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English Language Acquisition of the Secondary School Students Belonging to Tribal Area of Nanded District: An Investigation

Vithoba Pandit Khairnar

Research Scholar,
School of Languages and Literature,
S.R.T.M. University,
Nanded Maharashtra, India

Dr. Nirmala S. Padmavat

Asst. Professor,
Nutan Mahavidyalaya,
Selu, Dist. Parbhani,
Maharashtra, India.

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Abstract

Being an International language English holds an important position in school curriculum of India. It is introduced as a second or third language. The students not only study it as language but as a subject. However the performance of the students in English is a matter of discussion. There are some issues regarding English language acquisition at secondary level of school education. These issues are much intense in Tribal area of the country in general and Maharashtra in special. The remote, backward, notified tribal areas of the Maharashtra are known for the diversity of sociolinguistic factors. Nanded district located to south east part of Maharashtra state has the tribal region covering Kinwat and Mahoor tehsils. Most of the people in this area are the people from Scheduled Tribe and Nomadic Tribe social categories. The schools located in this tribal area are mostly in vernacular language i.e. in Marathi. Despite of the strenuous, Himalayan efforts undertaken by the state government, a sorry state of affairs is still rampant to exist in the achievement of English and the acquisition of English language of secondary school students belonging to tribal area of Nanded district in Maharashtra state is not satisfactory. The dialects, social background, weaker economic condition, aloofness from the

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advanced world, lack of amenities, health issues, ignorance are some of the social issues. Poor infrastructure, lack of teaching aids and competent teachers in tribal schools are some causes behind poor performance in English language. Students commit mistakes in spellings, sentence formation in addition to wrong pronunciation.

Keywords- Tribal Area, Scheduled Tribes, Nomadic Tribes, Adivasis, Secondary School Students

Language is a means of effective communication. It is acquired naturally by every individual. A child listens to the language spoken by its family members. While listening, it tries to speak the language and gradually learns to use it for effective communication. As a student he or she learns other languages in addition to mother tongue. In Indian school curriculum English language is introduced as a link language. It is taught to school students as a third language in Maharashtra. It is prescribed from first grade/ standard as L3m since 2000. However language acquisition should be central not language learning. Input is the most important aspect of language teaching. Language acquisition can only be successful when the message being transmitted is understood i.e. what is being said rather than how it said.

The language acquisition of tribal students is a matter of serious study. The students from tribal area hail from socially backward strata. These people are deprived, less privileged residing in remote hilly area. They depend mainly on forest resources. Providing education to them is a challenging task. The schools located in tribal region lack basic infrastructure. There is shortage of competent teachers.

Tribal Area of Nanded District in Maharashtra

Nanded is one of the districts in Maharashtra state within India. It is located to south east part of Maharashtra. The north east part of Nanded district covering Kinwat and Mahoor tehsils has been notified as a tribal area. Tribal area of Nanded district i.e. Kinwat and Mahoor blocks are inhabited by majority of indigenous, aboriginal communities called Adivasis. Scheduled Tribal population is a term applied by the British colonists to groups in India who by and large successfully resisted their control in the 19th century. 'Clans' might be a more appropriate term

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for these tribal groups. The population of this region is 347,726. This region is mostly remote, hilly isolated covered with dense forest. The people living here are socially, economically backward and less privileged. This is the most backward region in Nanded district. The Scheduled Tribes and nomadic tribes in this region are known for their traditional costumes and customs with own languages. The tribal Kinwat and Mahoor tehsils are inhabited by Gond, Kolam, Andh, Pradhan and Banjaras community. They differ in the Language they speak, in their cultural pattern and socio-economic categories. As the majority of these tribal living in the remote forest areas remain isolated, untouched by civilization, they are largely unaffected by the developmental processes going on in the rest of the state. Therefore these groups remain backward, particularly in health, education and socio economic aspects.

Tribal Population in Kinwat and Mahoor Tehsils of Nanded District

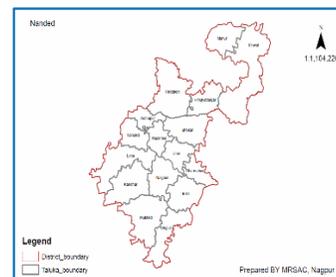
Name of Tehsil/ Block	Scheduled Tribe	Nomadic Tribe
Kinwat	71896	98158
Mahoor	14806	55232

*Source- Census of India 2011

Map of Maharashtra



Map of Nanded District



Secondary School Students in Tribal Area of Nanded District

There are 88 government recognised secondary schools offering education in tribal Kinwat and Mahoor tehsils. The secondary school students are the students studying in class

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ninth and tenth. This stage of school education is a bridge between primary and higher education. The students of this stage are adolescents facing crucial psycho-physical changes. Around 10 thousand students are studying in the secondary schools located in tribal area. The performance of the students in English subject is not satisfactory.

Issues Related to Tribal Society and Its Effect on English Language Acquisition

The acquisition of English language is poor. Some issues are the causes behind this poor attainment which can be explained as follows-

- 1) **Dialects: Multilingual Background-** Most of the students studying in tribal area of Nanded district are from different nomadic and scheduled tribes i.e. Gond, Pradhan, Bhil, Naikada, Banjaras, Vod- Beldar and Dhangar. These tribes have their own languages. The students speak mother tongue while they receive instructions in Marathi language at school. Hence in the classroom, these students cannot comprehend the concept explained by the teacher in Marathi. They fumble for the substitute words in Marathi.
- 2) **Poor Social Background-** The students from tribal area of Nanded district belong to less privileged, socially deprived communities. They are not well acquainted with the progressive world and indulge themselves in different rituals and social beliefs that constitute superstitions. This affects their study. The parents are not aware with the importance of English subject. Thus the parents fail to encourage their wards for positive learning of English language at school and at home. The discrimination between girl child and boy child is common in these tribal groups. Hence girls' education and health issues are ignored.
- 3) **Weaker Economic Condition-** People from Kinwat and Mahoor Adivasis/Tribal Taluka rely on agriculture. Since there are no medium, long industries here, people have to engage themselves in peasant activity. Many of them either hold less land or are landless. Around 18000 workers are marginal workers. The assets in tribal Kinwat and Mahoor block are limited to few people. These landless tribes depend on forest resources such as Tendu leaves, Moh flowers, honey, firewood etc.. Therefore the economic condition of these people is weak. This affects their mental and physical health. The parents cannot afford modern facilities to their wards like

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android mobile, laptop, PC etc. The lack of these resources results in insufficient learning experiences.

4) **Aloofness from the Advanced World-** Kinwat and Mahoor tehsils are remote, surrounded by hills and covered with dense forest. These tehsils are 155 km and 190 km away from Nanded district head quarter respectively. Many villages are still inaccessible. The residents of this region are far away from modern world. The infrastructure is not developed here. They are not acquainted with the modern amenities. The school children too from this region are deprived of these advanced facilities. There are no mobile network facilities in some villages even today.

5) **Health Issues-** Due to meagre income, the tribal people cannot afford healthy and nutritious food. They are also not aware with the importance of health. Most of the children and adults are victim of malnutrition resulting poor health. It directly affects their mental health as well. This distracts their attention and reduces memory efficiency. Majority of tribal people have poor health status, peculiar health needs and wide prevalence of red blood cell, genetic disorders that complicate their health problems further. Moreover, the inadequate health infrastructure in tribal areas to deal with such complicated health problems is a matter of grave concern. The students from such groups suffer from inferiority complex resulting in desperate behaviour and aloofness in the school.

6) **Ignorance of Education-**The people and the students from tribal area of Nanded district are ignorant of education. They are struggling to earn their bread hence pay less education to their children's education. English is very difficult subject for them. They are even unable to speak Hindi. Speaking English is a miracle for them. English is not given as much importance as they give to their vernacular. They never have the desire to learn other language in addition to their mother tongue.

7) **Illiterate Parents-** The students of tribal area of Nanded district are the first generations who do not have any foundation in English. These students hail from the families where almost every member has to support the family income, therefore no one had such opportunity to go to school. Many parents are illiterate which means no positive support to their wards in learning. There is zero exposure to English learning in and around the house.

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Issues Rising at School

a) Irregular Attendance in the School- Due to ignorance and low income parents often take their children to farm or forest either to assist them or to make additional gain. Hence the students frequently skip the school. This breaks the link of study. Some students dislike going to school and find English as the most difficult subject.

b) Chaotic Condition of Teaching English in Tribal schools-The major problem in school is that the teachers themselves do not know how to teach English to the budding students in tribal area. The teaching of English in tribal school is in a chaotic condition, because the students are taught English with view to prepare them for the exam and secure good marks. Thus the teaching and learning process in tribal area of Nanded district is highly pathetic. The students of tribal Kinwat and Mahoor tehsils consider English speaking as a great task. In these schools language learning is central and not language acquisition.

c) No exposure to English Language outside classroom-The schools in tribal area of Nanded district are in Marathi medium. The use of English is limited to only English class conducted in the school. Students and teachers rarely speak English outside classroom. The students learn it as a subject and not as a language. Hence English is limited to exams and evaluation. The teachers prefer Grammar Translation Method for teaching English.

d) Lack of Lack of Competent teachers in tribal Schools of Nanded District-The teachers appointed in the schools located in tribal area are qualified but they are unable to use English effectively. Thus they are qualified in English but not competent. They fail to use effective teaching method while teaching English. They teach English with exam point of view.

e) Scarcity of Teaching Aids in English Classroom-Many schools in Kinwat and Mahoor tehsils have shortage of electronic devices like radio, T.V., video, computer, internet connectivity etc. Some schools despite having these resources do not utilise them for providing better learning experiences in English to the students. The schools in tribal area seldom have any infrastructural facilities to teach English except black board and a piece of chalk.

f) Lack of Confidence to Speak English-The students from tribal schools are afraid to speak few words in English. For them speaking English is a tedious task. English is an alien language

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which is hard for them in several ways. These students find the sounds and words of English very difficult. Grammar rules and regulations and its application in writing-speaking English is a great task for the students in tribal schools.

g) Age factor: Adolescent Stage-Age exerts universal influences on the learning of language. According to Corder (1967) proposed that we acquire the rules of language acquisition in a predictable order. Some rules tending to come early and others late. The students learning in secondary school are the children of age 14 to 16. This the most vigorous stage of human life. In this stage children undergo various phycho-psysical changes. This is a storming period. It is very difficult for the children to control emotions and manage them. The students of tribal schools too witness these changes. To maintain their attention span is very challenging. The students dislike the complicated concepts and painstaking efforts in English classes.

Problems Faced by the Students in English Language Acquisition

While learning English language at school the tribal students commit some mistakes in English language. These can be brought to notice as follows-

A) Literal Translation of words: Impact of Mother Tongue- The students in this region make literal translation of English. The impact of vernacular is clearly seen. They fumble for the appropriate word. Marathi sentence pattern is followed while framing English sentences i.e S+O/C+V. Thus the wrong formation of sentences and improper word selection leads to the illegible language.

B) Wrong Pronunciation-The students from Kinwat and Mahoor Tehsils face problems in articulating words correctly. Since students use their own ancestral language, they are unable to utter English word. The multi syllabic words are hard to utter for them. The students from tribal schools do not follow proper pauses, intonations and rhythm while reading the text. The tone of mother tongue clearly reflects in reading. Many students suffer from spoonerism.

C) Errors in Writing-The tribal students do many errors in writing English. Spelling mistakes are common in their writing. The handwriting is mostly wobbly. They cannot follow teacher's dictation in the classroom. Due to no practice of writing English at home, students commit frequent, mistakes in English. There is often jumbling of letters while writing English words.

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D) Fumbling for the Words while Speaking- After mustering courage, students try to speak some simple sentences. They fumble for the words and cannot use appropriate words.

Conclusion

Thus the secondary schools students belonging to tribal area of Nanded district are lagging behind in English subject and are unable to speak it. The socio-linguistic aspects of the students as well as various issues related to school learning affect the language acquisition. The teaching learning of English is not up to the mark. Students are not interested in learning English because they find it hard and monotonous subject. Due to lack of English speaking environment, students do not show interest in English language acquisition. They study it only to pass the exams. Therefore many efforts are needed to arouse interest in students to acquire basic skills. The curriculum and syllabus should be upgraded. Special devoted classes to English language speaking are required. An awareness about importance of English as a language of opportunity needs to be spread among tribal students. The socio-economic questions should be addressed. The isolation of the tribal students from the rest the students is a matter of concern. Indeed the performance of students belonging to tribal Kinwat and Mahoor tehsil is not satisfactory.

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