Also there is less funding for extracurricular activities like literary clubs, theaters etc. There is also less students' engagement as there is no motivation for career opportunities in humanities. The students find difficulty in relating to text from distant cultures and time periods.

Opportunities and Innovative Strategies :

Teaching of English Literature at the undergraduate level in rural India presents a unique set of challenges, but also offers numerous opportunities for innovation. Here's a breakdown of potential opportunities and strategies to improve of English teaching in rural areas:

Literature can be used to address local issues, such as rural life, migration, and environmental concerns. It gives the student an idea regarding the current burning issues. If we take the example of the Poem, "The Deserted Village" composed by Oliver Goldsmith in the year 1770. We can teach the students the adverse effect of urbanisation, industrial revolution etc. by giving them real life examples. Rural India is increasingly gaining access to the internet and smartphones. This creates opportunities to use digital resources to supplement education and provide access to a wealth of online learning platforms, virtual labs, and educational apps.

Rural communities have strong social bonds. Teaching can be enriched through the use of local knowledge, cultural heritage, and community involvement. Students can be encouraged to be active in local problem-solving, which fosters both practical learning and community development. In this regard a survey was conducted by the teachers of Department of English in the Awankhed village of Dindori on 5th January 2025. Students were given questionnaire and they were instructed to ask questions to the villagers regarding their use of mobile apps related to agriculture, oxford English dictionary apps, and English to Marathi Dictionary apps. Whether the read their children's English books or watch English books. The students actively participated in this activity.

A few more interactive activities can be done in the classroom for the students to understand English literature properly, activities like encouraging group discussions, role- playing, and creative writing exercises can be done. Multimedia tools like films, podcasts, and documentaries can be used to teach and learn literature more interesting and engaging. College students, retired teachers/ professors of English can volunteer to mentor students, helping them with reading of different materials available. An innovative activity like peer reading involving students with in the class itself can be also done.

Parents involvement can also encourage to read simple English stories with their children, even if they are not fluent with English language themselves. Parents in city areas enroll their pupils in private coaching class which help the students till their matriculation or till their higher secondary exams. On the other side the students in the rural areas are completely depended on their schools for learning and proper understanding of English. One thing can be done as far as school is concern, Schools can hold workshops for parents to understand the importance of literature and how they can support their children. At the level of college for the improvement in English for their students, the college can arrange guest lecture, or book discussions with authors and literature experts can inspire students.

Project based learning activates can be given to the students as class assignments like writing newsletters, documenting local histories in English language or translating of folk stories and tales can make literature practical relevant. Teacher training programs can be organized for the teachers in rural areas.

Case Studies and Best Practices :

Teaching English in rural areas of Maharashtra presents unique challenges, including limited resources, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of trained educators. However, several initiatives have successfully addressed these issues through innovative approaches and community involvement. Here are some notable case studies and best practices:

1. Integration of Local Contexts into the Curriculum

Incorporating local literature and cultural contexts into the English curriculum can make the subject more relatable and engaging for students. By connecting global literary themes with local experiences, educators can foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of English literature among rural students. For example , “Jejuri” a series of poem by Arun Kolatkar.

Use of Technology and Digital Resources

Leveraging technology can bridge the resource gap in rural areas. Digital platforms and online resources can provide access to a wide range of literary materials, interactive content, and virtual discussions, enhancing the learning experience. For instance, integrating multimedia presentations and online forums can facilitate a more dynamic and interactive approach to teaching English literature.

3. Teacher Training and Professional Development

Investing in continuous professional development for educators is crucial. Training programs focusing on modern pedagogical techniques, curriculum design, and the integration of technology can empower teachers to deliver effective English literature instruction. Collaborative workshops and seminars can also provide platforms for teachers to share best practices and resources.

4. Community Engagement and Support

Engaging the local community, including parents and alumni, can create a supportive learning environment. Community involvement can lead to increased motivation among students and provide additional resources, such as guest lectures, workshops, and mentorship programs. This collaborative approach can enhance the relevance and quality of English literature education.

5. Adaptation of Teaching Methods

Employing diverse teaching methods, such as project-based learning, group discussions, and experiential activities, can cater to different learning styles and backgrounds. Encouraging critical thinking and analytical skills through interactive sessions can make the study of English literature more engaging and meaningful for students.

6. Addressing Infrastructure Challenges

Improving basic infrastructure, such as classroom facilities, library resources, and internet connectivity, is essential for effective teaching. Investments in these areas can provide students with a conducive learning environment and access to a broader range of literary materials.

7. Incorporation of Multilingual Approaches

Recognizing the multilingual nature of rural Maharashtra, incorporating multilingual approaches can enhance comprehension and engagement. Translating literary works originally written in English into Marathi or using bilingual teaching methods can make English literature more accessible to students. Sometimes direct translation method is used by the teacher to teach in class.

By implementing these strategies, educators can create a more inclusive and effective learning environment for English literature students in rural Maharashtra, fostering a deeper appreciation and understanding of the subject.

Case Studies**1. Contextualizing Literature in Rural Maharashtra**

Objective: The objective is to bridge the gap between the content of English literature and the student's local context.

Context:

In the rural context students can struggle to connect with the cultural and historical context of the western literature. A case study can involve selecting works that can be related to rural life, issues such as gender, caste system and migration. For example the poem "The Road Not Taken" by Robert Frost.

The above mention poem was composed in the year 1915. The speaker in this poem

has to make a choice between two roads. And he choose the one which was less used for travelling. This poem can be also used as a guide for the students regarding their career choice.

Method:

A workshop-based approach that includes group discussions where students relate themes of poverty, labour, and migration to their own experiences or local history. The teacher can also introduce Marathi or regional authors to show parallels in regional literature.

2. Interactive Language Learning Through Drama

Objective: To encourage student participation and improve both language and literary understanding through performance.

Context:

Drama offers a hands-on way to learn and engage with literature. In rural areas where students may not have strong English proficiency, performing scenes or short plays can make literature come alive.

For Example: - While teaching of **Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream"**, in the class the focus should be on specific, relatable themes like love, rivalry, and magic. Instead of reading the text alone, students can enact specific scenes.

Conclusion:

Teaching English literature in rural areas is a challenging yet rewarding job. By addressing resource limitation, contextualizing content, and leveraging technology, educators can make literature more accessible and relevant to rural students. Collaborative efforts among policymakers, institutions, and communities are essential to ensure that rural undergraduates receive a high-quality education in English literature.

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