Interdisciplinary Journal of Linguistics
Volume [17] 2024, Pp. 221-228

LANGUAGE CHALLENGES IN AGRICULTURAL INSTITUTES OF RAJASTHAN: A CASE STUDY

Bharti Shokeen*
Vhuyashi Das**

ABSTRACT

In Rajasthan, every year thousands of students appear in JET exam to get admission in BSc Agriculture courses in agricultural universities of Rajasthan. This exam is conducted by any one of the agricultural universities of Rajasthan. Candidates who have passed 12th class in Science (PCB/PCM) subjects with a minimum score of 50% can appear in this test. The JET exam is conducted both in Hindi and English languages. Therefore, in these agricultural institutes, we have a large number of students who are very competent in their science subjects, but lack proficiency in basic English. Moreover, in states like Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, English is not a compulsory subject at the secondary level and the students are mostly groomed and taught in vernacular languages. Therefore, the students who are otherwise very competent in the science subjects face acute language challenges which affects their learning very badly. In addition, there are a number of other factors accounting for poor English language proficiency among students in agricultural institutions. The agricultural books are published in Hindi also, and the students are allowed to write BSc agriculture exams in both Hindi and English language. Moreover, some teachers prefer to teach in Hindi or other vernacular languages. This paper tries to analyse those factors and also see how the teachers of various subjects address and respond to these language challenges with innovative teaching methodologies, pedagogies and strategies and motivate the students to learn English.

Keywords: Agricultural Institutes, Language Challenges, Rajasthan

1. Introduction

Ever since India gained its independence, agriculture has been the backbone and driver of its economy contributing around 18% (17.8) to GDP in 2019-20 (MoF2020). Nearly half (54.6 per cent) of the Indian population still depends on agriculture as a source of income. India has been ranked second in the world in terms of agricultural

* Sri Karan Narendra Agriculture University, Jobner -Jaipur
** Delhi Technical Campus, Greater Noida

production whereas service and industry sector fetched 9th and 5th rank respectively. Realizing the contribution and importance of agriculture in Indian economy, the Government of India, immediately after independence, initiated many sound reforms. Pandit Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, said, "Everything else can wait but not agriculture."

Following such reforms, the agriculture education system in India was also revamped and to assure quality agriculture education, Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR) was established in 1929 as an autonomous body. Along with the purpose to impart quality agriculture research and education, the Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR) is also responsible for the accreditation of State Agricultural Universities (SAUs), formulating and implementing academic policies, periodic revision of course curriculum, and other initiatives to assure quality agriculture education. Presently, under the ambit of ICAR, there are 64 State Agricultural Universities (SAUs), three Central Agricultural Universities (CAUs), five Deemed Universities (DUs) and four Central Universities with agricultural faculty. The New Education Policy (NEP), 2020 also has a special mention of agriculture education;

"Both capacity and quality of agriculture and allied disciplines must be improved in order to increase agricultural productivity through better skilled graduates and technicians, innovative research, and market-based extension linked to technologies and practices. The preparation of professionals in agriculture and veterinary sciences through programs integrated with general education will be increased sharply…" (GOI 2020).

Among the several other initiatives of ICAR, ICAR introduced and implemented a five-year project named 'National Agricultural Higher Education Project (NAHEP)' in 2017- 18 to strengthen the national agricultural education system. Under this NAHEP project, financial assistance is provided to agricultural universities from World Bank and Government of India. The main objective of this project is to develop resources and infrastructure required for faculty and student advancement, strengthen experiential learning, digitalization of education, and provide means for an effective and better governance of agricultural universities. Empowered and electrified with the powerful resources, funding and initiatives of ICAR, although the agricultural education system has been achieving remarkable growth, the agricultural universities in states like Rajasthan are grappling with language challenges at the grass root level of students.

2. Problem Statement

In Rajasthan, the students who want to get admission in BSc agriculture course have to appear in the JET exam conducted by any of the state agriculture universities. Candidates who have passed 12th class in Science (PCB/PCM) subjects/Agriculture Science/Maths with a minimum score of 50% can appear in this test. The JET exam is

conducted both in Hindi and English languages. Therefore, in these agricultural institutes, we have a large number of students who are very competent in their science subjects, but lack proficiency in basic English. The students enrolled in these agriculture universities in BSc agriculture courses have a very poor level of English. More than 80% students write their BSc exam in Hindi language as the university system allows them to write answers in both Hindi and English language. Though most of the teachers provide notes and study material in English, the students rely on the Hindi notes available openly in the market or provided by their seniors. Unlike other agriculture subjects, the university curriculum introduced English subject only in 1st semester which doesn't motivate students to learn and take English seriously. Moreover, the agriculture text/reference books are available in both Hindi and English medium which makes the students more handicap trying hands on easily available resources. The situation becomes more challenging and alarming for the subject teachers as they are compelled to teach and interact in bilingual or sometimes multilingual medium also. As most of the students have studied in Hindi medium schools and have been taught and brought up in local vernacular or Hindi language, they are not able to comprehend a lecture delivered in English. We can imagine a computer or statistics subject teacher explaining information technology, programming and artificial intelligence in a language other than English. Such a scenario becomes a sheer mockery of the whole series of initiatives taken at the higher level to impart quality education.

However, it is pertinent to mention here that in other professional academic institutes in Rajasthan like Manipal University, MNITs, the level of English is far better even among students from Bihar or Rajasthan. There are a number of factors accounting for the better language performance of students. The students cannot write their exam in any language other than English. Books/course material is available only in English and English is the only medium of instruction/teaching in class. Such factors motivate or force students to learn English fast.

This paper seeks to analyse the following questions:

1. What are the reasons for the poor English level of students?
2. What kind of challenges are faced by the subject teachers due to poor language level of students?
3. What strategies/methods are used by the teachers to meet these language challenges in classroom and how do they motivate students to learn English?

3. Literature Review

Backed by globalization, technical advancement and its massive contribution in economic growth of the country, the agricultural studies in India are at the boom (NITI Aayog, 2021). This shift calls for efforts to prepare our agriculture students for the inter-connected global

agricultural community and facilitate their access to international agriculture research (Gupta, 2017). However, it also poses a lot of challenges about the inclusivity and accessibility of students from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Researchers have investigated the language issues, academic policies in agricultural universities, perception of students towards language, and the challenges faced by students and teachers in these institutions (Gupta, 2017). The students who have studied from Hindi medium schools with Hindi as medium of overall school education grapple with serious language challenges in these agriculture institutions (Gupta, 2017).

As the Agricultural Universities have the mandate of research, education and extension, which is different from the other traditional universities, effective English communication plays a pivotal role at all spheres of research, education and extension. Effective communication is pivotal for dissemination of agriculture research and best field practices to rural communities, leading to growth in agricultural production and rural development (Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, 2021). Eicher & Rukuni (2019) also emphasized the need of effective communication skills in agricultural extension services and outreach programs. Studies have emphasized how effective communication influences research and collaboration opportunities, and felicitate dissemination of research findings globally (Sharma & Rao, 2020). Research has focused on the importance of communication skills in extension and how it is important to communicate effectively with farmers from rural backgrounds (Sharma & Rao, 2020).

Publishing agricultural research in reputed journals such as Journal of Agricultural Science and Technology also requires effective writing skills (Braun et al., 2017). By publishing agricultural research in international journals, the scientists can disseminate their research findings to a global audience and also attract international collaboration (Verma & Kumar, 2018).

4. Research Gaps

Importance and need of English language is emphasized by researchers for effective learning, research, extension and publications. However, none of the authors addressed the language challenges faced by teachers. It is very difficult to teach subjects like Computer, Statistics and English in Hindi or vernacular languages. This paper analyses the perception of both students and teachers towards language challenges and addresses the specific issues faced by teachers of all subjects.

5. Methodology

To understand the language level of students and the challenges faced by the subject teachers in agriculture institutes, an online survey was conducted through google forms. The online survey questionnaire consisting of 35 questions was filled by 144 students who have taken the 1st year BSc agriculture exam and are now studying in 2nd semester

to understand their perception towards English language. Another online survey questionnaire consisting of 33 questions was filled by the 8 subject teachers who have taught them in 1st year BSc course. The purpose of this questionnaire was to understand the language issues which they faced on daily basis while teaching/interacting in class and how did they respond to the challenges and also motivated students to learn English.

6. Analysis of Students' Questionnaire

Of the total 35 questions, a few with interesting response that highlight the language issues more prominently have been discussed here. Of the 144 students, 56.8% students reported that the medium of teaching in school was Hindi whereas 20.5% students admitted that they were taught in both Hindi and English. Another surprising thing was that 72.7% students wrote the JET exam in Hindi while only 27.3% opted for English in JET exam. 84.1% students reported that the teachers use both Hindi and English while teaching in class.47.7% students admitted that they find writing and speaking in English in class difficult. Another very interesting response regarding the level of English was that 72.7% students graded their English as 'Average', 13.6% at elementary level whereas 9.1% graded their English as 'Poor'. However, 97.7% students responded that they wish to earn their BSc degree in English.75% students admitted that they never read any English newspaper whereas only 22.7% students admitted that they read English newspaper sometimes.

6.1. Analysis of Teachers' Questionnaire

As per the subjects of BSc agriculture 1st semester, there were 8 subject teachers. Of the 8 subject teachers, 62.5% teachers found the English language level of students to be '**Very Average'** whereas 25% teachers found it poor. All 8 teachers (100%) admitted that they use both Hindi and English in class for teaching and instruction. 37.5% teachers admitted that the students attempted the BSc 1st semester exam in Hindi language while same percentage 37.5% reported that the students used both Hindi and English in exam. 75% teachers admitted that students speak '**Very Less'** English while responding in class. 50% teachers also reported that students can comprehend the lecture delivered in English only '**To Some Extent'.** Regarding improvement in the level of English among students in 2nd semester, 62.5% teachers admitted that there is '**Very Less'** improvement in the language level of students.

6.2. Level of English in Engineering Institutes of Rajasthan

Though the engineering institutes like MNIT, Manipal emphasize the importance of effective communication skills for employability, the teachers hardly face any language challenges in these institutes. Visible difference may be observed in perception towards language in engineering and agricultural institutes.

English Language	Engineering Institutes	Agricultural Institutes
JEE/JET Exams	Both Hindi & English allowed	Both Hindi & English allowed
Medium of Exam (BTech/BSc)	Only English Language allowed	Students can write in both English & Hindi
Books & Notes	Engineering books published in English only	Books published in both Hindi & English
University Language Policy for Degree	BTech Degree can be obtained in English only	Students shall be given degree even if they write all exams in Hindi
Communication Skills Course	Introduced in 2-3 semesters	Introduced only in one semester

7. Discussion and Recommendations

From the above responses of teachers, who have graded almost all the questions related to English language as '**Very Average', 'Very Less', 'To Some Extent'**, it is very clear that the level of English is very poor among agriculture students and that constitutes a major problem for the teachers also. Ironically, where the students must battle to learn English, the teachers are struggling with their Hindi in exams, lectures and interaction. The teachers of Computer and Statistics are facing extreme challenges as the technical subjects can be taught in English but these teachers have to deliver the lecture in both Hindi & English. The root cause of all language issues lies with the academic system itself that allows the students to write all exams till 8th semester in both Hindi and English. Rather than motivating and forcing the students to learn English, the academic system provides ample freedom to students on the one hand and creates hurdles and challenges for the teachers. Based on the responses of both students and teachers, the following conclusion has been drawn:

1. Allowing the students to pursue their degree in both Hindi & English, the academic system does not motivate the students to learn English.
2. Due to the freedom to write exams in Hindi & English, books and other study materials are published in Hindi also.
3. The subject of English is introduced only in 1st semester, and the students consider it as a hurdle to pass and not as an opportunity to learn English.
4. It has also been observed that some teachers prefer to teach in Hindi and local vernacular languages.
5. It has been observed from the responses of students that most of the students have studied from Hindi medium schools where the medium of instruction was Hindi. As a result, more than 75%

students in the class have written their exam in 'Hindi' and 'Hindi& English'.

Assuming that the academic system of exams in agriculture universities shall not be changed, following measures/strategies have been opted by teachers to tackle the language challenges and to motivate the students to learn English:

- Though the teachers use both English & Hindi in class, the ratio of English to Hindi needs to be increased consistently.
- Most of the teachers, specifically Computer, English & Statistics, are precisely making efforts like quiz, interaction on buzzing topics, group discussions etc.
- Most of the teachers are using smart board and ppt for teaching.
- Notes and study material is simplified and provided in very simple English. For students who are at the very poor and elementary level, notes are prepared in points not in complex paragraphs.
- Language lab has been approved where the students can practice English. One hour each day for language lab has been included from the next semester.
- For co-curricular activities, various clubs and committees have been formed that a number of events and activities have been organized such as 'Say No to Plastic', 'Voter Awareness Day', 'Finance Literacy', 'International Carrot Day', 'Ambedkar Jayanti'. Students have enthusiastically participated in such events. Such activities will increase their confidence level.

In addition, two major proposals have been made and one of them has already been approved in the academic counselling meeting:

1. To introduce English course at least for 2 years so that students start taking English seriously and make significant efforts to learn English.
2. Training & Career Counselling Cell has been approved that will provide training to the students from 1st year itself in the following areas:

- Communication Skills
- Computer Skills
- Skills Oriented Certification & Value addition courses
- Career Counselling Sessions

Though it is very difficult to revise the exam rules and policies regarding language and make changes at the administrative level, the faculty members are making substantial efforts in this direction by organizing events and activities. Recently, a 7-day workshop on 'Academic Writing' was organized and another one-week training

program shall be organized on 'Communication Skills & Personality Development' in March 2025. Such efforts shall surely motivate students and bring positive and substantial results.

References

Braun, A., Jiggins, J., Röling, N., & van den Berg, J. (2017). Enhancing the Relevance and Sustainability of Extension Advice: Lessons from a 4-Year Case Study in The Dutch Fen Meadow Area. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 34(2), 331-346.

Eicher, C. K., & Rukuni, M. (2019). *Farming and the Rural Poor: Agricultural Research and Policy for International Development*. Routledge.

GOI. (2020). *National Education Policy (2020)*. Ministry of Human Resource Development. Government of India

Gupta, V. (2017). Language, Politics, and Pedagogy in Agricultural Education: The Case of Indian Agricultural Universities. *Journal of Agricultural Education and Extension*, 23(1), 43-58.

Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare. (2021). *Agricultural Statistics at a Glance 2020*. Government of India.

NITI Aayog. (2021). *Strategy for New India @ 75*. Government of India.

Sharma, R., & Rao, P. P. (2020). Enhancing Agricultural Knowledge and Information Systems (AKIS) for Farmers in India. In *Knowledge Management and Innovation in Advancing Economies: Challenges and Opportunities* (pp. 153-168). Springer.

Verma, A., & Kumar, P. (2018). *Language Policy, Bilingualism, and English Language Proficiency in Indian Agricultural Universities*. In the Palgrave Handbook of Minority Languages and Communities (pp. 353-372). Palgrave Macmillan.