

RESEARCH ARTICLE



INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA
2395-2636 (Print); 2321-3108 (online)

A HISTORICAL REVIEW OF THE TRANSFORMING ELT SCENARIO OF INDIA FROM
BRITISH TILL TODAY

SURBHI VIJAY VARGEEYA

Assistant Professor, English
Jagannath University, Chaksu, Jaipur (Rajasthan)
Email: vjsurbhi@gmail.com



**SURBHI VIJAY
VARGEEYA**

ABSTRACT

The English language teaching in India has been one among the highly debatable issues in the Indian educational scenario. At present, almost all the schools whether government or private, colleges and universities in India have implemented English teaching as a compulsory practice. Core Literature teaching has already started losing its charm among students instead a communicative language teaching which is more skill-oriented has taken first place and consequently language teachers are more in demand. Even after, such a vast popularity and implementation of ELT in India the output or the desired result of the practice is ironically disparaging. The educationists seem least bothered about the dire need of the reformation of the ELT strategies at the very foundation level. The present paper highlights the foundational discrepancies of the ELT strategies in India bringing out the roots of the ELT establishments in the country since British times. The study has taken up a historical approach in verifying and highlighting the basic recommendations for the upliftment of the ELT scenario in India.

Keywords: ELT, communication, commissions, language, technology, literature etc.

KY PUBLICATIONS

English had become an important part of the Indian education system since the British introduced the modern system of English education in India. Theoretically, English education was introduced in India in the middle of the nineteenth century. Concentrating upon university education it could not go without notice that the Senate of the University of Calcutta adopted a resolution in 1861 that all examinations should be conducted in English. Consequently all the schools had to introduce English as a subject at a very early stage. Thereafter English in India evolved out of various pseudonyms such as; Butler English of Madras, Pidgin English of Bombay, Boxwallah English of

upper India, Chee-Chee English, Babu English etc. The use of English in India which started as a "historico-political accident" seems to have now become an "economic-academic reality" (Gautam 1)

English, the language of science, technology and research is considered the language of opportunity and development. English on one hand is a window on the world serving as a vehicle for international communication and on the other hand it's a language of administration functioning as the associate official language for inter-state communication as well as communication between the States and the Centre. The importance of English is an undisputable and the existence of this very

language is indispensable for the ever growing world. Radhakrishnan Commission has expressed the importance of English language teaching in India in the following manner:

If under sentimental urges we should give up English we would cut ourselves from the living stream of ever-growing knowledge. Unable to have access to this knowledge our standards of scholarship would fast deteriorate and our participation in the world movements of thought would become negligible... English is the only means of preventing our isolation from the world and we will act unwisely if we allow ourselves to be enveloped in the folds of a dark curtain of ignorance ... (Gautam 3).

"In the light of these facts one may venture to say that India without English would be less well-off economically, less well-integrated nationally and less important internationally" (Gautam 4).

Historical Review

English language teaching in India had undergone various shifts over the years. Before independence the goal set before students of English was that of mastering the language for the purposes of knowing English literature for developing a refined sensibility and expression and so on. After independence the knowledge of English was intended as a tool to be connected with the up-to-date knowledge and developing communication skills. There had been various efforts through some landmark commissions to bring necessary reform in the standards of English language teaching in India. They realized the necessity of the diversification of courses to suit the different requirements of different categories of students of science, commerce and humanities and consequently of the suitable changes in teaching techniques. A brief survey of the findings and recommendations of such commissions would help us to figure out some of the major problems of the English language teaching in India and valuable suggestions given by the experts.

In 1917, the Calcutta University Commission took note of the rapid decline in academic standards in all subjects specially English.

According to the commission some of the causes of the deterioration in the quality of the teaching of English were lack of contact with teachers who spoke English as their mother tongue, unsuitability of the lecture method and a lack of systematic instruction in spoken English. The commission recommended a progressive reduction in the use of English as a medium of instruction up to the matriculation stage and its retention as the medium above that stage, the adoption of scientific methods of teaching English, the introduction of more highly trained teachers and more difficult tests of a practical knowledge of English.

The Radhakrishnan Commission (1948) recommended the continuance of the study of English. "English should be studied in high schools and in the universities in order that we might keep ourselves in touch with the living stream of ever-growing knowledge."

The Kunzru Committee (1955) recommended that the teaching of English literature should be related to the study of Indian literatures so that apart from its value for linguistic purposes, it could be an effective means of stimulating critical thinking and writing in the Indian languages. The committee stressed the importance of the use of special methods in English language teaching and the study of linguistics as the essential qualification for ensuring adequate proficiency in English at the university stage.

According to the recommendations of the Official Language Commission (1956), English should be taught as "a language of comprehension rather than as a literary language so as to develop in the students learning it a faculty of comprehending writings in the English language, more specially those relating to the subject matter of their specialized field of study". Randolph Quirk (in his report on English Teaching in India, 1963) also found the standards of English teaching deplorable and stressed the need for reform and experiment. Kothari Commission (1964) emphasized the role of English as a library language.

The report of the Study Group I (1964) also made a special mention of the deteriorating standards of English. The group recommended a programme for teaching English where

comprehension received more attention than expression. The group noted that the skill of the comprehension of the written materials in English was essential at the postgraduate level. Therefore, the group recommended that English should be taught for all the three years and suggested that there should be one paper on language skill, another on skills through prescribed texts and a half paper in summary and translation. Two optional sections had been recommended in the MA course. The first one was language oriented and the second literature oriented. The group recommended viva voce test as a part of the MA examination to test the candidate's spoken English. Disappointingly, not many universities adopted this pattern thoroughly. Most importantly, the group presented a distinction between a lecturer in the English language and a lecturer in the English literature and guided the students to specialize either in literature or in language. The group also emphasized that universities should have two different departments for language as well as literature. They strongly suggested the importance of quality research on the teaching of English in India and also took note of the fact that the younger lecturers at our universities were almost as incorrect in their use of English as the pupils themselves.

Another important citation is a talk delivered by R.E. Underwood, the British Council expert, at the Nagpur session of the All India English Teachers' Conference. Underwood discussed university education in India and identified three major problem areas, which are interconnected:

- A. The college students,
- B. The college text,
- C. The college lecturer.

Thereafter, Underwood went on describing each one of them at length.

A. The average college student

- a. Cannot write acceptable English,
- b. Cannot understand spoken or written English,
- c. Is very slow at reading,
- d. Poses a problem to the lecturer,
- e. Causes various solutions to be proposed by the universities to deal with the students,

- f. Is aware of national controversy over the role of English in India,
- g. Wonders how seriously one needs to take the subject.

B. The average college text

- a. Is treated as though it was God-given;
- b. Tries to meet the needs of the two quite different sets of students-
 - i. The good (ex-English medium)
 - ii. The average to poor (ex-vernacular medium);
- c. Contains passages not primarily selected for purposes of language learning and development of reading skill;
- d. Contains no glossary and no text based remedial language exercise.

C. The average college lecturer

- a. Has studied hard for his/her MA in literature and is largely unwilling and unprepared to teach language;
- b. Prefers the lecture to the dialogue;
- c. Is disinclined to risk exposure by preparing his own language-teaching materials;
- d. May not speak and write correct English him/herself.

This talk given by Underwood is very much relevant in the present scenario in our universities when it comes to English language teaching. The above estimation of Indian universities intelligibly reflects some of the lacking areas of our teaching and learning of English language.

One very important point which comes out of the above survey of various reports on the English language teaching in Indian universities is that only the study of literature at higher level does not serve the purpose of language learning. The teaching of English as a skill and as literature should be clearly differentiated. Our English syllabus is still dominated by Shakespeare, Milton, Keats, Shelley, Tennyson, Eliot and others. Shakespeare's plays are being frequently introduced to the students from the secondary level of education itself.

A researcher has noted that even in the short Shakespeare edition of Julius Caesar, there are 154 archaic words and 400

sentences containing old-fashioned elements of structure and vocabulary. One wonders how the book gets prescribed for the students who do not even know the rudiments of modern English usage, who are yet to be taught how to make the subject and the verb agree. Examination procedures are often so clumsy and antiquated that a student can pass by memorizing summaries of passages dictated by his teacher without reading the texts prescribed or trying to learn a word of English. (Alam 9)

This is the reason why Nagarajan comments: "In hundreds of classrooms in India today, Shakespeare, the first poet in the world...is perishing...for ...not being understood". Such course not only encourages a memorizing and point-grabbing habit among students but also hinders their individual thought process. The need to replace the existing English courses by a course in language skills has already been suggested by the UGC Study Group. The group has recommended that at the degree level teaching should equip students with communication skills necessary to cope with the predictable situations they were likely to encounter.

The above historical survey is helpful to gauge the challenges as well as the possibilities of English language teaching in India. To ascertain the root causes behind the disparaging outcomes of ELT strategies in India the educationists need to look back to the past and learn from the recommendations of the various educational reports. The reports discussed in the present paper are enough to draw one's attention towards the lack of appropriate implementations in spite of the frequent recommendations for reform. Yet, we can be hopeful; at least such attempts have been made to archive the possibilities of reformation in current ELT scenario of India.

Works Cited

Books

Alam, QaiserZoha. *English Language Teaching in India (Problems and Issues)*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 1995. Print.

Dash, Neena and Dash, M. *Teaching English as an Additional Language*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2007. Print.

Ediger, Marlow, Dr. Bulusu Surya VenkataDutt and Dr. DigumartiBhaskaraRao. *Teaching English Successfully*. New Delhi: Discovery Publishing House, 2003. Print.

Gautam, Kripa K. *English Language Teaching: A Critical Study of Methods and Approaches*. New Delhi: Harman Publishing House, 1998. Print.

Hill, Walker H. *Improvement of Examinations*. Calicut: Xavier Press, 1972. Print.

Hurd, Stella and Murphy, Linda Ed. *Success With Languages*. New York: Routledge, 2005. Print.

Lawrence, H.S.S. *In-Service Teacher Education*. New Delhi: Ministry of Education, 1956. Print.

Sinha, Smita. *English Language Teaching: Prospects, Problems & Suggestions*. Jaipur: Mangal Deep Publications, 2005. Print.

Srivastava, A.K. *English Language Teaching: Methods, Tools and Techniques*. Jaipur: Book Enclave. Print.

Internet Sources

Hanumantharao, ChirivellaRadhika. "Teaching English Language: Problems and Remedies". Indian Streams Research Journal. Vol - I , Issue - IV May 2011, www.isrj.net. 21/11/12.

<http://www.isrj.net/may/2011/English_Teaching_English_Language.aspx>

Joshi, Nikhil. "Technology, ELT and Literature Teaching". ELT WEEKLY. Vol. I issue- 42, pp. 8-16, 30/11/2009. www.eltweekly.com. 12/11/12.

<http://eltweekly.com/ELTWeekly_Issue_42.pdf>

Mohan, Chandrika. "Updating the English Classroom with Techniques and Communication Skills". Language in India, Feb. 2012. www.languageinindia.com. 21/11/12. <<http://www.languageinindia.com/feb2012/chandrikaeltbook.pdf>>

Mulay, Pravin. "Importance of Soft Skills for English Teachers". 15 Sep. 2010, www.teachingenglish.org. 15/12/12.

<<http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/blogs/pravin-mulay/importance-soft-skills-english-teachers>>

Murali, M. "Teaching English as a Second Language in India- A Review". The Modern Journal of Applied Linguistics. Vol. – 1:1 Feb. 2009, www.mjal.org. 21/11/12.

<http://www.mjal.org/Journal/teaching_english_as_a_second_language_in_India_-_a_Review.pdf>

Narayan, R. N. Rajasekharan Nair and S. Iyappan. "English Language Teaching in India: A Theoretical Study". The Modern Journal of Applied Linguistics. Vol. – 1:1 Feb. 2009, www.mjal.org. 21/11/12.

<http://www.mjal.org/Journal/English_Language_Teaching_in_India.pdf>
