

THE DEVELOPMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE THROUGH THE PERSPECTIVES OF EDUCATIONAL POLICIES IN POST-INDEPENDENT INDIA WITH RESPECT TO EDUCATIONAL SCENARIO

Sumeli Das

*Assistant Professor, Shri Shikshayatan College &
Research Scholar, Department of Education,
Diamond Harbour Women's University, West Bengal*

Dr Amalendu Paul

*Associate Professor
Department of Education,
Diamond Harbour Women's University, West Bengal*

Abstract

English in India is used not only for communicating with the outside world, but also for inter-state and intrastate communication. Because of the great ethnic and linguistic diversity found within our nation, English acts as an indispensable 'link' language. This paper attempts to present a critical review of the current state of English language education in India in view of the prevalent pedagogical policies and practices. Different types of schools in the different school systems and typologies of teaching situations, the diverse nature of curriculum, syllabi, materials development, and the related quality issues are critically analyzed. Based on the critical perspectives and insights certain pedagogically important implications have been explored and recommendations made to improve upon the standards and quality of English language education in India.

Keywords: English language education, diversity and disparity, prevalent pedagogical policies and practices

English Language Education with respect to Educational Policies in the present scenario:

English language teaching in India is a complex and diverse phenomenon in terms of resources for teaching and learning of the language, the teacher, pedagogical practices and the demand for the language. It is an ever- expanding part of almost every system and stage of education in India (Tickoo, 2004).

The near-total achievement of universalization of elementary education has intensified pressure on secondary and higher secondary education in the country today. This is the stage when the English language attains greater importance as it serves as an additional instrument for undertaking higher education because 90% of higher education is through the medium of English.

English language education is marked by diversity and disparity in terms of provision and resources for teaching of English as a second language as well as a medium of instruction in school education. There are varieties of school systems that exist in the country today: the state-run schools where the medium of instruction is the state language or the vernacular; the English- medium schools known as the “public schools”, which are actually private schools where the medium of instruction is often English; the Kendriya Vidyalayas, also known as Central Schools, where the children of central government employees study; and a special category of schools known as the Navodaya Vidyalayas set up as a follow-up to the National Policy of Education-1986 for nurturing rural talents. The last two categories of schools follow a mixed medium of instruction. Children learn Science and Mathematics in English, and Social Sciences in Indian languages. There are schools where one section in each class is English-medium. Mohanty (2010) describes how this “mixed medium within a school and within a classroom” works in these categories of schools.

English is used to teach ‘prestigious subjects’ like Mathematics and Science, whereas, Hindi or other languages are used to teach the ‘less prestigious’ subjects like History and Social Sciences. Hindi used to be the second language subject in most of the non-Hindi

states in India. Now, it has been replaced by English and it is relegated to the position of a third language subject in most states. (p.168)

We can also find that the English language teaching situations within and across the school systems present a mixed picture in terms of Teacher Proficiency (TP) and the exposure of the pupils to the language in and outside the school, i.e. the availability of English in the Environment of language acquisition (EE) (Nag-Arulmani, 2000 cf. NCERT 2005b). Kurrien (1997) identifies four types of schools as follows:

- a) ↑↑TP, ↑↑EE (e.g., English-medium private/government-aided elite schools): Proficient teachers; varying degrees of English in the environment, including as a home or first language.
- b) ↑TP, ↑EE (e.g., New English-medium private schools, many of which use both English and other Indian languages): Teachers with limited proficiency; children with little or no background in English; parents aspire upward mobility for their children through English.
- c) ↓TP, ↓EE (e.g., Government-aided regional-medium schools): Schools with a tradition of English education along with regional languages, established by educational societies, with children from a variety of backgrounds.
- d) ↓↓TP, ↓↓EE (e.g., Government regional-medium schools run by district and municipal education authorities): They enrol the largest number of elementary school children in rural India. They are also the only choice for the urban poor (who, however, have some options of access to English in the environment). Their teachers may be the least proficient in English among these four types of schools. (Position Paper, Teaching of English-NCF - 2005- NCERT, 2005b, p. 2)

The difference in the teaching-learning situations, learners' exposure to the language outside the school and parental support further divides each category of students. As

Prabhu (1987) observes “typologies of teaching situations... should thus be seen as an aid to investigating the extent of relevance of a pedagogic proposal, rather than as absolute categories” (p. 3). The teaching situation decides where a school stands. Most rural schools in India today fall under the fourth category where we have children with almost no exposure to the English language, where the teachers’ proficiency in English is in question, and where the parents cannot support their wards in learning the language.

Selvam and Geetha (2010) bring out the disparity in English language education in the context of one of the south Indian states, Tamil Nadu from a “class perspective” (p. 56). They describe the schools as type A, B and C in terms of locations and resources. Type ‘A’ schools are located in big cities and are attended by upper middle class children. English language proficiency of both teachers and learners here are higher than all other categories of schools. Type ‘B’ schools are also found in big cities and additionally in smaller towns, and cater to the middle class which cannot afford to pay the high fees that type ‘A’ schools demand. Here the learners are not as confident and comfortable with the English language as their peers in type ‘A’ schools. Type ‘C’ schools are the ones located generally in small towns, catering to rural households that want their young to know English. “Neither the teachers nor the students in these schools move in an English-speaking world in the way that their counterparts in the cities do ... But there is a greater anxiety about learning English in these institutions” (Selvam & Geetha, 2010, p. 56)

Planning and implementation of English language education in the diverse Indian contexts calls for a flexible approach which suits the diverse needs of the learners. Language education in India is not conceived holistically for it is characterized by the many-fold fragmentations. Fragmentations in terms of regional languages versus English, and within the space of Indian languages the question of majority versus minority languages and tribal languages, has greatly disadvantaged the learners. It is recorded in the Fourth Survey of Research in Education (1983 -1988) conducted by the National Council of Educational Research (NCERT) as,

Language teaching standards are divergent in different regions of the country. One thing common to all is the consistently low standard of achievement in languages as well as subjects. Instead of learning subjects through languages subjects are used to learn languages. Therefore students are poor both in subjects as well as languages. Minimum competencies in language must be a pre-condition to the study of subjects, which in turn enlarge the scale of language learning. (p 127)

Language Policy in Education and the English Language with respect to Educational Policies:

In view of the National Language-in-Education-Policy for school education, the three-language formula recommended by the National Commission on Education 1964-1966, (GOI, 1968) was incorporated into the national education policies of 1968 and 1986. Accommodating at least three languages in the school education has been seen as a convenient strategy, but concerns have also been expressed from various quarters about its unsatisfactory implementation. India's language policy in education emerged as a political consensus in the Chief Ministers' conferences held during the 1950s and 1960s. The Central Advisory Board on Education (CABE), which consisted of Education Ministers of all the states, devised the three-language formula in its 23rd meeting held in 1956 with a view of removing inequalities among the languages of India, particularly between Hindi and other Indian languages.

The other major objective of the formula was to promote mother-tongue based multilingualism, where the learner starts school education in the mother tongue and at least two more languages are added (aiming at additive bilingualism) by the time s/he completes ten years of schooling. The three- language formula was simplified and approved by the Conference of Chief Ministers, held in 1961, to accommodate the mother tongue or regional language, Hindi, the official language (any other Indian language in Hindi- speaking regions) and English.(GOI,1962,p.67). The CABE also deliberated in details on the study of English as a compulsory subject as recommended by

the Education Ministers' conference held in 1957:

1. English should be taught as a compulsory language both at the secondary and the university stages so that students acquire adequate knowledge of English so as to be able to receive education through this language at the university-level.
2. English should not be introduced earlier than class V. The precise point at which English should be started was left to each individual state to decide (MOE 1957, quoted in Kumar and Agrawal, 1993,p. 98).

A comprehensive view of the study of languages at school was undertaken and concrete recommendations were made by the Education Commission between 1964 and 1966 (NCERT, 1968). The Commission, having taken account of the diversity of India, recommended a modified or graduated three- language formula:

1. The mother tongue or the regional language
2. The official language of the Union or the associate official language of the Union so long as it exists; and
3. A modern Indian or foreign language not covered under(1) and (2) and other than that used as the medium of instruction (MOE 1966, p. 192)

English will continue to enjoy a high status so long as it remains the principal medium of education at the university stage, and the language of administration at the Central Government and in many of the states. Even after the regional languages become media of higher education in the universities, a working knowledge of English will be a valuable asset for all students and a reasonable proficiency in the language will be necessary for those who proceed to the university. (MOE 1966, p. 192).

The Demand for English language with respect to Educational Policies:

While the diverse nature and quality of English language education in India poses a

serious challenge both in terms of access, resources and quality, the demand for English language has been on the increase since independence. The language, which was defined as “a library language” by the National Commission on Education 1964-66, has broken the walls of the library and the demand is so huge that every parent in India today wants to send his/her child to an English medium school, whatever be its quality and resources for learning. The national curriculum revision carried out in 2005 recognizes the growing demand for the language and the position paper of the National Focus Group on Teaching of English for NCF – 2005 (NCERT, 2005b) makes this clear when it addresses the English language question.

English in India today is a symbol of people’s aspirations for quality in education and a fuller participation in national and international life. Its colonial origins now forgotten or irrelevant, its initial role in independent India, tailored to higher education (as a “library language”, a “window on the world”), now felt to be insufficiently inclusive socially and linguistically, the current status of English stems from its overwhelming presence on the world stage and the reflection of this in the national arena (p. 1).

English today is a compulsory second language in the native/vernacular medium schools and in English-medium schools and it is making a case to gain the status of a first language, thus contradicting the spirit of the three language formula. Recognizing the diversity and enormity of the demand, Graddol (2010) in his *English Next India* brings out the divide in the demand-supply business of the English language and the responsibility on the teachers. He says, “Throughout India, there is an extraordinary belief, among almost all castes and classes, in both rural and urban areas, in the transformative power of English. English is seen not just as a useful skill, but as a symbol of a better life, a pathway out of poverty and oppression. Aspiration of such magnitude is a heavy burden for any language, and for those who have responsibility for teaching it, to bear. The challenges of providing universal access to English are significant, and many are bound to feel frustrated at the speed of progress. But we cannot ignore the way that

the English language has emerged as a powerful agent for change in India. (Graddol, 2010, p.120)

The demand for English language education (both as a language and as a medium of learning) is leading to the marginalization of Indian languages. It is believed that the English language acts as an instrument for exclusion of Indian languages, particularly the minor and tribal languages, some of which are yet to find a place in school education or have been thrown out of the system. The English language acts as “a killer language” in these situations (Mohanty, 2010, p. 77). Phillipson (2008) and Skutnabb-Kangas (2000, p. 66) believe that there is an “uncritical promotion of English language in education”. While the demand for English language and English medium education from every quarter makes the English language a “neutral language” in terms of ethnicity, religion, linguistic groups, region and ‘the language that unifies India, but it has become a medium used to maintain inequalities in society’ (Baik & Shim, 1995, pp. 123-124).

As Anderson (2012, p. 44) asserts, “the language remains inaccessible to those who are disadvantaged because of their economic situation, their caste, or both.” There are also arguments that it is the state/regional languages, which push the minor and tribal languages to the corner, not the English language. The languages of many tribal communities in the states of Odisha and Andhra Pradesh can be cited as illustrations where the state languages dominate as medium of learning. This demands a relook at the language-in- education policy both at the macro and the micro levels. Stating the policy in terms of number of languages and provisions at the macro level policy planning for mother-tongue-based multilingualism does not necessarily achieve the objectives of promoting multilingualism. There is a need to understand the learner needs and to foster a cognitively and pedagogically sound language education for the harmonious growth of school children.

Though the governments at the central and state levels through their schemes like the

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and *Rashtirya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA)* have made serious efforts to provide access to education for all children, achieving quality becomes an illusion on many counts. This starts with curriculum planning at the national and state levels to ensuring quality teaching by the teacher who has to face many constraints. Curriculum planning demands well-planned processes wherein people from different areas of expertise come together to design a pedagogically sound plan of action through curricular statements, defining objectives, suggesting methodologies appropriate to the context and understanding the profile and needs of the learner, chalking out assessment strategies that would support teaching-learning.

Conclusions, implications and recommendations related to English Language Education in the perspective Educational Policies:

English language education has come a long way in India and has, in a way, lost its colonial legacy. It is being seen as a language for upward mobility and has been accepted without much contestation. So it has become a neutral language moving beyond boundaries across the states and regions, cross sections of the society as a whole. But the major concern and worry is the way the language is perpetuating inequalities among languages in the country and inequalities within its own realm where the rich and elite get “good quality” English language education and the poor and rural mass get the “not so good quality English language education” (Mohanty 2010 p. 36). This “good quality” (by whatever means we define it) is reflected firstly in the teacher as a resource for learning English and then in materials and methods (strategies and techniques which are adopted). As Graddol (2010) points out, the huge responsibility of addressing the demand lies in the hands of people, teachers who are in a way not so well-equipped. Adding to the problems is the initiatives of the state governments to introduce English as a medium of teaching in one section of each class. Teachers who are not well-equipped to teach through English medium are now to teach in English the subjects such as Mathematics and Social Sciences. These are the same teachers who teach the subjects in the medium of Indian languages like Hindi, Urdu, Tamil, Bengali, Punjabi, and so on. They are not

oriented to teach the subjects in English. The argument is the teachers have studied their subjects at the university level in English medium and this makes them naturally suitable for teaching in English medium. This needs to be understood in a pedagogical perspective of Language Across the Curriculum (LAC) and the role of language in learning any subject. The subject teachers need to develop better awareness to understand how ideas are covered and qualified when said in a language.

The following could be seen as areas which need attention with respect to English language education in particular.

- *Professionalization of curriculum, syllabi and materials development:* There is an urgent need to develop teams of professionals in the vital areas of curriculum, syllabi and materials development in India. The practice in the states now is that curriculum development is a once-in-a-while activity where a group of teachers, teacher educators, and other professionals come together and do the activity of curriculum development and then it is forgotten. There is no regular exercise of curriculum research and professional training on curriculum development and evaluation at the state levels. It is necessary to have curriculum and materials development as part of both pre-service and in-service professional development courses (Meganathan, 2008). This will have both short and long-term implications.
- *Courses on English language teaching / education or language education:* A country which needs quite a huge number of English language teachers does not have courses on English language education or language education at the undergraduate or postgraduate level, except in few higher education institutions. Specialized courses on language teaching will equip the young graduates with an understanding of language pedagogy and pre-service teacher education courses could shape them to be able to deliver their lessons effectively when they join schools.

- *Teacher Development*: Teacher's continuous professional development has not been recognized as a major component for quality improvement of teaching in the classroom. Though many agencies like the NCERT, SCERT, EFLU (English and Foreign Languages University, which was CIEFL, i.e. Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages formerly), RIEs (Regional Institutes of English), University Departments of Education, NGOs conduct training and orientation programmes for teachers and key resource persons, the content and methodology of such courses remain a question in many institutions as to whether they really address day-to-day problems and issues that arise in the classrooms. A typical classroom teacher expects a training to equip him/her to enhance classroom interactions and learner motivations and participation in learning.

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