

Position of English in School Curriculum:

The Official Language Commission appointed by the Government of India clarifies the position of English in the school curriculum:

Since we need knowledge of English for different purposes, the content and character of the language as well as the method of imparting it have to undergo a change. English has to be taught hereafter, principally as 'language of comprehension' rather than as literary language so as to develop in the students learning it, a faculty for comprehending writings in the English language, more especially those relating to the subject-matter of their specialized fields of study...the change in the character and knowledge of English appropriate to our requirements hereafter, as distinguished from the past, is clear enough. The requirement for knowledge of comprehending English is mainly a matter of understanding the basic grammar and structure of language and thereafter, principally, a question of widening the vocabulary in the desired direction. A perception of the literary beauties of Shelley's lyrics and of Shakespeare's poetic imagery is not strictly related to the requirements of the case.

The emphasis is thus clearly upon the utilitarian aspects of English as opposed to a development of the critical faculty of literary appreciation at least up to a certain level.

The position of English as a compulsory subject in the school curriculum had been a controversial issue since independence. Though English had been considered to be a burden for the school students if imposed as a compulsory subject, which they may or may not require in life, it has increasingly become clear that at least a workable knowledge of English is necessary in the globalised world today. The new 10+2 pattern introduced by the Central Board of Secondary Education with effect from May, 1975, West Bengal followed suit. In West Bengal English was granted the status of a compulsory second language. Teaching of English in the Higher Secondary level too exhibited a trend of relating the subject to the needs of the learners and making it more relevant. Dr. D.S. Ganguly, the former President of West Bengal Council of Higher Secondary Education clarified the concern by asserting that : "In the new All India pattern of education (10+2+3 years of study) – English is, in fact, the only subject that has been admitted as compulsory in the PLUS TWO stage (termed the Higher Secondary stage of education in West Bengal) and therefore the West Bengal Council of Higher Secondary Education – the statutory body in authority – is deeply concerned with the task is deeply concerned with making the study of this compulsory subject Cogent, Acceptable and Viable."

The Central Advisory Board on Education (CABE), the oldest statutory body on education in India, initiated the discussion on languages in school education in the 1940s and this

continued to be a major concern in their discussions until 1960. C.A.B.E identified five major issues which required attention:

- i. The number of languages to be taught at various levels of school education
- ii. The introduction of second and third languages
- iii. The place and role of English
- iv. The place and role of Hindi
- v. The teaching of Sanskrit and minor language(s) in school.

The Board devised the 'three-language formula' in its 23rd meeting held in 1956 with a view to removing inequalities among the languages of India. It recommended that three-languages should be taught in the Hindi as well as non-Hindi-speaking areas of the country at the middle and high school stages and suggested the following two possible formulae:

1. (a) i. Mother tongue or

ii. Regional language or

iii. A composite course of mother tongue and a regional language or

iv. A composite course of mother tongue and a classical language or

v. A composite course of regional language or a classical language,

(b) Hindi or English

(c) A modern Indian language or a modern European language provided it has not already been taken under (a) and (b) above.

2. (a) As above

(b) English or a modern European language

(c) Hindi (for non-Hindi-speaking areas) or another modern Indian language (for Hindi-speaking areas) [Annual Report of Ministry of Education 1957]

The three-language formula was simplified and approved by the Conference of Chief Ministers held in 1961 as follows:

- i. The regional language or the mother tongue when the latter is different from the regional language

- ii. Hindi or any other Indian language in Hindi speaking areas; and
- iii. English or any other modern European language.(Annual Report 1961-62, Government of India)

The language policy which emerged as a political consensus in the formative years of independence is also an illustration of democratic processes in the Asian context. The three-language formula emerged as a policy or a strategy after a quarter of a century of debate and deliberations from political and academic perspectives by educational advisory bodies and politicians representing national and regional interests.

CABE also deliberated in detail on the study of English as a compulsory subject as recommended by the education ministers' conference held in 1957:

- i. English should be taught as a compulsory language both at the secondary and the university stages, students acquire adequate knowledge of English so as to be able to receive education through this language at the university level.
- ii. English should not be introduced earlier than class V. The precise point at which English should be started at the middle stage was left to each individual state to decide. (Annual Report of Ministry of Education 1957)

A comprehensive view of the study of languages at school was undertaken and concrete recommendations were made by the Education Commission between 1964 and 1966 (Report of the Education Commission 1966, Ministry of Education). The Commission, having taken account of the diversity of the Indian context, recommended a modified or graduated three-language formula:

- i. The mother tongue or the regional language
- ii. The official language of the Union or the associate official language of the Union so long as it exists; and
- iii. A modern Indian or foreign language not covered under (1) and (2) and other than that used as the medium of instruction. (Ministry of Education 1966:192)

The Commission's observation on the status and role of English is of important since it reveals the way the language was perceived by policy planners. The position English was to enjoy in the school curriculum is reflected in what the Commission said. The Commission said:

English will continue to enjoy a high status so long as it remains the principal medium of education at the university stage, and the language of administration at the Central Government and in many of the states. Even after the regional languages become media of higher education in the universities, a working knowledge of English will be a valuable asset for all students and a reasonable proficiency in the language will be necessary for those who proceed to the university. (Ministry of Education, 1966)

Recommendations and observations made by the various educational committees and commissions of independent India bring out the nature of concern regarding the position of English in the school curriculum. English education developed considerably in the late nineteenth century as the demand for English increased for practical utilitarian reasons. The Hunter Commission focusing mainly on primary and secondary stage indicated greater use of English in the secondary stage. The Government Education Policy, 1904s, advocated that though it is not necessary to teach English in the primary level, some degree of proficiency in English is needed in the secondary stage or the middle stage so that the students are prepared to high school where English was the medium of instruction. The Hartog Committee Report expressed concern over the low standard of English in the higher education level. The Abbot-Wood Report in 1936-37, prescribed teaching English to middle school students but without creating excessive load. The report advocated the use of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction in high school but with the simultaneous emphasis on English as a compulsory subject in high school. The report also insisted on making the teaching of English more practical and realistic. The Sergeant Report (1944) supported the earlier recommendations in favour of using English as a medium of instruction but also recommended the introduction of English as an optional subject in the basic schools. It also advocated the teaching of English as a compulsory second language in high schools. After India won independence, a general apathy to the language of the colonizers, could have resulted in the total abolition of English from the school curriculum, but the practical use of English for official and interstate communication purposes maintained its place in the school curriculum. The Mudaliar Commission (1952-53) made significant recommendations on secondary education and advocated inclusion of the mother tongue and English as compulsory subjects in the lower secondary stage. Even at the higher secondary stage, it recommended introduction of both the mother tongue or the regional language and two elective languages including English as “core” subjects. Properly graded text books were also to be developed. The Commission had advocated the three language formula discussed earlier. West Bengal made slight amendments and adopted a three language formula that included English as a compulsory subject that was to be introduced from class V. The Kothari Commission (1964-1966) Report asserted that English should continue to be studied

as the most important library language and a channel of international communication. It also recommended a modification of the three language formula with English to be introduced at the upper primary stage as the Associate Official language of the Union, along with the mother tongue or the regional language. Study of three languages was to be obligatory at the lower secondary stage with English as one of them. out of the choices given for the Hindi speaking and non-HJindispeaking states in this stage, English emerged as a compulsory subject. The National Policy on Education, 1986 and the following Program of Action perpetuated the emphasis on the importance of teaching English in Indian schools. The AcharyaRamamurti Commission Report(1990) endorsed the three-language formula and emphasized the development of linguistic competency in the school children. It advocated the concerted efforts of the Kendriya Hindi Sansthan, Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages and Central Institute of Indian Languages in collaboration with the Central Board of Secondary Education(CBSE) and the National Council of Educational Research and Training(NCERT), for developing effective methods and ways of facilitating uniform linguistic competency in the school students. The state governments were also to be involved. The Ashok Mitra Commission that investigated the position of English in the school curriculum in West Bengal, reveals the crucial position of English in the school curriculum. The report submitted by the commission revealed considerable dissatisfaction about the total abolition of English in the Primary stage of education. It was revealed that unless school children are taught English from the primary stage, their linguistic competency suffered considerably and the prospect of faring well in national level competitive examinations or different spheres at the national level was put at stake. The Commission thus recommended introduction of English from the primary stage of school education, but with properly graded text and carefully designed methods so that the children are not overtaxed. Such a report practically reflected the concern with the place of English in the school curriculum in different states of India. The necessity of the language was evident. The Pabitra Sarkar Commission of West Bengal is another such investigation that advocated the introduction of English as a part of the formal school curriculum from class III, with the help of properly designed texts. The commission also advocated the CCE or the Comprehensive continuous Evaluation system for English and to delink the promotion or detention on the basis of English scores, at least till class IV. Public tests in English after class IV were permissible. Proper teacher education and continuous negotiation between literature and language teachers of the primary and secondary English teachers was deemed necessary for developing appropriate methods for teaching English to the school students.