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## **TEACHERS' ROLE IN LANGUAGE POLICY FORMULATING PROCESS AT SECONDARY LEVEL IN ASSAM**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study aims to explore the relationship between the English language policies in regional language/ vernacular medium secondary schools of Assam and the language proficiency acquired by the recipients in the target language. As part of a larger research project, this study is conducted at twenty regional language/vernacular medium secondary schools of Dibrugarh district of upper Assam and twenty eight teacher responses is received. The study is based on primary data collected from the teachers teaching English in standard IX and X. Questionnaires and interview schedules are the tools for collecting data from the teacher respondents and their opinions and suggestions regarding the present syllabus and curriculum for teaching-learning of English are the content of analysis and discussion of this qualitative study.

Extended Learning Activities (ELA) in curriculum are the views and suggestions of the teachers for filling the gap of language proficiency of their students. ELA includes learning through role play, group discussion, English society activities, speaking workshop, experience sharing, debating workshop, writing workshop, phonics workshop, self-learning programme and remedial classes. Transitional bilingual medium of instruction is another suggested outcome of the study. "learning English" and "learning in English" are two objectives proposed by the teachers.

This study on English language policy tries to fill the gap of English language policy formulation and implementation and language proficiency acquired by the students in secondary level of education. Hence, thereby allows for an effective curriculum as it is important that there should be an appropriate term and link between the policy makers and the beneficiaries of these policies for an effective result and outcome.

**Key Words:** ELA, language policy, curriculum, "learning English", "learning in English".

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### **Introduction**

Language policy is a deliberate attempt to change an individual's or community's use of a language or languages or a variety or varieties of community exist at local, regional, national, international and cross-border levels. By formulating and implementing the Language Policies the agents may try to influence the language behavior of such different groups or language users.

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Language policies can be implemented both at micro and macro levels in groups and individuals acting within local, regional, national and in international contexts. It is important that there should be an appropriate term and link between the policy makers and the beneficiaries of these policies for an effective result and outcome. Both the governments and the citizens aspire for an effective teaching-learning system to have access to the information, education and economic opportunities in this global and modern world.

It is important to know what the general features of language policies are and what are the factors of success and failure of such policies. Again, socio-cultural factors too play an important role in determining the language policies of a country. A language policy determines which languages are important for the country, the purpose of usage and the fund allocation for implementing the language policies. It also defines the percentage of the national budget to the different languages and the targeted time and the date of achieving this aim and objective.

The language policy of India includes the official language and the language for administration and official work in the country; the medium of instruction and the language and the languages of study in schools and colleges by the students; and the development and promotion of languages and scripts as part of the preservation of national culture.

English is taught and learnt in India as an academic subject in schools and educational institutions. It has the importance at the educational institutions since the inception of the language during the British regime. Even in post-independence India it occupies an important role in Indian academic, social and commercial areas. The language is learnt for social mobility, higher studies and commerce and business.

### **Methodology**

The attitude and utility of English language at secondary level in Assam was derived from a survey conducted in different secondary schools of Dibrugarh district of Assam, India. This empirical study was based on the primary data collected from twenty-eight teachers of twenty Assamese, Hindi and Bengali medium secondary schools of the district.

### **Materials**

Direct measurement techniques were used for primary data collection with the tools of questionnaire and interview schedule as well as observation. The questionnaire included open ended questions and yes/no type answer questions. Questionnaire finds the desirability, preference, evaluation, reasons for learning the target language. This method tends to focus on beliefs of the respondents. Secondary data is collected from books and textbooks of secondary level of Assam.

### **Results**

Attitude towards English in India and its several states is a mixed one as it is both admired and hated by the Indians. There is an increasing demand for English language which is associated with progress and development in one hand; on the other hand, it is perceived as the cause of death of native or indigenous languages day by day.

This admired attitude towards English in India is instrumental rather than integrative. The positive attitudes towards the language are an additive factor for teaching-learning of the target language which occupies the status of second language in the country.

Teachers' questionnaire leads to know the opinions, attitudes and suggestions regarding the English language education policy at secondary level education of the state. Knowledge of English makes a person more employable and enables one to know the literature and culture of different countries of the world. Knowledge of the language helps students for higher studies and better professional life and career. Learning English in the state is instrumental rather than integrative. It

does not mean to follow the western culture. It is now not only the language of the native speakers and these countries, but the language of the world. As well as it is the medium to know the western literature, culture and their tradition.

Unanimously accepted fact that English is a useful language for the students for their future progress and development is an instrumental usage of the language. The views of the teacher respondents are positive towards teaching-learning of English. They are supportive to their students for creating conducive learning environment. The teacher respondents want to provide their students with a more progressive and useful curriculum. To handle with negativity in outcome of students' inability to learn the language is a major project in the teaching-learning situations. To solve this problem of teaching-learning of the English language the syllabus of this level should be more activity based leading to change of the curriculum. This change can only lead to the extended learning activities.

Teachers need to see the classroom from many angles including the SLA research, teaching a particular teaching material to a particular group of students in a particular situation. Learning English in this level means to learn the four basic skills of language learning. Teachers focus on teaching and learning of grammar and vocabulary, correct pronunciation as the sub-skills. Teachers have opinions for mental and emotional support to students for better learning procedure.

As medium is not the barrier for students' learning the L2 but an exposure to that language help to acquire the language. Students' English could be improved by the maximum exposure to the language which is one of the criteria of teaching-learning situations. Regular practice of the four basic skills is important for language learning. Group discussions, group activities and role play are techniques suggested by the teacher respondents for teaching English language to their learners. Extended classes for teaching the target language are suggested by the teachers. Audio-visual aids are the helpful tools for them in language acquisition.

English can be improved with more and continuous practices on vocabularies, grammar and communicative English through experience sharing, writing in English, and phonic practices. These are the major sub-areas of students' weaknesses in the English language learning process. Communicative English is one of the expected language learning objective. Extensive reading is helpful for language development skills. Story-telling, word-games are some other techniques for language acquisition. Focus on form can contribute to students' learning. Grammar can be taught through this technique without explaining grammar explicitly. Judicious use of this task-based teaching is useful rather than full-scale grammar explanation.

## **Discussion**

As India is a country of linguistic pluralism a strategic implementation of language policy is an important factor. The national language policy in India is based on the three-language formula which was recommended by the National Commission on Education 1964-1966, and was incorporated into the national language policies of 1968 and 1986.

Secondary Education Commission (1952-53) is the first Commission appointed by the Government of India to survey the problems of secondary education. Aims of Secondary Education (Chapter III) defines the Role of Education in Developing Democratic Citizenship that,

"The first requisite in this connection is to develop the capacity for clear thinking and receptivity to new ideas. Closely allied to clarity of thought is clearness in speech and in writing".

The National Knowledge Commission, 2007 has emphasized on the significance of language not only as a medium of instruction or as means of communication, but also as a determinant of access to higher education, employment possibilities and social opportunities. The English language

is a critical determinant of access to the opportunities for better life. English has been an indispensable part of Indian education system for more than a century. Yet English language is not highly accessible to all people in the country. The National Knowledge Commission emphasized to teach English to ordinary people to ensure them for an inclusive society and to transform India into a knowledge society.

Regarding National Curriculum Framework 2005, NCERT 2005 opined, English in India today is a symbol of people's aspirations for quality in education and fuller participation in national and international life...The level of introduction of English has now become a matter of political response to people's aspirations, rendering almost irrelevant an academic debate on the merits of very early introduction. (NCERT, 2006:1)

People in India aspire for a quality education to incorporate in national and international levels. English is recognized as an official language of the country along with Hindi and twenty-two regional languages of India.

The English syllabus at secondary level in Assam is framed after the National Curriculum Framework (NCF), 2005 and followed the recommendations for syllabus formulation. The 'Foreword' in "Beehive", and "First Flight", the textbooks in English for Classes IX and X respectively as follows:

"The National Curriculum Framework (NCF), 2005, recommends that children's life at school must be linked to their life outside the school. This principle marks a departure from the legacy of bookish learning which continues to shape our system and causes a gap between the school, home and community. The syllabi and textbooks developed on the basis of NCF signify an attempt to implement this basic idea. They also attempt to discourage rote learning and the maintenance of sharp boundaries between different subject areas. We hope these measures will take us significantly further in the direction of a child-centred system of education outlined in the National Policy of Education (1986)".

The objectives of the respective textbooks want to bring change in learning behavior of the students with new perspectives. It focuses on:

- (a) To make a link between the school life and the outside world.
- (b) To make them learn from the practical life, but not bookish learning.
- (c) Learning through activity/task, but not rote learning.
- (d) To make the teaching-learning learner-centred.

Again it says,

"The success of this effort depends on the steps that school principals and teachers will take to encourage children to reflect on their own learning and to pursue imaginative activities and questions. We must recognise that, given space, time and freedom, children generate new knowledge by engaging with the information passed on to them by adults. Treating the prescribed textbook as the sole basis of examination is one of the key reasons why other sources and sites of learning are ignored. Inculcating creativity and initiative is possible if we perceive and treat children as participants in learning, not as receivers of a fixed body of knowledge".

The success of this new curriculum is only possible if the principals and teachers could motivate their students for learning. It provides opportunity for more practices to acquire the target language and suggest students for further reading for self-improvement.

There are instructions for teachers to let the children participate in the activities to the fullest extent and if necessary adding some of their own.

The language learning is instrumental and pragmatic. With the status of the second language in India, English is widely used throughout the country and is the lingua-franca in this multilingual diversified country. It is the official language along with the regional languages and Hindi.

Understanding language itself is a part of human mind and it can be gained through foreign language study or through language awareness training. Again the virtue of learning a classical language trained the brain. The logical and reasoning powers of the mind are enhanced through a second language. It is supported by research that shows that children who speak two languages are more flexible at problem solving (Ben Zeev, 1977 in Vivian Cook). Again, they are better able to distinguish form from meaning (Ianco-Worrall, 1972 in V. Cook).

English as the second language is taught as a part of school curriculum. The children do not themselves form a community of users of the L2, but are the members of the groups of the 'learners'. They are to fulfill the goal of getting through the hurdles of the examination system. Language is a school subject taught and assessed like other subjects.

One avowed goal of language teaching is to help people to think better – brain training and logical thinking. Others are appreciation of serious literature; and students' increased self-awareness and maturity; the appreciation of other cultures and races; communication with people in other countries, and so on. Goals of language teaching include changing people's attitudes towards other cultures and using second languages effectively. The main goals of language teaching are to serve the needs of the society for different groups to interact within each other.

A second language teaching has some international goals such as careers in foreign countries, especially the country of the L2. This goal aims to make the learners in the L2 user rather than the imitator of the native speaker. Higher education through the L2 means for the students not the importance of the language itself, but the knowledge and qualifications that are gained through the L2. Here L2 is an important part of learning. For access to research and information English is learnt to keep oneself up to date and well informed. Many students' motivation to learn a L2 is to travel abroad which is an international goal.

Raising awareness of language is helpful in second language learning. Eric Hawkins (1984) (in Vivian Cook) suggested that learners' general awareness of language should be raised before they start learning the L2, partly through grammar. Students' expectation and motivation help to their reception of the target language. Increasing awareness of language leads to educational advantages. Increasing awareness of language may be a goal of language teaching.

To bring about a change to teaching of English teachers have some opinions of changing the class routine. A single class of forty-five minutes per day is not enough for teaching-learning of a language. Hence, change in curriculum leading to extended learning activities are the only solution to the present scenario.

All successful teaching depends on learning and the proof of teaching is found in learning. Students' diverse motivations for learning the second language affect their learning. Again the different ways to tackle their learning affect students' learning behavior. Basis of students' learning behavior lies on their previous experience of learning and using the language.

Instrumental or integrative motivation helps students to successful learning and again successful learning cause high motivation. Positive feelings towards the target language help them to acquire the language. Usually schoolchildren do not have particular contact with the foreign culture and have no particular interest in it, there is any possibility of job prospects of children related to the foreign country of the target language. Their attitudes to L2 depend on the stereotypical cultural situations of their own country. The roots of the motivations of students' lie in their minds and cultural backgrounds.

Extended Learning Activities (ELA) in curriculum are the views and suggestions of the teachers for filling the gap of language proficiency of their students. ELA includes learning through role play, group discussion, English society activities, speaking workshop, experience sharing, debating workshop, writing workshop, phonics workshop, self-learning programme and remedial classes. Transitional bilingual medium of instruction is another suggested outcome of the study. "Learning English" and "learning in English" are two objectives proposed by the teachers.

### **Conclusion**

The attitude of the teacher respondents towards the teaching-learning is positive along with some modification in the school curriculum at secondary level in Assam. The goals of language teaching-learning is to help people to think better, brain training and logical thinking; appreciation of serious literature; and student increased self-awareness and maturity; the appreciation of other cultures and races; communication with people in other countries. The main goals of language teaching are to serve the needs of the society for different groups to interact within each other. A second language teaching has some international goals such as careers in foreign countries, especially the country of the L2. Raising awareness of language is helpful in second language learning. The teacher respondents are supportive towards their students for a better teaching-learning situation. Their role is not only to teach them the lessons in the syllabus but to make their students acquire the L2. The inadequate classes for the target language can be converted into an extended learning activities bringing change to the curriculum. Syllabus should contain maximum opportunity to learn English language and to know the literature as well. It should be activity based for learning the language.

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