

Applied Communication in Classrooms: Tips for Teachers to Enhance English Communication among Tribal Learners in India

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Received: June 18, 2024

Accepted: September 23, 2024

Online Published: September 26, 2024

doi:[10.11114/smc.v12i4.7224](https://doi.org/10.11114/smc.v12i4.7224)

URL: <https://doi.org/10.11114/smc.v12i4.7224>

Abstract

English language communication has a significant role in current culture. Teaching English language communication inside the classroom is a difficult task since it is directly linked to the outer world. Teaching Tribal learners how to communicate in English or to make them communicate more effectively is a difficult task. By analyzing tribal learners and the learning facilities that exist in India, this paper discusses some of the effective ways and methods to teach these students to help them communicate and express their views in English, which is an important need. Additionally, the technologically assisted applications which might help teachers in teaching English communication are also discussed. This study promises to provide readers with a thorough understanding of the need of inclusive education and the importance of address the disparity regarding English language learning and communication.

Keywords: critical pedagogy, contextual learning, participatory methods of teaching, Bi/Multilingual Teaching, peer learning, positive reinforcement

1. Introduction

Communication is the basic behavior of a human being. Communicating in a language means understanding the politics of a native- like fluency of the language. Communication is a way of reaching others by transmitting ideas, feelings, thoughts, facts, and values. Communication is best defined as the transfer of information from one person to another (Sharma, 2017). It is a way of reaching others by transmitting ideas, feelings, thoughts, facts and values. Effective communication doesn't always need accuracy but fluency. Effective communication does not always need accuracy, as it also requires fluency. Communicating in English is manifesting one's potential ideas to the world, where a majority understand the language, since English is hailed as one of the primary global languages. Effective communication in English is an essential skill in the modern world, widening opportunities in educational and professional realms.

The politics of the English language does not diplomatically cater to social class equally. There are various underlying factors that affect the acquisition of language as well as learning the language when it comes to socially marginalized learners. According to Elman et al., (1996) "Language acquisition is a process which starts three months before birth" (p. 7). Therefore, language learning and language acquisition are two different ideas. Language has a power of its own. For example, the tribal learners of all the continents are the 'powerless' when the scenario of communicating in English becomes problematic. Though the land is already developed, the minority being deprived of the opportunity to learn and communicate in English prompts the necessity to reexamine the definition of development.

English education in India is totally credited to Sir Thomas Babington Macaulay, popularly known as Lord Macaulay. But the perspective of education in India was far transcendental that any Western thought. History of Education in India and the book on fundamental concepts of evolution of various methods of teaching/learning rightly emphasized the idea that knowledge is gained to attain salvation (Jayapalan, 2005). Think Global Health Editorial Team (CITE) in their survey on growth regarding the Indian education sect illustrated the following:

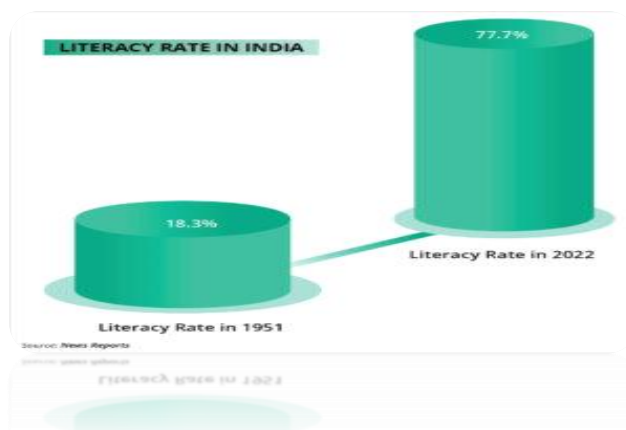


Figure 1. Literacy Rate in India

Currently, the English language plays a vital role in the fields of education in India. Most schools have adopted English as the medium of instruction. The question is to reconsider English as a language to be communicated rather than a mere subject to learn. Most of the students who have English as their mandatory language in schools are not good communicators.

According to David Corson, (1990) “The communicative competence includes knowing the alternatives and the rules for appropriate choice between the many codes, registers and styles of a language” (p. 80). The communicative competence must be viewed as including four areas of knowledge skills: grammatical competence, socio-linguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence (see *Figure 2*; Canale & Swain, 1980).

4 dimensions of Communicative Competence (Canale & Swain, 1980)

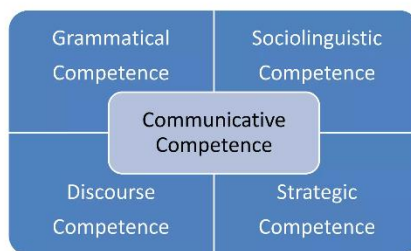


Figure 2. The Four Dimensions of Communicative Competence

Teachers who speak English in the classroom ideally satisfies two purposes— communication as a discourse for classroom management and as a discourse of input. The response of the learners should also be in English and it should be evaluated not on the basis of accuracy, but on the basis of fluency. The only way to ensure the progress of English language communication in classrooms is to focus on the fluent responses of the learners. The most important fact is that English communication in classrooms is not only the objective of English classrooms, but for all the classes, except the other language classes. It is a myth that English communication and the increase of competency in the English language is the responsibility of English teachers alone. It is the duty of teachers in all subjects make English universally acceptable, since the English language is adequate in allowing personal expression around the world. Thinking beyond the four walls of classroom teaching, learning will likely support this view.

Apart from the mainstream classrooms in and around India, there are less privileged learners in the outskirts of the country. The indigenous learners, for example, can be considered as less teachable when it comes to English language communication in classrooms. For tribal learners, who may face entirely different challenges due to their socio-economic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds, acquiring proficiency in English is a Herculean task. Being able to communicate effectively in English is crucial in current society as it can lead to both career and educational opportunities. Yet, it will be difficult for tribal learners to become proficient in English because of their socio- economic, cultural and linguistic origins, who are different from the privileged citizens of the country.

This paper aims at finding solutions for the following research questions:

- 1) What are the existing methods of teaching English communication in mainstream Indian classrooms?
- 2) Are these methods adaptable for indigenous learners in India?
- 3) What are the factors to consider while addressing indigenous learners' accuracy and fluency in English communication?
- 4) Which is has higher importance— fluency or accuracy?
- 5) How effectively can technology be used in indigenous classrooms to enhance English communication?

2. Method

Teachers can greatly improve tribal learners' English communication by employing learner specific strategies that respect and leverage their cultural context. This paper outlines strategies and tips to foster effective English communication among tribal learners, ensuring easy changes into the broader educational, social, and professional landscape. This approach is hopefully the best way to educate students on English communication in the classroom. The major strategies the teachers can employ include:

2.1 Understanding Cultural Background and the Cultural Challenges to Be Addressed

Tribal communities often use distinct languages and incorporate cultural transitions with their educational needs. Most of their language variants are scriptless and carry hairline differences. Tribal groups frequently have unique educational demands. Recognizing and understanding these unique aspects is the first step towards effective English communication.

2.1.1 Socio-Economic Barriers

Tribal learners often come from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, which can limit their access to quality education and resources. Many other factors beyond economic barriers, such as lack of parental encouragement, lack of peer encouragement, deficits in self-motivation, poor health, illiteracy of parents, involvement in household and wage labor, school environments that are not supportive, lack of applicability of the curriculum to tribal life, and lack of using the tribal language to communicate ideas better are hindrances to achieve desired outcomes in learning and communicating in English. For example, the socioeconomic background of children represented in literature, though fictional, cannot be understood by indigenous people in India. Chetan Bhagat's best sellers are still alien plots to these individuals. Mahaswetha Devi or Bama will be more realistic to them (Vimal & Pillai, 2024). Addressing these barriers requires a holistic approach that includes providing financial support, scholarships, and improving infrastructure in tribal areas along with reconsidering the curriculum to be more inclusive.

2.1.2 Linguistic Diversity

Tribal communities have rich cultural and linguistic diversity. This diversity should be seen as an asset rather than a barrier. Educators need to appreciate and incorporate these cultural nuances into their teaching methods to make learning more relatable and engaging for tribal learners. According to the Indian Encyclopedia, "Tribal people make 8.2 percentage of the nation's population, which adds to over 84 million people, according to the 2001 Indian census. Indian tribal language can be defined as essentially 'folk' languages, possessing no literary specifications of their own and spoken by people of ethnic groups who prefer to live in relatively isolated groups" (India Netzone, 2011). The different languages spoken by Eastern Tribal sects in India are depicted in *Figure 3*.



Figure 3. Division of Tribal Language in North Eastern India

The census defines the mother tongue as the language spoken in childhood by the person's mother to the person. On the 2011 census updates, out of 19,569 Indian mother tongues, the rationalized mother tongues are 1,369 in number. These figures were then re-grouped into 270 mother tongues used by more than 10,000 people under 121 languages. "The 2011 census report on bilingualism and trilingualism, which provides data on the two languages in order of preference in which a person is proficient other than the mother tongue, was released in September 2018" ("2011 Census of India," 2011).

The major 24 scripts available in Indian languages depict the tribal languages along with three minor scripts with slight changes. In short, most of the tribal languages often aim for dominant scripts in order to get represented. This situation is ambiguous since shifting a language from one linguistic environment to another script would change the transcripts since they would be written in different languages. For example, the Koya language from Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, and Chhattisgarh is scripted in Telugu, Oriya, and Devanagiri scripts. Most of the tribal languages in Kerala are scriptless, but represented using the dominant script, Malayalam.

Emphasizing the importance of learning English presents a problem. English, for indigenous learners, is still a foreign language and therefore the learners feel no inhibition to acquire the language as other mainstream learners do; instead, these tribes painstakingly learn English throughout schooling. Learning a language than acquiring the language will take significant time, with likely fissures in use.

2.2 Cultural Relevance and Contextual Learning

Integrating culture to the process of learning is crucial. It is important to encourage tribal students to connect their study of the English language to their own cultural experiences. Context can be provided from the surrounding areas, which would allow the representation through English language to be more effective. Then only would these learners actively participate in the act of appropriating the language to the very near context. Language and culture are inseparably intertwined. In addition to teaching the language itself, language teachers must emphasize the value of incorporating culture into their lessons and educating their students about the culture to which the learners belong. Most of the teachers focus on explaining the target language in language classrooms. This approach will be fine for mainstream classrooms where the students acquire the target language with the help of the exposure they get. But in the tribal classroom context, the importance of representing the source language culture through the target language may make things easier. For example, the text depicting the protagonist, taking a school bus and playing rugby with friends at free time, may not be easily comprehensible for tribal learners who might not ever seen a rugby field or experienced a bus ride to school.

The teachers can also find some alternative to help the learners communicate. The best way is to make the learners express what they have done and what is on their minds. For example, if a teacher wants to make the learners understand functional English, such as greeting someone, first the teacher should give the students an example from the teacher's life. Then, the teacher should encourage the students to generate sentences, such as greeting somebody they have already met or want to meet. Practicing real-world conversations will enhance learners' interest in English communication. The grammar rules can also be taught in this way, which is a practical way of acquiring the structure of English language. This approach is more effective than mechanically following what is including in the course book. Instead of making the learners understand the situation, the situations should be made relevant to them. This approach is called contextual learning.

2.3 Integrating Indigenous Knowledge

Teaching English in a relevant and engaging way can be achieved by using stories, customs, and local circumstances. For instance, educators can design lesson plans that incorporate conversations about regional traditions, folklore, and challenges facing the community, then adapt them into practice sessions in the English language. Education may support the idea of education for sustainability by promoting justice for indigenous people and respecting their values through the integration of indigenous knowledge into curricula.

Brazilian educationist Paulo Frier, in his "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" used education as a tool to liberate the oppressed. According to Frier, a humanizing education is the path through which men and women can become conscious about their existence in the world. He created a widely used approach to teach the illiterate. In the English language classes, the learners should be equipped to represent their experience in English rather than focusing on the syllabus or the grand narrative that English communication is central to the curriculum.

2.4 Bi/Multi-lingual Education Strategies

Though many approaches to teach communicative English are in use, the most effective way in this context is to use the grammar translation method. Regarding the term "multilingualism," some researchers have used it to describe individuals "who can communicate in more than one language" (Wei, 2008, p. 4), thus treating bilingualism as a particular instance of multilingualism, while others see multilingualism as an extension of bilingualism and a field of study distinct from the study of first (L1) and second language (L2) acquisition (Jessner & Herdina, 2002). Though this

method has pitfalls, it could be helpful for tribal learners at the beginning of their learning English language communication. Bi/Multilingualism in classrooms should not be considered as something that takes the learner away from the target language; rather this process should be the triggering force to familiarize others with the language. Bilingual education programmes may be of different types and include:

- 1) The use of a single school language, which is not the child's home language. This approach will not provide the desired effect in tribal classrooms, though it is a better choice for cosmopolitan schools.
- 2) The use of the child's home language when the child enters school but later a gradual change to the use of the school language for teaching some subjects and the home language for teaching other subjects. This approach involves maintenance of bilingual education, which will help tribal learners achieve the desired effect in the initial phase of language learning. However, communication is again a question in this scenario.

The partial or total use of the child's home language when the child enters school and the later change to the use of the school language is a form of transactional bilingual education, which demands patience and cooperation from the institute and the staff. Tribal learners in English classrooms can better understand new concepts without feeling overwhelmed by utilizing multilingual education methodologies, where instructions start in the native language or languages and progressively move to English overtime.

Resources like bilingual dictionaries, language applications, and educational materials with explanations and translations in both languages can be quite helpful. This approach is comparatively a better way to practically apply bilingualism to tribal classrooms, but it primarily demands the incorporation of competent teachers who are well versed in English communication. Then again, English communication could become a classroom phenomenon against all the objectives of the educational system.

2.5 Interactive and Participatory Methods

Interactive and participatory teaching methods enhance engagement and retention. The approach to teaching and learning are of primary importance to the learner, which should incorporate an active method to encourage learners to learn by performing activities individually or in groups, using self-collected or given materials. Ultimately, the method aims at framing and answering open-ended questions that come to their mind as a result of the activity. Participatory methods have the assurance of learner-centred learning, which is desirable in the process of education. This method is not the traditional way of teaching preset knowledge, but instead is a creative approach that stems from the learners, rather than the teachers, except when teachers correct certain structural errors. The teacher never criticizes the students' content; it is never what they say that matters, but the freedom to say or express what they can.

3. Discussion

3.1 Use of Technology

Technology can be used to create dynamic and interesting communication environments. The curriculum should offer a variety of engaging communicative possibilities, educational software, applications, and internet resources with an emphasis on communicative English language. Technology is used to break down the walls of the classroom and empower students to become global collaborators. This approach is another task for the tribal learners, since the availability of uninterrupted network connection and computers (or even smartphones) have not been addressed.

3.1.1 Visual and Multimedia Tools

Visual and multimedia tools are technological advancements that can be used in classrooms. Multimedia resources and visual aids can greatly improve English comprehension and communication. Explanations of complex ideas and topics can be made easier by using images, videos, flashcards, and educational software. Abstract ideas become more tangible and comprehensible with the use of visual aids. Technology through visual and multimedia tools can greatly assist learning the English language. Tribal students, who are not so familiar with technological classroom practices will be interested in experiencing such tools to learn a new language.

3.2 Multimedia Resources

There are many interesting and varied ways to practice listening and comprehension skills with multimedia resources, including educational YouTube channels, English-language movies with subtitles, and language learning applications. Diverse learning preferences and styles can be catered by these resources. When teaching English communication, the use of visual aids and multimedia tools can improve student engagement, comprehension, and retention. Some of the useful resources that teachers can use to help learners communicate in English are:

- 1) Infographics and flashcards like Quizlet, where students create and shape flashcards to teach each other interactively. Canva can be used to design customized infographics that explain grammar rules, idioms, and other language concepts helpful for English communication.

- 2) Whiteboards and drawing tools are traditional ways to teach English, but certain applications from Google allow real time interaction with others. 'Jamboard' and 'Explain Everything' are two useful multimedia applications that incorporate real-time interaction.
- 3) Flowcharts and 'mind maps' can be used to see how ideas and thoughts are connected to one another. This technology will be helpful at the primary level, as tribal learners learn to connect their indigenous concepts with the English equivalents, which will enhance their English communication and over time, the learning process becomes easier. The 'Mind Meister' and 'Lucid Chart' are helpful applications for this purpose, as they can help design storylines and conversations.
- 4) Multimedia tools like YouTube can provide access to a wide range of instructional videos on communication and pronunciation. These tools offer exposure to native customs, like communication skills, in interactive ways. TED Talks is another multimedia tool that presents difficult subjects in an interesting way; this approach can also allow for the use of animated lessons. 'Edupuzzle' is an interactive video quiz application that embeds quizzes and questions within the application experience. The popular multimedia tool 'Kahoot' makes the process of learning English communication interesting by making use of game-like tests and puzzles.
- 5) Some of the exclusive language learning applications are 'Duolingo' and 'Babbel'. Duolingo provides instructions on listening and speaking, which is more like a game than a study application. Babbel is more practical in learning English communication because it carries interactive exercises which reflect real-world conversations.
- 6) Audio tools are helpful in enhancing listening and speaking skills to achieve fluency. Some Podcasts and audiobooks are preferable for teachers who are interested in teaching English communication to tribal learners. ESL Pod and Audible are vast audio sources offering conversational English as well as a collection of interesting audiobooks for effective speaking and listening.
- 7) Communication is appreciated if fluency in pronunciation is achieved. Though it is not necessary to learn the accurate pronunciation for communication, there should be a platform for learners to understand how phonics work. 'Forvo' is a pronunciation dictionary in which the audio forms are by native speakers. Pronunciation power can also be used for interactive tutorials.
- 8) Virtual or interactive classrooms are better for indigenous learners at the advanced level compared to traditional classroom. Zoom and Google Meet are some of the common tools that were used during the Covid pandemic. These tools allowed others to interact with each other without worrying about geographical constraints.
- 9) There are language exchange platforms such as 'Tandem' and 'Hello Talk,' which can help learners practice speaking in authentic settings by interacting with native speakers. Hello Talk offers opportunities to converse with experts and real time corrections are offered.
- 10) The teachers can also made use of social media platforms and community learning platforms like Reddit(r/ English learning), Instagram communities, WhatsApp groups, and Facebook communities to share and adopt innovative ideas to teach English communication.

By incorporating these resources into teaching, the teachers can establish lively and interactive English communication classrooms.

3.3 Community Involvement

Engaging the community in the learning process can be beneficial for both teachers and learners. English Olympiads, Hello English, and other events are some of the practices of English learning regularly taking place in most Indian states. Planning English-speaking community activities, such as storytelling sessions, public speaking competitions, and cultural festivals, can offer useful language practice. Reiterating the value of studying English can also be accomplished through including parents and local authorities in the educational process.

3.4 Parental Engagement

Involving parents in learning can also enhance English acquisition in tribal learners. This approach may be difficult, as there are few educated parents, particularly those who can speak and understand language among indigenous people. Although adding more academic responsibilities, the teachers should take initiatives to make parents learn the importance of learning. Teaching is not only a profession, but also a service. The teachers should focus more on providing moral support to those who are in need, which involves parents having an awareness of the educational demands of the classroom environment. Parents need to be addressed in their own language sometimes, which is understandable. Sometimes, it is hard to find available time with parents, as they are busy with their daily chores. Hence, government initiatives or local governing support is also needed for parental engagement in students' learning processes.

3.5 Peer Learning and Mentorship

Peer learning and mentorship programs can be particularly effective. Peer learning groups including tribal student communities and house categories in schools that foster English communication along with mutual support. These groups, apart from traditional language classrooms where individual learners need to learn on his or her own, create opportunities for the learners to disclose their communicative competence as well as talent without inhibition. Learners who have advanced language skills can help others to improve their performance. Students can also improve their communicative competence by using self-evaluating tools, which track speaking and writing skills.

3.6 Scope of Mentorship Programmes

Programmes and initiatives that pair tribal learners with mentors who are proficient in English communication provide real life practice opportunities. The guidance, support, and motivation from mentors can help learners become good communicators. This method can go beyond the language learning scenario to higher education and career advice and development.

3.7 Regular Practice and Immersion

Regular practice and immersion in the English language are essential for mastering English communication. Encouraging tribal learners to practice listening, speaking, reading, and writing regularly is the best way to enhance their English communication. Preparing learners to acquaint with children's journals, school magazines, and assembly quizzes are regular practices that make tribal learners create interest in the process of communication. Making class blogs and vlogs are the new ways to exhibit talents on a regular basis. There are many schools offering YouTube channels and Blogs that get others updated on regularly, including what activities learners are engaging in.

3.8 Focus on Practical Communication Skills

Learning practical communication skills rather than acquiring solely theoretical knowledge can make learning more efficient.

3.8.1 Conversational English

Conversational English has an inevitable role in learning English communication. Almost all the syllabus revisions should focus on including conversational English from the primary level to the collegiate level. This approach incorporates instances of everyday interactions, helping learners to face a real-life situation outside the classroom with confidence and fluency. This approach not only helps learners listen to a native-like accent but also exposes them to idiomatic expressions and cultural nuances. The significance of conversational English in the curriculum is reflected by opportunity to think and act in real time. Moreover, this approach builds social and critical thinking skills. Teaching conversational English assists the learners to learn the English language. Role-play is an engaging, kinesthetic way to build practical communication skills. Teachers should be trained in such a way to make the language learning process practical and more communication-oriented.

3.8.2 Functional Language Use

The importance of practicing everyday language does not mean that functional English communication has less significance. Learning how to address a gathering or to prepare an e-mail or report comes under functional use of the language, which is an added benefit for career exploration. Along with native tongue, learners should be molded in a way where they use the English language to compose, edit, and proofread English documents. In a classroom, functional English can be taught to learners in the following ways as prescribed by Dr. Qasserras, the teaching English to the students of other languages (TESOL) trainer: warm-up activity, presentation, concept checking, concept checking questions, semi-controlled practice, and free practice.

3.9 Positive Reinforcement and Encouragement

Positive reinforcement and motivation are vital in shaping confidence among tribal learners.

3.9.1 Celebrating Achievements

Understanding, recognizing, and celebrating every achievement can significantly contribute to the learners' language learning process, especially to tribal learners, who are deprived of any significant aid from the outer world to learn the English language. Conducting competitions, appreciating and celebrating their efforts through mementos, certificates, awards, or any such public recognition of progress can be powerful motivators for these learners. This positive reinforcement should not exceed a certain limit in order to allow tribal learners room to progress on their own.

3.9.2 Feedback

Feedback should always be constructive. Feedback should support learners by helping identify their common pitfalls and identify areas of improvement. Focusing solely on either strength or weakness does not contribute constructive feedback. Instead, feedback should provide information to learners to help them improve effectively.

3.10 Teacher Training and Resources

Investing in teacher training and resources is crucial for effective English communication instruction. For teachers' teaching to be effective in online learning environments, there must be opportunities for teachers to learn informally so that they can develop professionally in ways that enable them to resolve problems (Beach, 2017; Mayer et al., 2017).

3.10.1 Professional Development

A teacher should be considered a craftsman. The development of a teacher should be evaluated based on three basic ideas: methods of teaching, techniques of teaching, and strategies of teaching. A teacher can create and identify his/her agenda for professional development; this agenda should address the ideas related to human development, learning, and decision-making. To establish an identity as a teacher, professional development is a prerequisite. Teacher development can be achieved in many ways, incorporating institutional practices, materials, pre- and in-service courses, and many government-initiated programmes and policies. The following figure is from the official website of the North American Stamping Group who offers the following initiatives as part of their professional development:



Figure 5. The Modes of Professional Development

In order to teach tribal learners, teachers need to go beyond those who do the same thing in mainstream schools. They should be culturally knowledgeable and responsive. They should aid their teaching using appropriate resources to support tribal learners. The teachers who head the higher responsibilities should consider professional development opportunities, such as seminars, teacher development programmes, education-initiated meetings, and technological platforms for professional development.

3.10.2 Teaching Materials

Materials for teaching English vary in scope and type. Different methods of teaching use different materials. The grammar translation method uses literary texts as the material for analysis. But in situational language teaching pictures, concrete objects or realia, charts, flash cards, stick figures, and other artifacts are used with the core text. In the audio-lingual method, dialogues, drills, and other practice activities form part of the materials in the beginning stages of the class. The printed word is introduced at a particular stage in the learning process. The communicative approach to language teaching incorporates a wide variety of materials including text-based and activity-based language instruction. Providing teachers with effective materials, including visual aids, textbooks, and multimedia resources, ensures effective teaching and learning. Collaboration with organizations that specialize in language education can provide additional support and resources. Teaching English communication to indigenous learners demands cultural-specific teaching materials.

4. Conclusion

Effective strategies of teaching that are motivating, engaging, supportive, and culturally relevant can make tribal learners communicate effectively in English. Educators can create a better learning environment that is both inclusive and interesting to tribal learners. Teachers should know that learners are from different cultural backgrounds and understand the need to respect their cultural background. Through these recommendations, learners are being equipped with the skills necessary to thrive in a globalized society similar to those who learn in mainstream schools. Tribal learners can gain the skills and confidence to speak English fluently through a mix of bilingual education, community involvement, and real-world communication. Investing time and money into various technological and material aids can help implement these aims. Moreover, the blend of appropriate aids, methods, and techniques can help teachers fit the needs of indigenous learners to help them be part of the ever-growing world.

Acknowledgments

I (Binny Binoy) am extending special thanks to my Ph. D. Research supervisor and co- author Dr. Subramania Pilla R. for his valuable guidance and support throughout the research process. He helped me in writing the research paper and assisted me till the completion of the paper.

Authors contributions

Ms. Binny Binoy and Dr. Subramania Pillai R. were responsible for the study design and revising of the article. Ms. Binny Binoy is the first author. She was responsible for data collection and drafting of the manuscript and Dr. Subramania Pillai, the second author, reviewed and proofread the final draft. All authors read and approved the final manuscript

Funding

Not applicable.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Redfame Publishing.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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