
A STUDY ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN RURAL SCHOOLS OF INDIA : THE SITUATION, THE POLICY AND THE CURRICULUM

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Abstract: The language policy in school education emerged as a political and social consensus, though established equality among the languages in school education, is somehow heading for a competitive bi / multilingualism in which the English language is (perceived to be) over taking Indian languages. On the contrary the quality of English language education in majority of Indian schools presents a very appalling picture. Teacher's language proficiency, exposure to language and materials are major concerns for quality English language learning. An analysis of curricular statements and syllabi of the states of Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Mizoram, Manipur and Nagaland reveals how planning for language in education is not looked at holistically in terms of basic assumptions about language learning / acquisition (how language learning takes place), learner profiles and the contexts in which learning takes place, and the recent developments in language learning-teaching. Most states refuse to move beyond the good old structural approach of the 1950s and the 60s, while they stress for communication skills to help the learner for an upward movement. This, in reality, reveals the paradoxical situations of an English language education which would further place the rural learner in a very disadvantaged situation.

There are so many curricular packages in the Andhra Pradesh to reach the goals. English will continue to dominate the school curriculum not only as a language, but as a medium of learning too. Given the important roles to English in education and in the larger society (Tickoo 1996), this will have greater implications for language education, particularly English language education in rural settings. While some of our native languages are losing their battle for survival where English is taking the 'killer' role and the curricular documents calling for collaborative bi-/multilingualism, what in reality felt is subtractive bilingualism. This dangerous trend may lead to mass conversion to English medium instruction in our schools, both urban and rural schools. We must ensure that English as a language in education is fully realised in terms of the basic conditions for learning the language and those educated through native medium schools attain the proficiency that would not hamper them to move forward to higher education and employment any other urban English medium educated child would compete.

Keywords: Curriculum, Multilingualism, Aspiration, Assumption, Naturalistic, Instructed

Introduction: The language policy in school education emerged as a political and social consensus, though established equality among the languages in school education, is somehow heading for a competitive bi / multilingualism in which the English language is (perceived to be) over taking Indian languages. On the contrary the quality of English language education in majority of Indian schools presents a very appalling picture. Teacher's language proficiency, exposure to language and materials are major concerns for quality English language learning. An analysis of curricular statements and syllabi of the states of Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Mizoram, Manipur and Nagaland reveals how planning for language in education is not looked at holistically in terms of basic assumptions about language learning /

acquisition (how language learning takes place), learner profiles and the contexts in which learning takes place, and the recent developments in language learning-teaching. Most states refuse to move beyond the good old structural approach of the 1950s and the 60s, while they stress for communication skills to help the learner for an upward movement. This, in reality, reveals the paradoxical situations of an English language education which would further place the rural learner in a very disadvantaged situation. The increasing demand for English – both as a language and as a medium driven by the instrumental motivation has compelled most governments at the state (provincial) level to introduce English as a language from class One. English is an institutionalized subject in the school curriculum. Resistance to spread of English language

education is countered by genuine arguments which look at the English language as a tool for empowerment. English today is simultaneously sought after and suspected (Tickoo 1996) phenomenon. The motives, generally, are not only social-political and but academic too. While the demand increases on the one hand, the quality of English language education in our state run schools, more particularly in rural schools, presents an abysmal picture. The 'divide' between the urban and rural is further contributed by the way English language education is making its way as a medium of instruction. The paradox of demand and suspicion (Tickoo 1996) mentioned above could be further reflected through the paradox of access depicted by the report of the National Knowledge Commission (NKC 2007), India as it brings out rightly, The diverse English language education situation in the country shows both a rosy and an abysmal picture. Schools in different regions and systems operate in their contexts. The state policy on language education, curricular statements and syllabi and materials for teaching-learning of English along with teacher inputs decide the quality of education in schools more so in rural schools. An analysis of language policy practices and the curriculum and syllabi of five the states, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Mizoram, Manipur and Nagaland reveals how planning for language in education is not looked at holistically in terms of basic assumptions about language learning / acquisition (how language learning takes place), learners profiles and the contexts in which learning takes place and the recent developments in language learning-teaching. Though there is an increasing demand for the language, English has become a bone of contention for reasons of social and political, and also academic. The position paper of the National Focus Group on Teaching of English for NCF - 2005 makes it clear when it addresses the 'English language question' English is in India today a symbol of people's aspiration for quality in education and a fuller participation in national and international life. Its colonial origins now forgotten or irrelevant, its initial role in independence India, tailored to high education now felt to be insufficiently inclusive socially and linguistically, the current state of English stem from its overwhelming presence on the world stage and the reflection of this in the national arena. English does not stand alone, it needs to find its place

(i) Along with other Indian Languages (a) in regional medium schools: how can children's other languages strengthen English learning? (b) in English medium schools: how can other Indian languages be valorized, reducing the perceived hegemony of English. (ii) In relation to other subjects: A language across the curriculum perspective is perhaps of particular relevance to primary education. Language is best acquired through different meaning-making contexts and hence all teaching in a sense is language teaching. This perspective also captures the centrality of language in abstract thought in secondary education. English today is a compulsory second language in the native / vernacular medium schools and in English medium schools it is competing to the status of first language.

Any curricular reform ought to take into consideration the fact that whatever appears relevant and essential today may not be suitable for tomorrow. Curriculum in countries like India bases itself on the diverse characteristics of the nation with its multiplicities. As John L. Clark (1987) remarks, a curriculum addresses the common as well as the individual aspirations.

Given the diverse and conflicting values that exist within any large social group, and given a democratic concern for the valuing of such diversity, it would seem necessary for any contemporary curriculum to attempt to embody what are agreed to be common aspirations, and yet leave space for individual interpretation within and beyond these, to accord with the individual characteristics of each teaching and learning context.

Goals for a comprehensive language curriculum needs to bring in aspects of language, culture, practices of people in the learning process in accordance with the local needs and concerns so that learners are able to connect with real life situations. A national curriculum (in language education) should aim for (Position Paper in Teaching of English NCERT - 2005) ... a cohesive curricular policy based on guiding principles for language teaching and acquisition, which allows for a variety of implementations suitable to local needs and resources, and which provides illustrative models for use. A syllabus, which is a medium to realize the aims of language education, is driven by various needs and concerns that a curricular framework aims to achieve. We expect a syllabus to present textbook developers for deigning such materials that would

give scope and space for teachers to exploit the perspective to maximum extent and to go beyond the textbook to engage the learners with their peers and immediate surroundings. The main objective of a good syllabus is to enable the learner to achieve proficiency in the language in different domains. The syllabus should reflect:

- i. Assumptions about language learning
- ii. Appropriate themes the texts embody
- iii. Objectives of teaching-learning English.
- iv. Knowledge of methods expected of teachers who use the textbooks
- v. Ideas on how learning materials will be constructed (What? and How?)
- vi. Ideas on how learning is to be evaluated

The state run schools which mostly fall under the fourth category of schools mentioned above would need to provide a curriculum for that ensures at least minimum level of exposure to the language, materials (receive inputs) that would present the language in contexts through authentic texts (Krahsen 1985), tasks and activities where children would engage with the language and interact and develop communicational skills, proficient teachers who would ensure enabling conditions for learning the language in meaningful contexts, and an examination system that would not threaten the rural learner and declare him a failure because s/he could not pass the mark of 33% in the subject as that of a content subject. Do our state curricula provide such conditions so that the rural learners feel comfortable being in school, particularly in learning English language? Let us see through an analysis of the curricular statements and the syllabi of some of the states.

Curricular package in Andhra Pradesh: The syllabus makes an attempt to define the two-fold goals of language curriculum as (i) attainment of basic proficiency, and (ii) the development of language as an instrument for basic interpersonal communication and later for abstract thought and knowledge. Recognizing the diverse nature of schooling and linguistic environment that prevail in India today, it calls for using meaningful and often multilingual contexts to enrich learning experiences. It recognizes input-rich communicational environment as a prerequisite to language learning.

The objectives are delineated at two levels for primary stage: level I for classes I & II and level II for classes III, IV & V. Upper primary and secondary levels have different sets of objectives. An interesting aspect of the primary level syllabus is that through the objectives spelt out for English medium and Telugu medium or vernacular medium are common, the activities and competencies to be realized through objectives are indicated separately. Sub themes and structures are listed in detail showing which structures are to be learnt / taught through each sub theme. Level I Objectives (classes I & II) seeks to familiarize the child with the spoken language by exposing them to the language in meaningful, interesting and real life situation though the mother tongue, signs, visuals, pictures, sketches, gestures, letters, words, single-word questions and answers, formulaic expression as communicative props. Teacher talk and listening to recorded material are some other suggested ways for exposing learners to spoken language. Use of drawings / paintings as precursors to writing and relating these activities to oral communication and familiarizing the learner with the text (words / phrases/ sentences, rhymes) and playing the roles of birds and animals are included in the objectives. Level II Objectives (classes III, IV & V) move from familiarising the children with the language by exposure to enabling them to read and write, besides listening and speaking. The objectives include too many items in terms of skills and competencies. These are: (i) transforming the silent written / printed language into living speech (ii) readying the learner for reading, discussion and writing (iii) enriching vocabulary through telling, re-telling and reading aloud of stories, folktales (iv) teaching good hand writing and correct punctuation and. (v) helping them speak simple English with correct pronunciation (vi) and facilitating them to recite and appreciate rhymes and poems and classify words nouns, actions (verbs) describing words (adjectives) and linkers (conjunctions). Level III Objectives at the Upper primary (classes VI, VII and VIII) include reading of texts of representing different genres and themes, speaking in a given situation, acquiring production skills (to develop fluency and accuracy) in speaking and writing., developing study skills / reference skills and understanding and appreciating jokes, riddles, anecdotes , etc. The first objective will

create awareness among learners of 'learning how to learn'. It will help learners know / understand their learning goals and evaluate their own progress. Level IV Secondary stage (Classes IX and X) Higher order skills are introduced here to enable learners to use the language appropriately and to be creative. Learners will acquire greater proficiency and fluency in oral and written communication in different social settings and will shape themselves out as independent learners through self learning skills.

A single textbook is recommended for each grade up to class V. The material from class VI onwards as indicated by the syllabi should consist of (i) A Reader (ii) A Workbook and (iii) A Supplementary Reader. The number of lessons/ units in each book has also been suggested. Reader (the main textbook) should contain not more than ten comprehensive units (text, exercises / tasks activities) and five / six poems of varying lengths depending on the class. The workbook will have as many corresponding worksheets as the number of comprehensive units in the Reader. The Supplementary Reader will have about eight pieces meant for self-study to promote reading for information and pleasure. The material included in the package will be completed in 150 working days.

Allotment of marks in terms of weighting to each book is prescribed; the Reader will have 40%; the Workbook 40% and the Supplementary Reader 20%. Suggested evaluation procedures include what is called periodic, preferably at regular intervals of 4 to 6 weeks of actual instruction. Both oral and written evaluation methods need to be followed and the periodic tests should carry a weighting of 50% of oral and 25% of written testing at the primary level.

The syllabus of Andhra Pradesh does not make an attempt to understand what is language learning i.e. assumptions about language learning. The syllabus reflects (i) attainment of basic proficiency, and (ii) the development of language as an instrument for basic interpersonal communication and later for abstract thought. It does not talk about the learner, nature of learning, language and learning. The place and status of English language is touched formally. The syllabus draws learning upon NCF - 2005. The syllabus moves from learning orally to written i.e. speaking to writing at the primary stage, but is not clear about when to begin writing the alphabets of English. Objectives attempt to bring in many things

at the same time. We can notice it in the primary, and in upper primary stages. Though the syllabus advocates multiple methods for teaching / learning the language, it appears that it relies heavily on 'good old' structural approach in the primary classes. The number of structures to be taught / learnt is listed in the detailed syllabus.

Language learning, whatever way it occurs in a naturalistic or in an instructed context, takes time and laborious process (Rod Ellis 1993 & 2008). Learners need to receive exposure to the target language. The language input (comprehensible input) and motivation (Krashen 1985) are essential for learning a language as second or foreign language. The intended curriculum and syllabi of the states analysed above, though attempt to provide a comprehensible package of text material as a major input, are not clear on how and why the learners would be exposed and the teachers' language proficiency acts as a major input in the classroom. They do not talk about development of reading; strategies for reading (like storytelling, story reading, etc.) and integrated approach to learning the language are not clearly understood. The enabling conditions for learning the language as second or foreign language are not even talked about. In other words, the syllabi do not make attempt to understand the contexts of the learners, how learning takes place in the contexts, while tall statements are made in recognizing the language (English) as a language for access to higher education and employability.

There is lot of confusion in understanding what an activity or a task is in language classroom. The activity / task needs to let the learner use the language, i.e. get engaged with the language. This requires learner initiating, turn taking, suggesting, debating, etc. the syllabi and a cursory look at textbooks shows that the activities are teacher directed and teacher centered. The syllabus does not visualize (except cursorily in the objectives) how activities in the classroom can be organized and what roles learners and teachers have in the classroom.

We can notice the paradox of the syllabus aiming to design communicational syllabi and doing the opposite of the same. This is noticed in all the five states syllabi analysed.

Each state analysed here suggests teaching-learning material for each stage. Rightly all recommend only one book for primary stage. Three textbooks are prescribed from class six onward. They are: a

textbook (the main reader), supplementary reader and a workbook. Some states prescribe number of units to be included for each class, number of poem and grammatical item. The textbook is aimed at providing comprehensible inputs (Krashen 1985) and the input needs to be authentic i.e. texts which are written not for the purpose of textbook, but written for some other purpose like stories, novels, travelogue, autobiography, etc. The curricular statements on materials do not talk about the authenticity of texts, texts that would provide opportunity to exploit the maximum learning, variety of genres, and translation from Indian languages. The workbook aimed to teach grammar items explicitly need to be introspected further as the recent trends advocate learning-teaching of grammar in context rooting it in the texts of the main textbook, thus connecting it with the experiences of learners.

All the five syllabi in their design for materials or curricular package include a supplementary reader (from class VI) aiming at promotion of reading as a major input for learning the language. The syllabi fail to recognize the distinction between the intensive reading and extensive reading. It appears that the supplementary readers for extensive reading are aimed at for intensive reading as that of a detailed reading text. So the examination specifications suggest testing of the supplementary reader as that of the detailed text. Moreover, the syllabi do not envisage promotion of reading taking the benefit of learner's first language / mother tongue and through story telling, story reading and creating locally available resources like class library and reading as a continuous strategy for learning the language.

Though much water has flowed through the processes of curricular reform both at the national and state levels, not much progress has been felt in the syllabi of the states in evaluation. Every syllabus talks about continuous and comprehensive evaluation, but it is the one time final examination that decides what has been learnt and there has been regret about listening and speaking not tested. The syllabi designers find themselves in a fix when it comes to the two important skills of language learning, i.e. listening and speaking. It is only the written examination that decides all aspects of learning the language. Since there is not much scope for 'teaching' listening and speaking beyond the textbooks, the skills suffer in the tested curriculum

too. If the teaching-learning situation is to be made rural learner centered, the curriculum in language education needs to:

1. Have a holistic approach to language planning where language education is perceived as whole in which English language education find its complementary and supplementary role.
2. Use the languages of children as a resource for teaching-learning of languages and other content subjects (NCF -2005). Adopting the multilingualism as strategy for learning of languages and other subjects will help the rural learner finding their contexts and connecting their life outside the school with happenings of the classroom.
3. Create (English) language environment in the classroom and attempt to enable the learner to explore finding the language in use outside the classroom. This requires bilingual proficient teachers, who are conformable in the mother tongue(s) of children and in English. The activities and assignments that would demand children to move beyond the textbook and the classroom in finding to use the language. Newspapers, radio, TV and computers could be exploited for the purpose.

Conclusion: English will continue to dominate the school curriculum not only as a language, but as a medium of learning too. Given the important roles to English in education and in the larger society (Tickoo 1996), this will have greater implications for language education, particularly English language education in rural settings. The anti-English spirit or English hatred is dying out and will slowly diminish in coming years as the language is perceived as language of hope and better life. While some of our native languages are losing their battle for survival where English is taking the 'killer' role and the curricular documents calling for collaborative bi-/multilingualism, what in reality felt is subtractive bilingualism. This dangerous trend may lead to mass conversion to English medium instruction in our schools, both urban and rural schools. We must ensure that English as a language in education is fully realised in terms of the basic conditions for learning the language and those educated through native medium schools attain the proficiency that would not hamper them to move forward to higher education and employment any other urban English medium educated child would compete. Much discussed Common School System needs to be taken seriously

along with right to education to realise a comprehensive language-in education strategy that

would keep our rural learners comfortable.

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