CHAPTER-I
INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This chapter begins with a discussion on the significance of English language in the present world and the status of English in India. It discusses English Language Teaching in India. It is followed by background of the study, statement of the problem, rationale of the study, aim and objectives of the present study, research questions, hypotheses and possible outcomes of the study. The chapter ends with conclusion.

1.1 Significance of the English Language in the Present World

With the emergence of science and technology in the world, the pressing demand for English language has spread far and wide and has become immanent. The revolution of information technology and globalization of business have brought communication, particularly communication in English, to the forefront of global market, industry and academia. As the whole world is becoming the global market and businesses spreading every nook and corner of the world, diverse and result–oriented, language teachers, professionals and technocrats are facing new challenges/problems in English language communication every day. A success in this competitive, computerized and global environment depends not only just on acquiring information and knowledge and soft or hard skills, but also on developing effective communication skills in English.

English has become the most important language in the world. The British had spread and introduced English in India, South Asia, Africa, Australia, New Zealand and America. It had spread like a wildfire to these nations and has become monopoly of
languages. The English language has crept into these nations like water under the carpet. The British intruded into these countries by introducing English as the language of travel, business, and exploration and then became the sole medium of instruction in education, law, administration and polity. Today, English is the official language of international politics, business, information, world banking, science and technology, academic research, space travel and global computing and connecting. It has become a link language. It is perhaps considered the most flexible of all the languages in the world today. Therefore, people belonging to different parts of the world widely use English. It is also considered the lingua franca of the world. There is a fast development and emergence of science, technology, information and research across the globe in Asia, Europe, Africa and Australia. Connecting between these countries is possible only through medium of the language, i.e., English. Therefore, a scientific invention in Germany or Russia will have become outdated and old by the time it reaches Indian scientists through translation. Education across the globe has multiplied the role of English language, because colleges and universities worldwide often use English as the medium of instruction and common mode of learning and communication. English in India has become the language of the Constitution, the Supreme Court, the High Court, and official departments in states and the country. This is how English is firmly rooted in the Indian soil. A person in North India can communicate with a person in South India through a medium of English. English has spread everywhere in India today. It has taken over the local languages and we see only the English medium schools everywhere. English is not only a link language, but also a killer language, as most of the tribal and indigenous languages have become extinct. People from different parts of the country and the world can communicate with one another by using English language. English language is sometimes a
confidence builder. It can take you anywhere in the world. Hence, there is a dire need for English in the competitive and computerized world.

Knowing the importance and widespread of the target language, the researcher is determined to proclaim its importance to the students in the tribal areas, particularly for the Erukala tribal learners. A close observation and witness with such disadvantaged learners for so many long years, so many complex problems of rural tribal area school learners have been observed and witnessed in the current study.

1.1.1 Status of English in India

English language was introduced in India with the intrusion of the British. English in India was initially introduced as a foreign language, but in recent years, it has acquired a distinct identity as a first language in some places, second language in some other context and a third language in other context, particularly in the tribal context. For Erukala tribal learners, it is the third language. Today, there is a distinct change in the attitude and behaviour of both Indian and Western people towards English in India and Indian English. Indian English has its own variety in every sense of the linguistic, phonological and phonemically. As the world is becoming one and it is globalized, there has also been a sense of language, English language, not just a language of the British, USA or the UK. Prior to 1947, English was a business language and language of the ruler. English was the language politically imposed on Indian masses. Post-independence, however, it was noticed that English had much deeper roots in India, than in the British rule. Today, the anti-English spirit or English hatred is seen diminished as the language is perceived as language of hope and better life. Indians in different contexts are more likely to have witnessed, or experienced benefits of having more competence in English than before. These changes in the
functions and benefits have brought about a change in the status of English from that of a foreign language to a compulsory second language in school and college education.

In certain context such as home environment, for some, it has become the first language. As we witness, today, English occupies a place of prestige, name and fame in India. People belonging not only to a different language groups but also to the same speech community make use of English in their inter-personal and inter-group communication in general.

In India, English is seen only to be the key to socio-economic prosperity, but for the social value as well. Parents, especially, on the one hand, those belonging to the upper and middle classes, expect their children to get the best type of education through English medium. On the other hand, people from the lower classes and the downtrodden emulate/imitate the model-setting behaviour of the upper and middle classes. This increasing demand for English and English education has resulted in the mushrooming growth of English-medium schools and educational institutions all over country affecting the regional medium schools, particularly the tribal learners.

1.1.2 English Language Teaching in India

English language teaching in India commenced with the establishment of schools by the British Raj in India. The British type of education system was followed initially in pre-independence era. Conventionally, English was taught through various methods such as grammar translation method, audio-lingual, and structural method. Structure-based syllabus was used into the state systems of teaching in 1950s and it was introduced as a major innovation in teaching. The purpose behind the introduction of structure-based syllabus is that language teaching could be systematized. After 1960s,
however, there were the behavioural-psychological and philosophical foundations of the structural method. Within the English language teaching profession, there developed dissatisfaction concerning structure-based approach, as the English language that was learnt through this approach is not organised or useable in real life situations. The structure-based or form focused-teaching of English language aggravated the gap between the learners‘ linguistic schema and cognitive ability to the point where the mind could be no longer be adopted or engaged.

Therefore, the importance was shifted to the use of the language in meaningful situations and contexts in real life. Many scholars and researchers, particularly, the British linguists argued that in English language usage/speech, there was something more involved apart from grammatical competence, the term ‘communicative competence‘ was introduced to signify this dimension to language learning and teaching.

Now, in the current ELT, there have been new innovations of teaching such as CLT, TBLT and CALL. Though there are up-to-date methods of teaching, still such teaching approaches are not able to cater to the language needs of all diverse learners, particularly the tribal learners, in different contexts. Apart from the teaching approaches, the materials designed and prescribed mostly represent the target and dominant culture of the learners and the language. However, the present teaching materials do not match with the culture, social and daily life situations of majority of learners in tribal contexts where English language and the materials alienate them.

1.2 Background to the Study

Culture plays a significant role not only in one‘s social life, but also in one‘s academic life. Culture and language are inter-related. Hence, understanding culture and its
relation to language is very important. From most of the researches, it can be understood that culture plays a significant role in language learning and teaching. It has been generally observed and identified that language is considered as a means through which culture is understood and expressed. Language is related to culture because it conveys the ideas in the culture. Culture is representation of what and how a particular group experiences/lives.

Hence, it is necessary to be aware of the culture of the target learners and how culture helps them use the language as a means of communication and how culture is represented in teaching-learning process of the target language. This constant awareness of the importance of culture enables the learners to develop their thinking ability in learning a new language. It is noted that the learners who know the grammatical rules of the language and learning of the vocabulary, are not in a position to use the target language sufficiently as the Erukala tribal learners are not familiar enough to the target culture, English.

Knowing one’s cultural variations is also significant part of language learning as a particular culture may mean differently to different learners in a diverse, multi-lingual and multicultural contexts. There arises a problem of using the existing prescribed materials/textbooks to teach English language in general and oral communication skills in particular to the Erukala tribal learners. The prescribed teaching materials/textbooks represent the dominant and mainstream culture, which the Erukala tribal learners are strangers to. They feel alienated and uncomfortable with such materials, resulting in poor language learning and acquisition. There is a problem with the teaching materials/textbooks and the methodology adopted by English teachers in the classroom. Most of the language teachers adopt traditional approaches in teaching the target language and more importance is given to two language skills
such as reading and writing whereas less importance is given to the other two language skills such as speaking and listening. Ultimately, learners’ proficiency, particularly the Erukala tribal learners’ proficiency in speaking is mostly affected. They are not involved in any speaking activity in the classroom. There is no target language speaking environment either in the classroom or outside the classroom for the Erukala tribal learners. Thereby, their communication in English is a major concern. Therefore, in order to teach/learn English language to the tribal learners, one has to know the culture of the learners and integrate their home culture to the teaching materials/textbooks.

Keeping in mind the points discussed above, it can be undoubtedly stated that culture and language are inter-related and inter-linked. Brown (1994) stated that culture and language are interwoven so that these two cannot be separated. Brown added that the learners and language teachers of the target language ought to know and understand the socio-cultural differences. They should also recognize that each individual is different from others. The unique differences between the learners and their cultures of the learners are vivid. As a result, language teachers cannot avoid conveying impressions of another culture where they realize or not, added (Rivers, 1981). Chastian (1988) stated that there are numerous principles/techniques such as role-plays, narratives, films, games, proverbs, culture assimilators, and culture capsules can be used for the language teacher to assist them in the process of acculturation in the classroom. Therefore, it is important to develop cultural awareness among the learners to meet the target language proficiency. Underhill (2012, p.3) provides the relationship between language and culture. According to him, language is viewed as a cognitive system or faculty of the mind, language as action and language as social practice. So, learning a language becomes easy when a learner is in touch with his/her
own culture. Hence, the researcher intended to find out whether the own culture-based materials of the Erukala tribal learners would be effective in developing their oral communication skills in English.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Tribal learners in general lack effective communication skills, particularly in English, because they are cut off from the mainstream society. For them, communicating in English is always a distant dream. There have been innumerable reasons for this situation. Following Martin and Lixian (1999), it is assumed that Erukala tribal learners are not able to learn/enhance English communication skills because the teaching-learning materials being used were not based on the culture and the social world of the learners. Eli Hinkel (1999, p.2) claims, “if the culture of the learners is not considered by the teachers and the material designers, second/foreign language can rarely be learnt and taught”. As a result, the Erukala learners feel like fish out of water as the prescribed textbooks are drawn from the mainstream cultures. As a result, the Erukala learners are not able to make connections with the learning materials/textbooks that are prescribed. The gap between the learners’ cognition and the culture of the text presented in the textbooks has remained unchanged producing discouraging learning outcomes. There is an imbalance in the distribution of time in teaching and assessing the language skills, particularly the speaking skill. More importance is given to reading and writing skills whereas less importance is given to listening and speaking skills because learners are mostly tested on the basis of writing and reading skills whereas other two skills are rarely tested in examination. On account of overlooking on listening and speaking skills, there are no opportunities for the development of oral communication skills in the language classroom. That is why
the Erukala tribal learners feel uncomfortable with irrelevant materials/textbooks and they are found to be silent, shy or a profound fear being wrong to express their thoughts, ideas and feelings in English in the classroom. As a result, there is a need for them to develop oral communication skills in English.

1.4 Rationale of the Study

The Erukala tribal learners start learning English as a third language from class III. Even after being exposed to several years of English instruction, they still struggle to communicate in English and have very low proficiency in oral communication skills. There could be a number of factors responsible for this situation. Therefore, the present study tried to examine and identify the major issues related to the teaching materials/textbooks responsible for the learners’ weakness in oral communication skills. It was assumed that the teaching materials/textbooks would be one of the factors for low proficiency of the learners in oral communication skills. The study attempted to develop oral communication skills of the learners through their own culture-based materials, which were more realistic and contextualised to the learners.

Culture-based materials would attract the attention of the learners and make them communicate freely without having fear, shyness and hesitation. They would also engage the learners participate in communicative activities, which directly reflect the language used in their real life situation. For this reason, the learners own culture-based materials are very useful for developing oral communication skills. This study also focused on building confidence and self-esteem among the learners which could have a direct bearing in developing their oral communication skills in English. Therefore, the present study —Developing Oral Communication Skills of Tribal
Learners through Culture Based Materials” was carried out to enhance their oral communication skills by using culture-based learning materials.

1.5 Aim

The aim of the present study is to look at the problems of high school Eruakala tribal learners (i.e., class IX) in oral communication skills and examine the effectiveness of their own culture-based materials for developing oral communication skills in English. The study also intends to explore how the tribal learners‘ home culture or culture-based materials would attract the attention of the tribal learners and motivate them towards learning English language in general and developing their oral communication skills in particular.

1.6 Objectives of the Study

Based on the aim of the study mentioned above, the following objectives are set for this study:

- to explore the truth behind the effectiveness of the culture-based materials in developing English oral communication skills by conducting an experiment with Erukala tribal learners.
- to identify the learners‘ responses to the use of their own culture-based materials for developing oral communication skills.
- to identify teachers‘ reactions towards the use of tribal learners‘ culture-based materials to enhance oral communication skills.
- to show the significant difference between teaching oral communication skills with culture-based materials and without culture-based materials.
• to prove that culture-based learning materials make the learners to feel at home in the class thus paving a way to faster learning.

• and to examine the effectiveness of using culture-based materials to develop oral communication skills of high level Erukala tribal learners.

Based on the objectives mentioned above the following hypotheses are formulated.

1.7 Hypotheses of the Study

The study is based on the following hypotheses:

• Culture-based materials will help improve oral communication skills of the Erukala tribal learners.

• The teaching materials presently used in the secondary schools of Telangana are not relevant to the Erukala tribal learner’s culture, social and real-life situations.

1.8 Research Questions

The study answers the following research questions:

i. What is the impact of culture-based materials on oral communication skills of the Erukala tribal learners?

ii. In what ways are the present teaching materials suitable or not suitable to the needs of the Erukala tribal learners of Telangana?

iii. What kind of problems do the Erukala tribal learners face with regard to the existing learning materials while learning English language?
iv. To what extent will the learners’ culture-based materials be effective in developing oral communication skills of the Erukala tribal learners at secondary schools?

1.9 Significance of the Study

The present study was mainly carried out to examine the Erukala tribal learners’ culture-based materials used for motivating them towards learning English in general and developing oral communication skills in particular. Using culture-based materials is not certainly a new source but these materials are still limited in English classrooms. The teachers of English working in the tribal areas are not aware of the significance of culture-based materials and implementation of these materials in the classroom because they are not familiar with the research works done in the area of culture-based materials for developing oral communication skills. Furthermore, they pay more attention to reading and writing skills as these two skills are tested in the exams, but developing oral communication skills is given less importance in teaching learning process and in the examination. This study aims at developing oral communication skills through the learners’ own culture-based materials and making them relieved from aliened materials of the textbook. It was assumed that the learners culture-based materials would develop curiosity among the learners towards learning English language and developing oral communication skills. The culture-based materials would create joyful environment in the classroom. Considering all these diverse dimensions, the present study is significant.
1.10 Possible Outcomes of the Study

The study attempts to examine the effectiveness learners’ culture-based materials for enhancing the oral communication skills of the Erukala tribal learners. Some of the possible outcomes of this experimental study are as follows:

- Erukala tribal may gain confidence to communicate in the target language.
- They may overcome shyness and fear of the language, English.
- The prescribed textbooks and the teaching materials do not cater to the language needs of the Erukala tribal learners.
- The Erukala tribal learners may feel like fish out of water with existing teaching materials and learning of English language.
- The Erukala tribal learners’ culture-based materials may enable them to gain confidence to speak in English.
- Their culture-based materials also may make them learn English language easily and faster.
- Their culture-based materials may enhance their oral communication skills in English.
- Teachers and material designers may keep in mind the culture of the tribal learners while teaching them the language and designing the teaching materials.
1.11 Conclusion

In this chapter, the significance of the English language in the present world and the status of English in India have been discussed. The status of English language teaching in India has been discussed. The background of the study, statement of the problem, aim and objectives of the present study, rationale of the study, research questions and hypotheses, significance of the study have been presented and discussed in detail. Some of the possible outcomes of the study have been presented. The next chapter presents and discusses the review of literature and theories based on which the study takes support from.