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Education Technology and English Curriculum: A Critical Perspective

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Abstract

Curriculum and syllabus, though used interchangeably, and in the same perspective, as if having the same implication, are different from each other. It consists of other things like co-curricular, library, laboratory, workshop, playground, and informal activities which are the result of continuous interactions between students and teachers. The present paper reviews the teaching of English from school education with a critical perspective.

Keywords: Education, Curriculum, Syllabus, Skills, Sub-Skills, Socialization, Teaching/Learning Process, Procedure, Activity.

Introduction

Education is the beginning of a conscious exploration of the world, called education. In school, students are like lumps of mud that can be moulded to develop their skills. A country like India having the second largest population in the world has been facing a challenge to educate children, especially from deprived and depressed classes. If we go back to the pre-colonial period, the colonial period has substantiated this kind of poor educational scene. The education had been focused on by Woods Dispatch in 1854 which expressed concern about the education of depressed people. As deprived masses are not able to pay the fees of private schools, a state must take care of education and its dissemination to bring all the children for this noble cause. The Constitution of India recommends free and compulsory education for children up to 14 years in the 21 (A) article and it is the duty of the respective state to provide education to children. Though states have full freedom to structure their own policies, they have to adopt the National School Curriculum Framework and Council's policies. The present paper probes into the English curriculum in schools and covers English taught in public/ government schools, especially schools in rural and remote areas in India.

The progressive states in India are well-known for people like Mahatma Phule, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Mahadeo Ranade, and others who led India towards the status of a developing country with values of social justice and equality. All these people worked for the cause of education English was being taught in all the states but they had their own policies of teaching English. It was decided unanimously that all the states must have a common core with some changes according to local needs in 1968. The Kothari Commission introduced a common education programme and proposed a teaching plan for all the states in 1968. English was made compulsory from 5th to 10th standard in 1972 throughout states. States announced its policies for English curriculum in 1988 to respond to the 1986 National Policies on Education which recommended the introduction of English from the 6th standard according to 1972 policy. In order to meet global needs and make students competent enough to excel in the global market, State governments made the English language a part of primary education and launched it as the first standard in schools in June 2000. When it was announced, conservative people agitated against it and expressed that it might demolish its culture because they thought, that students' innocent minds could be corrupted by Western culture which cannot be separated from English. State governments remained firm and made clear that English would be introduced with its colour and culture,

though, in some cases, it was hardly possible e.g. cultural words. Before going through the fruits of English, it's better to look for its roots in India which can be easily traced to the colonial period.

English once, was a language spoken in some Western countries, now it has become a language of information and technology which has been converting the world into a village. English has been covering the world scenario and is very close to capturing the minds of the people who once denied its utility in the global market. We now find them making English an inseparable part of their national curriculum. One may take liberty to call it 'the global language', though, it is yet to be confirmed universally, but its immense future cannot be denied. English native speakers are being excelled by non-natives. If non-native speakers are distinguished from native speakers of English. 'English' natives will discover themselves as a minority. Then British colonies like India, South Africa, etc have been contributing to the growth of non-native English. A special report entitled 'English Out to Conquer the World', published in U.S. News & World Report (18 Feb 1985) and quoted in Krishnaswamy and Burde (06:2008), substantiates the spread of English.

English is the medium of 80 percent of the information stored in computers around the world, 1 of every 7 people, in the world claims some knowledge of English. English is the native language of 12 countries and the official or semi-official tongue in 33 others where it is used to conduct at least some government business. Further, it is either a required subject or one widely studied in the schools of at least 56 additional countries.

English was brought to India by English colonizers and Christian missionaries for trading and spreading Christianity respectively. As they established their control over the Indian administration, the need was felt to have humans having Indian bodies and English minds to assist the British administration in India. Lord Macaulay rejected oriental literature and sciences by calling them poor and rude and proposed English literature to create a class of 'Indian in blood and English in taste' through his famous minutes in 1835. Charles Wood accepted another vernacular language to be studied in schools along with English to appease Indian uproar as quoted in Krishnaswamy N. & Krishnaswamy Lalitha (48:2006).

The English language would be taught where there was a demand for it, and it also would be combined with careful attention to the study of the vernacular language of the district. English was not to replace the native languages.

The Government of India Resolution in 1904 was passed under the leadership of Lord Curzon, then Viceroy of India. The Resolution proposed English to be taught after the required knowledge of the mother tongue of learners. He wanted to separate Indians from the English because it brought revolutionary ideas with it that caused the establishment of the National Congress in 1885. Then, English was supplemented with other vernacular languages in the curriculum till 2000. It would be sensible to have some knowledge of post-colonial educational commissions that contributed to the English curriculum. Dr. Radhkrishnan Commission stated the significance of English calling it a 'treasure of knowledge', and made it an indivisible part of the curriculum in schools and colleges. Later the Kothari Commission called it 'library language' and it is a must for technical and scientific knowledge. National Policy on Education examined the implementation of the Kothari Commission and emphasized a three-language formula.

English Language Teaching / Learning – A Critical Study

The curriculum is the backbone of the education system and consists of a list of objectives that are meant to be achieved at the end of a course. Curriculum and syllabus, though used interchangeably, and in the same perspective, as if having the same implication, are different from each other. Kamlakar Wakankar and Dr. Dattatreya Tapkeer (15:2008) define the two terms as follows:

The curriculum does not mean only academic subjects traditionally taught in the schools but it includes the totality of experiences that a student receives through the various activities.

The curriculum is a broader term rather than a syllabus which is just one of the parts of the curriculum. A syllabus is simply a list of topics to be taught throughout an academic year, while, a curriculum consists of other things like co-curricular, library, laboratory, workshop, playground, and informal activities which are the result of continuous interactions between students and teachers.

Though curriculum designing is a time-consuming and back-breaking activity, one should not be

untailored or insincere in his/her efforts. It must be cautiously framed to suit the global as well as local needs. Any curriculum reflects the educational policies of the concerned nation. At the national level, we find boards or councils, working for the 'renovation and rejuvenation' of curriculum and setting ideals before academicians, teachers, and all the stakeholders of a noble and life-long mission, called education. In India, the National School Curriculum Framework Council looks after curriculum designing and provides a skeleton to State Boards for Education which have quite a bit of freedom to make additions and subtractions in the provided guidance but they can't cause damage to the skeleton, devised by NSCFC. Therefore, diversities in a three-language formula can be observed in India.

Every policy is successful when it is implemented by able human resources. The majority of primary teachers were not capable of handling new challenges, created by the introduction of the English language. Teaching/state language as a first language is pretty different. Students have good command over their mother tongue when they enter primary classes. It becomes very easy for teachers to converse with them and provide knowledge in their first language (state). As far as teaching English was concerned, teachers were not able to have conversations with the students and were unaware of teaching methods to suit English language teaching. In order to make human resources efficient, Zilla Parishad (District-level administration) arranged teachers' training workshops in the last few years. It was very difficult for the government to train Lacks of teachers in a short period of time because there was a scarcity of resource persons, therefore, to overcome this hurdle, teachers were provided with Handbooks, designed according to the textbooks of each class. It was made obligatory for teachers to attend training programmes because those programs were arranged during vacations as a result they took part in them insincerely but apart from all these hurdles, somehow the administration succeeded in training the majority of the teachers.

Instructions for teachers and students are given in the introduction of each textbook to be prescribed for primary classes. Language of instruction has been a controversial issue since English was introduced in India. English was emphasized as a language of instruction in Macaulay's Minutes but since Charles Wood's Dispatch, British rulers became a little bit flexible to calm down the national fervor for independence. After independence, thinkers like Mahatma Gandhi, and Rabindranath Tagore made it clear that a child can have maximum knowledge of surroundings in his/her mother tongue. Even, all the educational commissions have highlighted mother tongue/regional language to be the language of instruction in schools and colleges. There may be other reasons for selecting regional language as a language of instruction. According to Lata Morey (08:2008).

All was not well with English being taught as a subject in the absence of trained teachers and good textbooks. This was another powerful reason for making the regional language the medium of instruction.

The curriculum of primary schools in states has its regional language, as a language of instruction since the aims and objectives of the curriculum and guidelines for teachers and students are stated in the state language. Efforts are made to use English as much as possible. Instructions for students at the end of every unit are given in English. Students are expected to respond to teachers' instructions in English.

Every nation takes into account social and cultural aspects, while designing curriculum, especially school curriculum, to conserve moral and ethical values. It can be done by introducing mythical figures, and famous legends, and depicting the surrounding social picture, Inclusions of these aspects make students feel at home. Studying English is regarded as an uninteresting activity, chiefly in remote and rural areas where the majority of the students go to government schools. The use of this technique can make learning English more pleasurable and fruitful. State Education Board has taken care of this practice by bridging the gap between English language learning and Indian (state) culture.

There are some nursery rhymes that have been coloured with Western culture and geographical features. These nursery rhymes can confuse the students as they learn to dance in 'summer day' with 'English man and children'. Nursery rhymes need to be produced according to Indian colour and culture to take away English culture from the English language as the English language hasn't remained a language of 'English people'. It has become an inseparable part of Indian culture.

Knowledge is perceived through five senses, sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste. Sight and hearing are basically prominent as we acquire more than 85% of knowledge through these senses. From Yardi's (174:1994) point of view "the two senses, particularly the sense of sight, could be exploited to advantage in teaching". Audio-visual aids play a significant role in teaching – learning English. Teachers can make use of various types of aids to enhance teaching activity. Blackboard has been a friend of the teaching community

since primitive times. Generally, all the classes have a blackboard that can be used for drawing pictures and writing words. The sample survey has been conducted to trace the actual teaching of English in rural areas. It indicates that teachers are sweating hard at home to prepare visual aids like pictures, charts, cards, etc but they lack electronic aids such as tape recorders, television sets, computers, etc.

We think that we are living in an age, called ‘information technology’ but reality is quite different. More than fifty percent of schools, to be surveyed, don’t have a computer system which is shocking and requires immediate measures, to be taken seriously. Those having computer systems lack efficient human resources. Teachers are not conscious of its uses for teaching purposes. Computers are utilized to entertain (video games) the students so that students will not miss the classes. Schools must be provided with well-furnished infrastructure and audio-visual aids like computer systems including educational software.

In our time, the thought of whether to include grammar or not in Teaching English as a second/foreign language is haunting the minds of ELT practitioners worldwide. It depends on the implications of a word's grammar. Grammar has undergone three stages traditional, phrase-structure, and transformative and generative grammar. Each differs from each other. Especially TG grammar is more inclusive than others. Grammar has been an inseparable part of learning a second/foreign language. In a limited sense, the term ‘grammar’ refers to rules of sentence construction. Grammar was emphasized in the past because English was basically considered a ‘library language’, a source of knowledge like Latin and Greek in the 19th century, and not a language to be used for communication. Globalization changed the status of English from a library language to a link language. Now, English has become a medium of global communication and academicians are stressing only communicative aspects of English in curriculum.

As a result of this trend, teaching grammar at the primary and secondary school level has been criticized by the National Knowledge Commission Report in 2007. It points out that students find it difficult to communicate properly, though students have been grappling with English grammar for years. In 2009, the National School Curriculum Framework Council advised states not to pay much attention to English grammar in primary school curriculum and consequently, States wiped up all the grammatical terms from primary school textbooks and accepted a novel method of teaching grammar, proposed by Tickoo, a well known ELT practitioner. As mentioned in this method, there is no need to teach grammar explicitly and grammatical explanation should be given only when the situation arises. Students will gradually absorb grammar in the process of English language learning like first language acquisition. ML Tickoo (169:2009) says, “Grammar thus gets learned in situations of use rather than through isolated examples. It is perhaps best learned when pupils not only observe grammar in action but use it themselves to produce the changes that the application of rules demand.”

Teaching language means to develop four linguistic skills of students, listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Nowadays, a communicative approach is being used for teaching English which stresses only the pragmatic use of English as pointed out by Geetha Nagaraj:

It is the ability, not only to apply the grammatical rules of a language in order to form grammatically correct sentences but also to know when and where to use these sentences— in other words, to use them appropriately (44:2008).

In order to make students able to communicate efficiently, textbooks of primary classes emphasized listening and speaking only by using short pieces of comics and conversations. Thus, textbooks are designed to bridge the gap between first-language acquisition and second-language learning. It is important to know that such an exclusively communicative approach to English has the potential threat to certain crises. People are looking at English as a commodity, rather than a language saturated with thoughts like social justice, equality, liberty, etc because, in globalization, English plays a vital role in getting good jobs as it brings people from different regions together. Thus, students are made to employ English for communication which is required in a global business context. This communicative approach to teaching English may produce generations having language without revolutionary thoughts and students will be like puppets, speaking according to the wishes of their owners (employers) rather than their own wishes.

We learn things from mistakes when they are discovered and tackled properly. Failures are measured and rectified to avoid circular repetition of mistakes. Measurement and rectification of failure is called evaluation. Evaluation is an essential act to move in the right direction. Students commit many mistakes while learning the English language because they get confused due to interference with their first language of states.

Every English utterance by students comes through a state language filter which leaves its traces in filtered utterances. In the survey, conducted to support this paper, primary teachers expressed concern over the mistakes, committed by students. Most of the mistakes are about pronunciation and comprehension. In order to correct these mistakes, teachers are applying formative evaluation which means regular assessment as stated by Kurchedkar S (266:2005) "Formative tests are teacher-set and teacher-evaluated tests that function as occasions of feedback, both for the students and the teachers." In recent times, state governments have not issued perfect specific guidelines for evaluations. It is legalized that students should not fail till the 8th class. Teachers are given the freedom to have their own methods of evaluation; therefore, there is no coordination among teachers. It is also depicted in the survey because there are varieties of tests, carried out as formative evaluation.

Teaching and learning must be reciprocal and complementary to each other. In computer language, teaching can be called input and learning output. Input and output cannot be equal in the context of second/foreign language learning. It may happen in an ideal classroom which hardly exists in the world. If the input has flaws, the output will be definitely wrong. Output should be assessed regularly and flaws must be cured by proper actions. Teaching, based on diagnostic tests is called remedial teaching. It is just like a medical practitioner who prescribes remedies after diagnosis. Like a medical practitioner, the teacher also arranges diagnostic tests to identify and eradicate flaws and apply remedies, apart from their regular schedule. Primary teachers, in states, are taking an extra one hour in the morning and one hour in the evening for students who have missed classes or things, taught in the past. Diagnostic tests are conducted to evaluate students' performances and based on these tests, students who are short of things, taught in the past, are made to come to school one hour before the actual schedule. As a part of remedial teaching, tests are arranged separately for those students. As a result of this separation, students develop a feeling of inferiority complex and remain passive in the class. Though remedial teaching is made compulsory by the government, teachers are not serious enough to carry out it successfully because extra remuneration is not paid for this work and they are always busy with other non-academic work like maintaining records of mid-day meals served to students. Some administrative works are also assigned to them like registration of voters, election duties, census, etc.

To sum up, State governments have become quite conscious of their duty to provide qualitative primary education to students but there are other things to be focused on in order to have a complete feeling of success. In rural areas, the infrastructure library is not developed and maintained. There is an estrangement between the government and the teacher community due to excessive expectations from the government. Teachers don't express their disgust openly as they are afraid of transferring to remote and hilly areas. If they understand each other well, all the above-mentioned things will have eternal fruits.

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