



Development of English Education in Post-Independence India: An Overview

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Abstract:

Independent India has witnessed a series of changes in English teaching. But it is matter of regret that because of infrastructural and human capability constraints, and absence of monitoring and whole-hearted effort on the part of all concerned with the system, the present situation is not at all promising. It is true that the Communicative Approach has made great progress today. Both in approach and methodology the change has been dramatic. The boring and mechanical exercise types have been replaced by a variety of exciting and engaging practice activities. Along with its many virtues, the Communicative Approach has its inherent vices typical of an intellectual revolution. Who knows which one will appear to revolutionize the present practice by putting the learners and teachers in a competitive market and which one approach or method will survive and which one will be extinct? But after independence much paper has been wasted in determining the position of English in the educational framework. Even in National Education Policy 2020 the status of English could not be ascertained.

Keywords: English Language Teaching (ELT), English Language System, English Education, English Education System, Indian Education Commission.

Immediately after the independence, English teaching in India followed the beaten track in absence of any sort of vision. It was not literally possible for a newly independent nation to start afresh and anew. The country stepped into a new era with new hopes and aspirations to be fulfilled. Education was thought to be the prime need for reconstruction of the country with a colonial past. Before independence English was introduced as a medium of instruction as well as a subject of study. As it was the language of the ruling class it was easier to lend English such a status. The situation was favourable for teaching English. But after independence much paper has been wasted in determining the position of English in the educational framework. Even in National Education Policy 2020 the status of English could not be ascertained.

In independent India, the status of English has been swinging between two extreme views – one giving it the Associated Official language status, and also of “Library

language” while the other is in favour of replacing it with regional language or mother tongue. “Rightly”, says Graddol, “some in India claim it as a burden, others a liberation” (English Next India:9). The present status stems from its overwhelming presence on the world stage. (NCF2005: Position Paper 1). To cope with its global demand the status has changed so much that it finds its reflection in national policies and politics. As a consequence, all the commissions and committees had to address the issue of lending English a distinctive status in the educational scene, beginning with the University Education Commission (1948). On the other hand, there has been a great change in the perception of teaching of English following the changes in perception of language acquisition. While the government policies underwent a succession of rapid evolution to meet the need and aspirations of the new generation of learners, the delivery system also modified itself with the emergence of a number of well-accepted theories of language acquisition. As a result, there has been a shift in approaches and methods, techniques and tools. So English Language Teaching (ELT) moves on from traditional grammar-translation method to the Structural Approach giving rise to new methods like the Direct Method, from structural approach to functional and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), and so on. Thus the history of English Education since Independence incorporates changes in two parallel layers – one on the level of policies and the other on the level of implementation by adopting new methods and techniques.

New Challenges in the Postcolonial Era: While inaugurating the first All India Educational Conference, in January 1984, Jawaharlal Nehru said, “Great changes have taken place in the country and the educational system must also be in keeping with them. The entire basis of educational system must also be in keeping with them. The entire basis of education must be revolutionized.” (Education in India: 127). However there was a revival of the same fever and fervour that marked the National Education Movement in the early twentieth century. But there was neither any clear – cut goal nor any planning to meet the needs and aspirations of a new nation. The first attempt initiated was to set up the University Education Commission, under the Chairmanship of Dr.Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, on December 6, 1948. The recommendations of this Commission made the wheel of history of Indian education move.

Applied linguistics contributes a lot in changing the course of language teaching. Inputs from linguistics, psychology, sociology, education, communication and other fields of study mould the whole system of English Language System. While inputs from education determines the goals and organization of the syllabus, inputs from linguistics contribute to the determination of the content of language teaching, i.e. sounds, vocabulary, structures and the like. Goals are defined within the sociocultural contexts in which teaching and learning take place. The perception of language itself has been undergoing continual changes over the years. In the past language was conceived of as a set of rules and, for this, learning a language meant learning the rules of grammar of that language, and applying those rules appropriately while using language. Later the structural linguists considered language as a set of structures and, as a result, the Structural Approach gained currency in

the 1960s and 1970s. Now language is established as a means of communication; so, learning language essentially means learning how to communicate in both spoken and written modes. The existence of language functional varieties and choices of style, register etc. influence the selection of content according to the purpose of the course. Inputs from psychology have implications in the teaching process. That's why teaching English gradually moves on from mere memorization of rules to habit formation, from stimulus response bond to internalization of rules and creative construction. As language is used in social contexts to fulfill social goals, sociology, contributes a lot in determination of relevance, appropriateness, focus of the message, target audience or reader, formality, politeness, and such other social functions of the language. In the same way learning language means achieving communicative competence. Inputs from communication focus on fluency and negotiation of meaning, encoding and decoding, and noise and redundancy in language transaction. Such changes in conceptual framework invariably influence the policies to be undertaken and cause shifts in paradigm. This can be illustrated by citing the role of National Curriculum Framework 2005 in defining the components of language teaching: objectives, content, methodology and evaluation.

1948 witnessed a new beginning under the leadership of Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, the University Education Commission took up the responsibility of giving Indian education a new direction. In its report (1949) the commission admits the role of English in strengthening national spirit. As there was no such federal language to bind multilingual India, English continued to retain its status with a difference. The difference lies in vision, not in practice. Only in the case of school education, English as a medium of instruction was to be replaced by any regional or federal language. In 1950 when our Constitution was adopted, the position of English was again reestablished at least for the period of fifteen years. It became the associate official language.

For the first time in independent India, Mudaliar Commission (1952) surveyed the loopholes of the secondary education system, reviewed the study of language and took into account the recommendations of the Conference of the Professors of English (1953). The Commission laid emphasis on development of appropriate textbooks, use of modern methods of teaching, use of audio- visual aids and examination reforms. The Commission also made recommendations for training of English teachers and establishment of English Institutes for teacher training all over the country. To implement the report the Government brought about a considerable change in all spheres of secondary education since 1956.

The most extensive impact on Indian education was by the Kothari Commission (1964-66). It made a comprehensive review of the entire educational system for national development and gave Indian Education a proper shape and impetus. It recommended a three- language formula but lent an important place to English. Its recommendations include such significant aspects as the following:

- (i) Teaching English should begin in Class V
- (ii) The Structural approach to teaching English be introduced and

- (iii) English should be taught for development of language skills, not as a content subject.

The first National Policy on Education (NEP) was taken up in 1986 and the Acharya Ramamurti Committee (1990) was appointed to review 1986 policy. The Committee attached importance to the level of attainment and suggested that Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages (CIEFL) be activated to spell out modalities for the purpose of improvement of competency in English. It was followed by Programme of Action (1986) which provided details of implementation. It played a significant role in Indian education. Later National Curriculum Framework (NCF) was adopted in 2000 and 2005. All educational activities up to +2 level are now being conducted following the tenets of NCF 2005. Very recently National Education Policy 2020 has been adopted and NCERT has entrusted with the task of framing National Curricular Framework for School Education, NCFSE2020 for the days to come.

Reflection of Perception and Policies in Practice: Any significant change in perception of language and language teaching obviously makes its mark in the policy document. And in practice such a change gets distinctly reflected in designing textbooks and handbooks for teachers' training. This can be illustrated by citing some examples. Following the recommendations of the Mudaliar Commission English Institutes were established in different parts of India. The first of its kind was established at Allahabad in December 1953. This English Language Teaching Institute introduced course for teachers' training, prepared books for the students and teachers, and tackled the problem of teaching English in Uttar Pradesh. Publication of *Teaching English: A Handbook for Teachers* by Bhandari et al (1956) is the first comprehensive attempt to introduce the Structural Approach for teaching English in India. In the book it was claimed that "the new technique of teaching English as a second language is based on sound linguistic principles" and the methods aim at teaching the pupils the essential tools of the language. Among the tools of a language the structures were considered to be the most important. As defined in the Handbook "the Structural Approach to English is teaching the learner certain selected structures in a certain order". In West Bengal from January 1984 English was introduced as the second language for the first time in Class VI. In the Teacher's Manual it was stated that the new approach was different from any attempt in the past. The cognitive maturity of the learners was considered to be an advantage. In Tamil Nadu a new English Course Book was prepared in the context of the implementation of the National Policy on Education 1986. The course book shows a balance between the Structural Approach and considerations of the functional aspects of language. At the end of every lesson activities and tasks are included to reinforce the language learnt.

In West Bengal the English Institute was set up in 1963. Since then in collaboration with the British Council and Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages, Hyderabad, the institute has been functioning with a goal to improve the standards of teaching English in the state through training, research and other academic activities. The institute was closely involved in introducing a Structural Functional Communicative (SFC) syllabus in school

curriculum in 1984. This particular change has a far-reaching consequence in the history of second language teaching in India, since West Bengal was the first state to introduce such a challenging ESL syllabus in the country. The Institute collaborated with the WBBSE in designing the syllabus, preparation of textbooks, developing a testing pattern and training of English teachers. English was introduced as the second language for the first time in Class VI from January 1984. The basic difficulty as well the advantage of teaching English at the elementary level to the intellectually mature students was kept in mind. As mentioned in the Teacher's Manual the philosophy behind the new approach is that learners would enjoy the lessons as success depends more on their active participation than that of the teacher. This approach was different from earlier attempts. The textbook, *Learning English* is a collection of tasks, puzzles and games rather than conventional series of lessons followed by grammar and vocabulary exercises. The tasks included are child-oriented and the teacher is a guide, not a constant performer. The grammar and sentence patterns included in the book relate to the language presented for acquisition of the learners. The main thrust of the new approach is in doing away with the boredom which comes from mechanical rote-learning. "Enjoyment and the sense of achievement that comes from solving problems, are the two elements which ought to play the most important part in this new approach" (Teacher's Manual, 1983). Constant oral practice, frequent correction of essential items and an encouraging and positive attitude on the part of the teacher are considered to be factors contributing to acquisition. Later in 1995 following the recommendations of Dr. Ashoke Mitra Commission (1994) West Bengal Board of Secondary Education (WBBSE) introduced English in Class V and revised and redesigned the text book for Class VI. It was prepared in a way so that learners could pick up the communicative skills in English language. The teacher's role is mainly that of a facilitator. The scope for the learners to work in pairs or groups or even individually, as the class room situation permits, was extended. Some amount of grammar was included in the exercise to give learners practice in the required language structures. However, the rules of grammar were not meant to be tested or examined. In the Teacher's Manual for *Learning English* (Step III), published in 1986, it was stated that the material was functional. The Manual explains "the functions expressed by certain phrases/structures themselves." The text book was based on the principle "minimum teaching, maximum learning." For every lesson functions and structures were well defined. In 2002-2003 in pursuance of the recommendations of Dr. Pabitra Sarkar Commission the West Bengal Board of Primary Education brought out the course book *Ingreji Siksha* for primary school children of Class III-V. The Commission recommended that the English course book for subsequent classes should be suitably revised. So "*Learning English*" (for class VI-X) was revised accordingly. The revision and redesigning had been made as a continuum of course book *Ingreji Siksha* for class II-V. The WBBSE published A Workbook on Guided Composition in English for Class VI, VII, and VIII to supply the learners with extra writing practice.

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absence of monitoring and whole-hearted effort on the part of all concerned with the system, the present situation is not at all promising. It is true that the Communicative Approach has made great progress today. Both in approach and methodology the change has been dramatic. The boring and mechanical exercise types have been replaced by a variety of exciting and engaging practice activities. Along with its many virtues, the Communicative Approach has its inherent vices typical of an intellectual revolution. Who knows which one will appear to revolutionize the present practice by putting the learners and teachers in a competitive market and which one approach or method will survive and which one will be extinct? The struggle for existence will go on. But with every significant change in theory of language and theory of language learning, English Language Teaching is sure to evolve to cope with the situation.

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