
English from the First Standard in Indian Context: Need and Effects

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Abstract:

Many Indian states have in the last few decades introduced English from the first standard. The present paper has justified this decision on various grounds. It caters to the demands of the parents and the society at large. It has many academic advantages because English has attained the status of the world language. Advances in research in science and technology, law and pharmacy, engineering and medicine are available in English alone. It is a linguistically sound proposition. It is a necessary impetus to design the language curriculum. It motivates the teaching training and teaching learning process promptly through the teaching of the four basic language skills. The production of teaching methods and the evaluation techniques will stand revolutionized if English is introduced from the first standard.

Key words: The English language teaching (ELT), the four language skills, LSRW, teaching materials, language curriculum design, teaching materials production, evaluation techniques.

The present paper attempts to justify the introduction of English from the first standard on different grounds. In last few decades many states in India have introduced English from the first standard. The state of Karnataka introduced English as

compulsory Language from the first standard from June 2005. The Government of Maharashtra effectively introduced English as a compulsory subject from the first standard from June 2000. There were strong protests over the issue of introduction of English from the first standard then in Maharashtra. The untoward reactions and bitter experiences in Maharashtra and in Karnataka after this decision of introduction of English from the first standard have raised the hue and cry and disturbed the hornet's nest Maharashtra and Karnataka are major states of our country which have successfully implemented the policy decision of introducing English from the very first standard.

It is educationally a sound proposition to start the teaching of English from the first standard and therefore it is necessary to make it a policy decision. Most of the educated parents to a large extent desire to send their wards to English Medium Schools right from the beginning of their schooling. This is a general prevalent trend in all the states of the country. This has led to the deterioration of conditions in the schools of regional language medium and it is worsening day by day. In government schools the students from the economically and socially backward communities take their education. The quality and standard of education in those schools is also a matter of grave concern. The problem is becoming more and more a matter of anxiety, There is a clear cut division of the two classes of school children one of the students who are the wards of well - off and alert guardians who are learning in private English Medium schools and the other class is of the children of socially and economically backward parents who are completing their education in the regional language medium Government schools. This rift between the two classes is ever-widening on account of Privatization and Liberalization. As quality will gain significance in each and every field of life, the standard of government schools needs to be raised. In order to curb the ever-increasing number of English Medium schools one of the solutions lies in the introduction of English from the first

standard. One of the main reasons of this is the fact that English has attained the status of world language, the language of science and technology, business and communication all over the world.

The members of public at large are fascinated by the world language status of English. Therefore if English is introduced from the first standard in the regional language medium schools such as Kannada, Marathi and others, the parents will consider sending their wards to schools where the instruction of English from the first standard is imparted even though these schools happen to be regional language medium schools. This may not be a full-fledged alternative to English medium schools. This decision will definitely restrict their expansion and the survival of the regional language medium schools will be possible. This has been the after-effect of this decision in Maharashtra. This point is elaborated to such a length because there are many who think that the decision will adversely affect the Kannada medium schools, the Kannada medium school will survive. English is thus needed for the survival of Kannada. The irony is that those who oppose the introduction of English from the first standard send their children and grand children to English medium schools. It is a fact that their cries for the survival of the mother tongue are nothing short of shedding crocodile tear. The needs of these social constituents that are deprived of opportunities since long will be satisfied by the introduction of English in regional medium schools run by the public authorities such as the state government, district councils and municipal school boards.

What is the linguistic propriety of introducing English from the first standard from the psycho-linguistic and socio-linguistic points of view? In the age of rationalism and scientific attitude, it is essential to consider the linguistic status and facts of this issue. It is observed that children of the age group speak about Six to Nine many languages simultaneously. It is commonly found topical example in Housing Societies in Metros

where children use Kannada (home), Marathi (outside) Hindi (Market), English (School), Telgu (neighbours) and Tamil (friends). The same and similar phenomenon can be observed any where anytime. The specific age-group has an adaptability of acquiring proficiency in many languages. At a later stage, the process of acquiring language proficiency needs greater efforts and hard work and early age children are in position to master different languages rather easily according to their exposure.

The children whose parents speak different languages can acquire a second language in circumstances similar to those of the first language acquisition. The term 'acquisition' refers to "the gradual development of ability in a language by using it naturally in communicative situations. The term 'learning' however applies to a conscious process of accumulating knowledge of the vocabulary and grammar of a language (Yule 1996, 191). Different languages can be acquired through social interaction. It depends upon exposure of languages to children. In border areas of the neighboring states people speak in two-three languages proficiently. In Sholapur district - Kannada, Marathi, Telugu not to mention Hindi and English are the languages which are used even by lay person. If opportunity is available learn multiple languages, any human being, irrespective of his education, can acquire many languages. The exposure to language, an opportunity to listen to the sounds of languages, a living contact with the language is the only pre-condition required and the better at a tender age. Anybody can observe that language proficiency is not dependent on intellect but purely an exposure to the specific language. Speaking a language is an acquired skill and anybody can acquire it provided he tries to do so.

Designing the Language Curriculum

The pre- requisites of the introduction of English from the first standard are designing the curriculum, prescribing the

syllabus, production of text-books and study materials and the updated training of the teachers. Curriculum is defined “as a plan for providing sets of learning opportunities for persons to be educated” (Saylor, William & Arthur, 1981, 53). The curriculum should be always based upon the needs, interests, aptitudes and abilities of students. The features of the curriculum need to be determined cautiously, It ought to be consistent with the changes around and in keeping with the current times, English is not just a school subject but it is obligatory that the students should be able to effectively put it to practical application in real-life situations. Therefore, the language learning skills are most significant in designing the curriculum and syllabus of English.

Listening, speaking, reading and writing (LSRW) are the basic language skills in the order of priority. Therefore it is essential to impart instructions in how to acquire the Listening and Speaking abilities in the first two years of schooling, that is, the first and the second standard. Listening is the most vital skill (unfortunately the most neglected area in the present pattern), Therefore it is necessary to give the children an opportunity to listen to English from their world of experience. It is imperative to give practice in listening English sound and to implant the sounds of English through continuous sessions of ear-training the "Sanskar of Dhvani" (the imprint of sounds on ears) is essential. Language is learnt through listening to its sounds and it is imperative to make use of audio-cassettes to enable the learner to get an opportunity to acquire the sound system of the specific language in this case, English. It is necessary to bear in mind that language is made of sounds and not letters and alphabets which are their symbolic marks. Therefore let us not try to teach the script in the first and the second year of the schooling. Language learning has taken wrong notion. What is primary is speech and writing is secondary. Therefore listening and conversation are two language skills that ought to be given the utmost priority and

in the beginning emphatic stress be given on the learning of listening and speaking abilities.

After mastering the basic primary-skills of listening and conversation, the learners need to be taken on the secondary skill of the reading and writing. The circles of priority of LSRW need never be reversed on any count. The preparatory instructions in writing be imparted on the third standard and never before the time for that is suitable. The teachers are under the influence of the script writing and grammar while imparting instructions in the traditional method. The linguistic bases of latest language teaching techniques need to be adopted. Efforts are made to some extent. Texts are prepared but the teaching goes the same way as practiced from the days of Adam and Eve. This requires greater precaution. The learning process will be an enjoyable experience to the learners, provided the teaching techniques involve the active participation of the learners. One of the major objectives of introducing English from the first standard is to remove the fear (phobia) of English from the minds of the young learners.

The programme of introducing English from the very beginning of the schooling will be jeopardized if proper attention is not paid to the designing of the curriculum, framing the syllabus and predicting the textbooks. Considering the specific circumstances in which learning and teaching of English is to take place. It is necessary not a single specified teaching method but to adopt a suitable teaching strategy that involves the principal of practical comprehensive linguistically oriented teaching techniques that be the most effective in the present situation and therefore multiplicity of methods and techniques of teaching need to be adopted. The curriculum should be designed in such manner that it will be student centred and will be given emphasis on self instruction and self study skills of the learners. The success of policy decision of introducing English from the first standard completely depends on the curriculum design and syllabus framing.

Teaching Training and Teaching Learning Process

Training of instructors is highly vital in the process of learning and teaching and in any discipline but it is most vital in the language learning and teaching situation. It is necessary to make the teachers acquainted with features, aims and objectives of the syllabus and the entire scheme of the text book and related study materials. The active participation of the teachers is needed during the entire period of the training programme. The teachers must have a positive approach to the teaching of English. The negative attitude of the teachers is detrimental to the interest of the academic process of language learning and teaching in particular in the area like language teaching and specifically teaching a foreign language like English. Some action oriented patterns of exercises such as (i) Listen (ii) Listen and Do (iii) Listen, Understand and Do (iv) See and Speak (v) speak and Do (vi) See, Listen and Speak (vii) Find similarity (viii) Find Difference (ix) Find out etc. These activities will enable students to enrich their listening and conversational skills. In text books, nursery rhymes, songs and prayers etc. be included so that the students will be directly acquainted into the sound system, stress and intonation patterns of English. There should not be questions related to their meaning or content. The nursery rhymes are meant for familiarity with English sounds and the practice of recognition and production of sounds. Teachers should take the practice and drill sessions giving full attention to the various instructions, commands, greetings, short sentences practice questions and answer and other detailed exercises in text-books.

The pantomime of teachers and response from students through active participation are equally important in the learning teaching process, picture strips, Pictures, Flash Cards and other teaching material should be used to make the task of the imparting instructions (teaching) lively. The proper use of

audio-cassettes will increase the listening ability and at the same time they will learn the correct pronunciation of the English sounds and words. Considering age group of the learners' familiar words and then less familiar words will have to be used in the due of priority by teachers to teach the units like words. At this stage what is expected is to make them listen to the names or words for ear-training and to make correct pronunciation of the words in English taught in their phase. There is no need to expect the reading and writing of these words by the students at their stage. While teaching in the classroom, teachers ought to know in comprehensive manner which language skills are emphasized in given lesson or unit being taught, what teaching techniques are suggested, which teaching tools are to be used and what is the expected learning outcome. Teachers should necessarily think about the approach to the teaching of language, the teaching method and techniques in the most appropriate manner. The need of the situation is to establish effectively the meaningful active participation of students and teachers in order to make the learning-teaching process of English as a language most effective.

The production of appropriate teaching material is necessary to render the process effectively meaningful. The position of the text-book is that of a nucleus and cuds. There is pressing need of a Teachers' Handbook to make the use and application of the Text-book effectively and academically sound. The teachers training programme should be designed in such a manner that the teachers will get maximum guidance during the training period with the due uniformity of implementation.

Evaluation

Evaluation is the integral part of teaching learning process. It is a dynamic process which is useful in formulating instructional objectives, content of learning, teaching-learning

strategies and the means of feedback. Evaluation is a “valid and reliable measure of students’ development and a powerful instrument for imparting teaching and learning” (Singh 2012, 10). Evaluation should be used to get an individual feedback from every student. It is necessary to take the precaution that the students are not discouraged on account of the continuous and comprehensive evaluation. The evaluation of specific language skill be made in a group and that of other language skills be made on the individual basis. Evaluation ought to be the integral component of the teaching-learning strategy and feedback from the evaluation be used for diagnostic and remedial teaching. Teachers must adopt different evaluation methods in an innovative manner.

The introduction of English from the first standard is the need of the parents and society at large. It has many academic advantages because English has attained the status of the world language. It is therefore educationally, psychologically, linguistically and practically a sound proposition to introduce English from the first standard in the regional language medium schools.

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