

AN EVALUATION OF TEACHER TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA

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Abstract: Teacher education needs to be ongoing and onsite (through formal or informal support systems) as well as preparatory. Emphasis must be laid on teacher proficiency in or familiarity with the language, as the teacher is often a role model (for example, for reading). This is also one way to cultivate teacher awareness of or sensitivity to language learning. Proficiency and professional awareness are equally to be promoted, the latter to be imparted, where necessary, through the teachers' own languages. A curriculum is only as effective as its implementation. The 1960s structural curriculum aimed at "teacher-proof" material; this model failed linguistically, pedagogically, and psychologically. Subsequent presumptions of the teacher as "facilitator" of learning similarly face problems of credibility. While the teacher need not be the sole purveyor of language input (as recognized, for example, by his/her dependence on a textbook), the success of any classroom activity or innovation stems from the teacher's resources in the language.

i) Teacher proficiency in English is linked to the teachers' sense of satisfaction, indeed to his/ her willingness to teach English (Krishnan and Pandit 2003). This factor has hitherto not been addressed in teacher-training programmes. The recommendation for a later start for English presumed the availability of better (language-proficient) teachers at later stages (which, however, may not be true). With English now having been extended to situations where the teacher and the classroom are the sole sources of input, teacher proficiency has to be addressed urgently.

Keywords: Training, Proficiency, Assessment, Benchmark, Dialect

Introduction: Teacher education needs to be ongoing and onsite (through formal or informal support systems) as well as preparatory. Emphasis must be laid on teacher proficiency in or familiarity with the language, as the teacher is often a role model (for example, for reading). This is also one way to cultivate teacher awareness of or sensitivity to language learning. Proficiency and professional awareness are equally to be promoted, the latter to be imparted, where necessary, through the teachers' own languages. A curriculum is only as effective as its implementation. The 1960s structural curriculum aimed at "teacher-proof" material; this model failed linguistically, pedagogically, and psychologically. Subsequent presumptions of the teacher as "facilitator" of learning similarly face problems of credibility. While the teacher need not be the sole purveyor of language input (as recognised, for example, by his/her dependence on a textbook), the success of any classroom activity or innovation stems from the teacher's resources in the language.

1. Teacher proficiency in English is linked to the teachers' sense of satisfaction, indeed to his/ her willingness to teach English (Krishnan and Pandit 2003). This factor has hitherto not been addressed in teacher-training programmes. The recommendation for a later start for English presumed the availability of better (language-proficient) teachers at later stages (which, however, may not be true). With English now having been extended to situations where the teacher and the classroom are the sole sources of input, teacher proficiency has to be addressed urgently.

2. When proficiency is given its due place, there is freedom to provide the ideational or development component of teacher preparation in the teacher's own language, ensuring comprehension as well as debate. Teacher training through English has often found the language of its academic content an obstacle to understanding; this leads to jargonisation of teaching methodology. The Assam experience (Dowerah 2005) shows that academic content can be delivered in the teacher's own language. School teachers must mandatorily receive both pre-service training and in-service education at regular intervals; systemic provision must be made to spare teachers from constant routine activity. Pre-service education could profit by updating its curricula (and training personnel) to reflect the cognitive revolution in learning; too often "lesson planning" is still done in terms of immediate behavioral objectives, in spite of the accumulated evidence for language and vocabulary "growth" as against conscious knowledge of content, rules, or definitions.

3. Onsite intervention is essential if workable ideas are to be identified and put into practice.

In mother tongue(s) learning, speech progresses from a one-word, mostly nouns, stage to the production of multi-word sentences with verbs, auxiliaries, determiners, adjectives, and prepositions, perhaps through a two-word stage. Some research at CIEFL (Jangid 2005; Vijaya (in progress)) suggests that second-language learner-speech progresses through similar stages. Typically, learner control of language is reflected in longer mean length of utterance; sustained language input is reflected in such a growth in output

(in response, for example, to pictures shown to the child). In contrast, children from rigidly taught classrooms remain inarticulate, or produce single words, mostly nouns, in response to such pictures. Thus, teachers can get an intrinsic sense of language growth in the child with such a task, administered at three or four-month intervals. The results for such an evaluation can be: (a) in the form of an entry (a comment) in a portfolio that is maintained for each child ("portfolio assessment"); or (b) recorded in teacher and/or learner diaries. Teachers' diaries as a source for teacher development are being widely discussed. Learners can also be encouraged to maintain private, frank diaries of their learning experiences, in a language they know, to monitor their own progress. At later stages, speaking can be analysed into sub-skills for testing.

1. Reading aloud/decoding: As children become more proficient in decoding, they read faster (words per minute) with fewer mistakes. There may be children who progress from the mere spelling out of the letters of a word, to spelling and sounding out the word, using spelling out as a "word attack" skill for new words.
2. Scanning a text (such as a list, a telephone directory, an advertisement) for information
3. Reading for given information (factual comprehension)
4. Reading for inference
5. Extended reading

The testing of writing and listening can similarly be broken up into sub-skills. This sort of testing can be complemented by integrated language tests (beginning with the Cloze test, for example). A sub-skills approach to evaluation reflects the teachers' intuitions that particular students may have particular strengths; extroverted, articulate speakers may not be very interested in or good at an introverted, private activity like reading. The teacher can identify areas of strength as well as areas where help is needed.

Summative Evaluation must be "proficiency" rather than "achievement" oriented, i.e. designed not to test the mastery of studied passages, but rather the ability to use the language appropriately in new (albeit recurring) contexts, in

1. Reading age-appropriate material
2. Listening to and understanding age appropriate material
3. Conversing on age-appropriate topics
4. Writing on age-appropriate topics
5. Control over receptive vocabulary
6. Control over expressive vocabulary

National benchmarks for language proficiency need to be evolved by first gathering reliable descriptive data in all these respects from representative all-India samples. Such benchmarking of national norms or averages is well known as a precursor to the adoption

of support initiatives where necessary in the social sciences and education. It will also balance the curricular freedom that we suggest should be provided during the learning process, with the standardisation of evaluation that certification ultimately requires. The benchmarking should lead to a set of National English Language Tests, a bank of tests that learners and teachers can use for self-evaluation by opting to take them. These tests should allow for a much finer measure of proficiency than a broad overall grade or score (currently, scores on comprehension of unseen passages are conflated with scores on the recall of passages already studied, thus bundling even "proficiency" with "achievement"!). It is a robust teacher intuition that not all learners are equally at home in all the four skills; thus, good speakers may not be good writers, as there may be a trade-off between "accuracy" and "fluency" in the learning process. Neither are all skills equally important for all professions. Scores that reflect differential learner aptitudes and strengths will enhance employment potential, and have a washback effect on the curriculum.

Importantly, a set of National English Language Standardised national benchmarks for language skills that culminate in a set of National English Language Tests for various levels will:

1. allow individual schools or students to get a sense of where they stand, their strengths and weaknesses, and how to progress;
2. balance freedom of learning (curriculum, time frame) with standardisation of assessment; and
3. delink failure *in English* at Class X from failure at Class X, and provide an alternative route for English certification outside the regular school curriculum.

In its primary spoken form, language is a continuum of social or geographical dialects that are mutually intelligible at adjacent locations, whereas locations separated geographically, socially, or in time may become unintelligible. Most speakers command more than one spoken dialect or register of language (for example, formal and informal varieties). Written varieties of language, after the invention of print, have tended towards a standard variety that serves as the norm, particularly in education and academic life; this is necessary given the relative permanence of such communication.

Discussions on what model of English is appropriate for India centre mostly around the pronunciation (i.e. spoken English), and secondarily on lexis or vocabulary. The criterion for an acceptable pronunciation has to be intelligibility. David Crystal's (2004) concept of a tri-dialectal model, with speakers moving smoothly from a regional dialect (such as Punjabi English or Tamil English), to a national dialect (Indian English), or an international dialect where required, seems to be a feasible one. The success of

young Indians at call centre jobs shows that “accent training” is a matter of unlearning obvious regionalisms and arriving at a neutral speech style. This is achieved in large part by learning to slow down speech, speaking to a rhythm, and articulating with clarity, factors that improve the sound of speech in any language.

As for the sounds themselves, spoken “Indian English” has been described as having some pan-Indian characteristics such as long vowels instead of diphthongs, and retroflex consonants instead of alveolar ones. Many more characteristics of “Indian English” reflect the various mother tongues of the speakers, given the fact that “India” is a nation, but “Indian” is not a language. The less obtrusive these mother-tongue characteristics are, the more acceptable the pronunciation of the other tongue. It is also a common experience that a person may have more than one speech style, just as he understands many accents other than his own. Coming to lexis, linguistically the vocabulary of a language is an open class that enriches a language the more it borrows. It is well known that the strength of the English vocabulary lies in the richness of its sources.

Standard dictionaries currently have supplements of words commonly occurring in English used in India; there surely cannot now be any reason to keep these words out of the classroom. We include in lexis the idiomatic use of prepositions: *in a bus* rather than *on a bus*, and the use of *into* in mathematics; the latter means the division of one number by another in British

The initiation of research projects grounded in an awareness of current thinking is necessary for the provision of baseline data in language education, for curricular innovations and their implementation, and for theoretical progress in understanding second-language acquisition. A few suggestions for broad areas within which such projects may be conceptualized are made below.

1. Language across the curriculum: The language of social science and science textbooks (including verbal mathematics): patterns of questioning, and the relation of content to language
2. Language inputs and language growth: a holistic perspective
 - Language in spoken form (with or without print support)

- Language in written form (with or without read-aloud support)
 - Status of English at the primary level
 - A bank of activity and text materials (Level I)
3. Methods and materials to promote multilingualism
 4. Curricular choices for special groups (socially marginalized, learning disabled)
 5. Outcomes of teacher training programmes

Conclusion: Emphasis must be laid on teacher proficiency in or familiarity with the language. The 1960s structural curriculum aimed at “teacher-proof” material. The success of any classroom activity or innovation stems from the teacher’s resources in the language. English now having been extended to situations where the teacher and the classroom are the sole sources of input, teacher proficiency has to be addressed urgently. Teacher training through English has often found the language of its academic content an obstacle to understanding. Onsite intervention is essential if it is to be identified and put into practice. Learner control of language is reflected in longer control of language is reflected in longer mean length of alternate. Teacher’s aeries are as a source for teacher development being widely discussed. The testing of writing and listening can similarly be broken up into sub-skills. Summative evaluation must be “proficiency” rather than “achievement” oriented national bench marks for language proficiency needs to be evolved by first to gathering reliable descriptive data which lead to a set of national English language. A set of national English language standardized national benchmarks for language skills that culminate in a set of national English language tests for various levels be developed. The success of young Indians at call centre jobs shows that “accent training” is a matter of unlearning obvious regionalisms and arriving at neutral speech style. Spoken “Indian English” has been described as having some pan Indian characteristics such a long vowels instead of diphthongs, and retroflex such a long vowels instead of diphthongs, and retroflex consonants instead of alveolar ones. Standard dictionaries currently have supplements of words commonly occurring in English used in India. The initiation of research projects grounded in an awareness of current thinking is necessary for the provision of baseline data in language education.

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