

CHAPTER 2

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

TEACHING: A BRIEF PROFILE

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2.1 Emergence of English language in India:

The introduction of English in India dates back to the advent of the East India Company to the country. It all occurred in the summers of 1608 when Emperor Jahangir in the court of Mughals welcomed Captain William Hawkins which was India's first tryst with an Englishman and English. Jahangir later allowed Britain to open a permanent port and factory on the special request of King James IV and the British were here to stay in India. Since then from the early 1600's, English language developed in India, as the East India Company started trading here and English missionaries began their efforts to spread the language. A large number of Christian schools imparting English education were set up by the early 1800's. The process of producing English-knowing bilinguals in India began with the Minute of 1835, which officially endorsed T.B. Macaulay's goal of forming "a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern - a class of persons, Indians in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals and in intellect"⁹. In 1835, the British Government in India designated English as the medium of education for schools and universities. (Kachru 1983)

Due to its association with the British colonizer, English started life in India as not just a foreign language, but as a much-hated language. From the despised instrument of oppression to the reluctantly adopted lingua franca to the status symbol of the upper classes to its position today as a second language, English has come a long way. During over a century of British rule, English grew in popularity as a language of power, prestige and convenience. English became the official and academic language of India by the early twentieth century. Although it was a foreign language at that time, native Indians were quick to take to the

⁹Macaulay, 1979: 116

language, and even those who opposed to British rule would voice their resistance primarily in English. The rising of the nationalist movement in the 1920's brought some anti-English sentiment with it -- even though the movement itself used English as its medium.

Once independence was gained and the English were gone, the perception of English as having an alien power base changed; however, the controversy about English has continued to this day. Kachru notes that "English now has national and international functions that are both distinct and complementary. English has thus acquired a new power base and a new elitism"¹⁰. Even after India gained its independence from Britain, English continued to be widely used, and, in fact, the new constitution makers deliberated and wrote the Indian Constitution in the English language. While Article 343 of the Indian Constitution designated Hindi as the official language of the Union, it also provided for the continued use of English language for all official Union purposes for a period of 15 years.

After nine years, the Official Language Commission of India recommended extending the use of English; a recommendation that has been subsequently echoed by several other committees over the years. English came to be known as an 'associate official language' or an 'associate additional language'. Recognition of the need to train English teachers led to the establishment of several institutions, such as the English Language Teaching Institute (ELTI) and the Central Institute of English Language (CIEL), and several Regional Institutes of English.

2.2 Status of English in India

The status of English in India is different from its status in a Western European country. In a Western European country, where it is treated as a foreign language, here in India, English has the dignified place of second language, and, as such, it is widely used in the media, education, administration, non-localized business, etc.

¹⁰ Kachru 1986, p. 12

In the majority of cases, spoken and written English are learnt through formal education. While school textbooks are written in Standard English, students are continuously exposed to many varieties of Indian English outside of the classroom. English is mainly used as the medium of instruction in English-medium schools in the country. English-medium schools of varying standards exist in most cities and towns. In other schools, English is taught as a subject within the curriculum. At university level, the usage of English becomes more intense. It is the medium of instruction and examination in all the prestigious institutes of technology, institutes of medical sciences, agricultural universities, and university departments of engineering and technology. It is also the favoured medium of instruction and examination at post-graduate level for many subjects in the majority of universities.

Even though English is primarily a second language for Indians, it is the medium in which a great number of the interactions in the economic, industrial, professional, political, and social domains are carried out. Indians, who do not speak English, do not appreciate this growing importance of it, despite the fact that they are unable to change its popularity. This is particularly true in South India, where English serves as a universal language as Hindi is in the North. English confers many advantages to the influential people who speak it which have allowed it to retain its prominence despite the strong opposition to English which rises periodically.

2.3 English language teaching situation in India

As the status of the language underwent constant reinvention along with time, the whole ELT paradigm also travelled through the complete gamut of modification. In the closing years of the Twentieth century when English began to emerge as the global language, the Indian classroom was transformed because of the change in the environment of the learner. Whereas the earlier surroundings had been poor acquisition with regard to English, suddenly every language user seemed to be jumping upon the learn- English- bandwagon.

The liberalisation of the Indian economy ushered in all kinds of reasons to learn the language. While earlier in the century students who had specialised in English joined either teaching or the civil services, now a whole new spectrum of job opportunities has opened up. There are now call centres that need trainers to equip their employees with communication skills, there are multinationals who have been recruiting marketing staff that needed to be taught spoken English, there are medical transcription centres which need efficient translators and reporters. Those desirous of immigration to the west needed professional help for clearing tests like the IELTS. Hence, the avenues where ELT came to be required in India are unlimited today.

The change was first observed at the social, political and economic levels. Suddenly, English ceased to be the badge of status for the upper crust. Earlier, only the upper classes and a few limited size groups were seen using English in everyday life. The middle class reserved it for official purposes or those social occasions where they wished to leave an impression. The lower classes thought the use of English was beyond them and since the government schools of India made no effort to teach any kind of spoken English, this category of people had no exposure to it. However, around the year 1995, the whole paradigm began to change. The liberalisation of the economy led to the advent of multinationals resulting in many developments like varied job opportunities that demanded a command of English, more English channels on the television, an increasing number of English publications and international lifestyles becoming a tempting option.

The English language teaching situation in the pre-independence completely differed in the post-independence period. The situation that was during pre-independence completely changed due to its increasing demand. A close observation makes the point clear how the teaching situation of English in the post-independent period completely differed from the pre-independent.

2.3.1 Pre-independence period

The universal propagation of Christianity in India became one of primary motives for introducing English in the education system of India. The impact of Missionary activity was spreading fast and a considerable part of the elite started feeling that the access to education and knowledge is possible only through English. Wadia (1954) points out the Rajas of Tanjore and Marwar had approved to open English medium schools as early as in 1795. English was slowly but surely taking shape in the socio-historical context and the first book written to teach English was produced in India in 1797. The culmination of Missionary activities can be seen in Macaulay's minute of 1835. Macaulay was persuaded that there was no merit in Indian history, literature or science and that the Indian people could be educated only through the medium of English. Woods Dispatch (1854) evidently outlined the British government's agenda for a comprehensive educational policy in India. He believed that "Indian vernaculars" are not only important to the extent that they could be used for the dissemination of western language¹¹. Lord Bentinck directed that "all the funds be henceforth employed in imparting to the native population, knowledge of English literature and science, through the medium of English language". Hardinge later enticed the Indians by giving employment to those who were trained in English. As a result English became the sine-quo-non for the scholars, the job seekers and the wealthy class of the society. By the middle of the 19th century, English had replaced Persian as the court language and there was a vertical division in society which is visible till date. While the upper class elite were allied with English language, the lower classes were associated with Indian vernacular languages. By the 1920s, English had become the language of political discourse, intra-national administration, and law, a language linked with liberal thinking. Raja Rammohan Roy was committed to the idea that "European gentlemen of talent and education" should be allotted to instruct the natives of India (Kachru 1986). English was ultimately used against Englishmen, their roles and intentions as it became the

¹¹ Agnihotri and Khanna, 1997

language of resurgence of nationalism and political awakening, the medium for all these purpose was ironically was the alien language. Mohandas K. Gandhi (1869-1848) for instance struggled to create consensus for an acceptable native variety, as the national language expressed his message to the elite in English. Since there was no common language in India, he tried to create consciousness against British in English itself and he became successful in his drive to a great extent.

The modern school system in India has its origins in the colonial system of education that was formed between the 1830s and 1870s. Prevailing features of the current system, including the centrality of the textbook and examinations, and a highly centralised system of education administration, can all be directly traced to the colonial institutional structures. Although there was a widespread presence of village teachers engaged with literacy and numeracy instruction as well as centres for “shastric learning” (Sanskrit and Arabic), which could be considered as an indigenous system, the British system supplanted these “schools” or centres of learning and effectively cut off forms of state support or benefaction that they had previously enjoyed. The programme of study of the colonial school system included Western knowledge, the English language, and “(colonial) citizenship” and excluded all forms of indigenous knowledge. The new system was within the reach of all castes and communities and over time also addressed the education of girls; however, it was never anticipated to be a universal education system. Much of the spread of the system is to some degree accounted for by government effort in some parts of India, but also that of Christian missionaries, local rulers who promoted education in their princely states, social reformers, and finally, the involvement of the private sector was also responsible for it. The twin interests of social reform through enlightenment, knowledge, and education, as well as the bait of employment through Western education, drove the spreading out of the system. It is worth recalling the fact that this period was also the time when in the colonising European countries, the idea of national systems of education and compulsory schooling were developing, and curricular and pedagogic imaginations were being re-formed. The remarkable fact is that how quickly debates and developments in Europe found their reflection in the colonies and

how curricular and pedagogic innovation and development in the colonies sometimes preceded and informed progressive changes in Europe. Indigenous centres for shastric learning continued but on a much smaller scale and with limited sources of benefaction. It has been noted that characteristics of the indigenous system, particularly the centrality of an dictatorial teacher, knowledge as received, and pedagogies and approaches to learning including repetition and memorisation by an obedient student, all took root in and soon dominated the colonial school – this has been characterized as the “textbook culture”.

2.3.2 Post-independence period

By the time India became independent English had already consolidated its position in the school and university education. The debates of constituent assembly held in 1949 clearly indicated the significance of English in India. While Hindi was seen as a threat (a symbol of north Indian supremacy) by south Indians, English was seen as the continuation of colonial rule. Hindi was declared to be the official language of the union and English was given the status of an associate official language for a period of 15 years. Its importance as a language of wider opportunities and international contact was increasingly recognized. One can see a reflection of this in the constitution of India. According to Article 343 of the Indian constitution ". . .for a period of 15 years from the commencement of this constitution, the English language shall continue to be used for all the official purposes of the Union for which it was being used immediately before such commencement". Moreover special provisions were made for the retention of English language under the discretion of the parliament even after the fifteen year period for the following purposes.

- a. All proceedings in the Supreme Court and high courts.
- b. Authoritative texts of Bills, Acts, Ordinances, Order, Rules, Regulations and Bye laws issued under the constitution or under any law.¹²

¹² Kochhar 1991

In the academic field too all the education commissions appointed after India's independence have laid stress on the use of Indian languages as media of instruction at different stages of education, recommending at the same time, the study of English as an international link language, as a window to the world and as a library language which can be summed up as:

1. (i) For the medium of instruction for higher education English is replaced as early as practicable by an Indian language which cannot be Sanskrit on account of vital difficulties.

(ii) English is to be studied in high school and in the university in order that we may keep in touch with the living stream of ever-growing knowledge.

(University Education Commission, 1948–49)

2. The curriculum will consist of the following

(i) "Mother tongue or regional language or a composite course of the mother tongue and a classical language".

(ii) "Hindi/English/modern Indian language/foreign language/classical language".

(iii) Classical language or any one form

(Secondary Education Commission 1952-53)

Even the Kothari commission and the education policy of 1968 had emphasized the ". . . three language formula which included Hindi the regional language and English in the curriculum". At present socially English is recognized and upheld as a mark of education, culture and prestige. In this era of globalization the importance of English is growing rapidly. The first English language Teaching Institute ELTI was established in 1954 with the collaboration of the British Council. The structural syllabus prepared by the London school was brought to India by the British council and introduced in Madras in 1952.

2.3.3 English Language teaching situation in the present time

The increasing demand for English – both as a language and as a medium driven by the instrumental motivation has compelled most governments at the state (provincial) level to introduce English as a language from class One. The recent curricular revision at the national level culminated in the framework for National Curriculum Framework – 2005 (NCF) records the half a century development very objectively when it says, “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” (Position Paper Teaching of English 2005 - p1). English is an institutionalized subject in the school curriculum. Twenty six out of the thirty five states and union territories (the provinces and the specially created regions) introduce English as a language from class I and the remaining states introduce the language either from class three or five. There is every likelihood that these states (which do not introduce English in class I) would bring it down to class I within a year or two. Resistance to spread of English language education is countered by genuine arguments which look at the English language as a tool for empowerment. English today is simultaneously sought after and suspected ¹³ (Tickoo 1996) phenomenon. The motives, generally, are not only socio-political but academic too. While the demand increases on the one hand, the quality of English language education in our state-run schools, more particularly in rural schools, presents an abysmal picture. The ‘divide’ between the urban and rural is further contributed by the way English language education is making its way as a medium of instruction. The paradox of demand and suspicion (Tickoo 1996) mentioned above could be further reflected through the paradox of access depicted by the report of the National Knowledge Commission, India as it brings out rightly, *“There is an irony in the situation. English has been part of our education system for more than a century. Yet English is beyond the reach of most of our young people, which makes for highly unequal access. Indeed, even now, more than one*

¹³ Tickoo 1996

percent of our people use it as a second language, let alone a first language But NKC believes that the time has come for us to teach our people, ordinary people, English as a language in schools. Early action in this sphere would help us build an inclusive society and transform India into a knowledge society."¹⁴ The diverse English language education situation in the country shows both a rosy and an abysmal picture. Schools in different regions and systems operate in their contexts. The state policy on language education, curricular statements and syllabi and materials for teaching-learning of English along with teacher inputs decide the quality of education in schools more so in rural schools. English language teaching situation presents a mixed picture from top to very low level in terms of teacher proficiency (TP) and the exposure of pupil to English in and outside school, i.e. the availability of English in the environment of language acquisition (EE). (Nag-Arulmani, 2000 cb NCERT 2005). Kurien (2005)¹⁵ identifies four types of schools as given below

↑↑TP,↑↑EE (e.g. English-medium private / government-aided elite schools)
Proficient teachers; varying degrees of English in the environment, including as a home or first language

↑TP, ↑EE (e.g. New English-medium private schools, many of which use both English and other Indian languages): teachers with limited proficiency; children with little or no background in English; parents aspire to upward mobility through English.

↓TP, ↓EE (e.g. Government-aided regional-medium schools): schools with a tradition of English education along with regional languages, established by educational societies, with children from a variety of background.

↓↓TP, ↓↓EE (e.g. Government regional-medium schools run by district and municipal education authorities): they enrol the largest number of elementary school children in rural India. They are also the only choice for the urban poor

¹⁴ NKC 2007,P.47

¹⁵ Kurien 2005

(who, however, have some options of access to English in the environment). Their teachers may be the least proficient in English of these four types of schools. (Position Paper Teaching of English-NCF - 2005- NCERT) (p 2)

The difference in the teaching-learning situation, learners' exposure to the language outside the schools and parental support further divides each category into many levels. As Prabhu (1987:3) observes that "typologies of teaching situation... should thus be seen as an aid to investigating the extend of relevance of a pedagogic proposal," rather than as an absolute categories. The teaching situation decides where a school stands. The most rural schools in India today fall under the fourth category where we have children with almost nil or no exposure to the language, teachers' language proficiency is in question and here are the parents who cannot support their children in learning the language.

2.4 The Language Policy in India: Three-Language Formula

It is a well known fact that, India enjoys too many languages to choose a sole official/common language. However, any nation needs (more than) one common language to communicate with one another and to unite the nation. Of course, in terms of efficiency and economically it is better for a nation to have the least number of languages as an official language. The language debate in education in the formative years of India's independence not only brought in awareness among the stakeholders of education, it also enabled the policy makers to fully attempt to realize the constitutional vision of equality of opportunity, linguistic rights of every linguistic and ethnic community and moving towards the goal of achieving universal access to education.

"The Three-Language Formula", India's most representative language policy, is a compromise between different linguistic groups in India. Though the term "the Three-Language Formula" is seldom used by the Government of India in official documents, the term is widely accepted and used. The Three-Language Formula was worked out as a way of accommodating the interest of each linguistic group.

The formula is a policy to encourage them to choose and learn three languages at school. The first one of the three languages, in most cases, is speaker's mother tongue/regional language while the second one is Hindi (a language of national pride and unity). And the last one is English (a language of administrative efficiency, technological progress and international communication).

According to the Formula, children are required to study a regional language (in most cases [about 74% of the Indian children], their mother tongue) at the lower primary stage (1st-4th grades). They are required to learn two languages such as a regional language (mother tongue) and English at the higher primary level (5th-7th grades). Moreover, they are supposed to study three languages like a regional language, English and Hindi in non-Hindi regions (or a modern Indian language in Hindi regions though, in fact, a classical language like Sanskrit, Persian or Arabic is chosen) at the lower secondary level (8th-10th grades). Generally, English is preferred to Hindi by children though either of them can be chosen at the higher primary level. Recently due to rapid growth of the demand of English, it has been introduced from the very first standard.

The Three Language Formula which emerged as a political consensus on languages in school education was a strategy (not a policy)¹⁶ to accommodate at least three languages within the ten years of schooling. As the report of the Education Commission (1964-66) rightly describes it, "the impelling considerations were more political and social, than educational. In effect the formula established equality between the Hindi and the non-Hindi areas..." (p 191) India today has 92.07% schools at the primary stage teaching through mother tongue, and the rural and urban comparison shows 92.39% schools in rural areas and 90.39% school in urban areas teach through mother tongue. At the Upper Primary stage 91.34% teach through mother tongue which consists of 92.71% in rural areas and 87.37% in urban areas. 12.14% at the primary stage, 14.47% schools at upper primary and 18.53% at the secondary stage have two or more media of instruction. It is also interesting to note that 91.95% of schools in

¹⁶ Pattanayak D.P. year not mentioned

the country at the primary stage teach two or more languages. With regard to number of languages taught 90.61% of schools at the upper primary stage follow three language formula (i.e. at least three languages are taught), 84.86% of schools follow the formula at the secondary stage. (7th AISSES - NCERT 2007). Forty seven languages are used as media of instruction in schools and forty one languages are taught or used in schools.

Three language formula has been adopted in Indian Educational system considering the multilingual aspect of different Indian community. Multilingualism is constitutive of Indian diversity. There are about 1652 languages belonging to five different language families in this country (1971 census). Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution recognizes twenty two languages as official languages of the country, eighty seven languages are used in the print media, seventy one languages are used on radio and the administration of the country is run on thirteen different languages. But only forty seven languages are used as media of instruction in schools. Our educational system should make every conceivable effort to sustain multilingualism (Crawhall 1992; Heugh et al. 1995 among others) rather than suppress it (NCERT 2005). Pattanayak (1981) argues how our educational system has consistently weakened the advantages of grass-root multilingualism that characterizes our society. As Illich (1981) suggests, we need to make every possible effort to empower the languages of the underprivileged and tribal and endangered languages. Affirmative action is called for in this domain (NCERT 2005). To quote Pattanayak, “if participatory democracy has to survive, we need to give a voice to the language of every child.”¹⁷ Multilingualism in education refers to the use of two or more languages as medium of instruction (UNESCO-2003). The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) – 2005 strongly advocates multilingualism in school education. This confers definite cognitive advantages. Bilingual children not only have control over several different languages but they are also academically more creative and socially more tolerant (NCERT Position Paper: Teaching of Indian Languages

¹⁷ Pattanayak (1981)

2005). Using the multilingual aspect in the classroom as resources to teach the subjects would benefit the teacher in locating the child in his / her context. This also takes us to language across the curriculum perspective. The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) – 2005 provides the following guidelines for language education in schools.

Language teaching needs to be multilingual not only in terms of the number of languages offered to children but also in terms of evolving strategies that would use the multilingual classroom as a resource. Home language(s) of children should be the medium of learning in schools. If a school does not have provision for teaching in the children home language(s) at the higher levels, primary school education must still be covered through the home language(s). It is imperative that we honour the child's home language(s). According to Article 350A of our Constitution, 'it shall be the endeavour of every state and of every local authority within the State to provide adequate facilities for instruction in the mother tongue at the primary stage of education to children belonging to linguistic minority groups'.

Children will receive multilingual education from the outset. The Three language formula needs to be implemented in its true spirit, promoting multilingual communicative abilities for a multilingual country.

In the non-Hindi speaking states, children learn Hindi. In the case of Hindi speaking states, children learn a language not spoken in their area. Sanskrit may also be studied as Modern Indian Language (MIL) in addition to these languages.

At later stages, study of classical and foreign languages may be introduced. (3.1.1. Language Education, NCF 2005 P37)

2.5 Spread of English language in Assam

English was introduced in Assam by the Christian missionaries who came with the East India Company. The Ramakrishna Mission also took initiative to spread English language in Assam and also modern education in general. First English

school in Assam was established in Guwahati in 1835 and then at Sibsagar in 1840 by the Christian Missionaries with a view to impart English education to the youths of Assam and also to make them suitable for junior post in administration. With the expansion of British rule in India as a whole, knowledge of English became a historic necessity both for administration and increasing commercial intercourse. Before the charter act of 1833 there was no noticeable progress in the field of education in Assam, but after that both government and missionaries actively took part in educational field'. It has been very aptly pointed out that the 'aim of the English to educate the Indians was either to produce caricatures of European characters who would be willing to accept the Gospel of Christ or to get a regular supply of cheap clerks to serve them in the business organization of the government of India and subsidiary undertakings of the British Subjects'¹⁸. As a result of the Missionary efforts in the past, English could make its way in this region which later helped to flourish many English medium schools in this locality. Hence the position of English in Assam is not very different from that of the nation though, due to the negligence of the people it is lagging behind than many other states. The cause of poor knowledge of English among the students is the negligence of the students as well as their uneducated parents. Large majority of the students doesn't get apt guidance at home and school as well as the knowledge of the language doesn't get proper scope to flourish generally where the medium of instruction is other than English. In majority of these schools the teaching of English is in a nearly chaotic condition. This is due to the lack of inefficient teachers without having proper training and knowledge about the latest methods of second language teaching.

The unique importance of English has however been realized in Assam and therefore it has been retained as a compulsory subject up to degree level of education.

¹⁸ Bose, 1989:90

2.5.1 Medium of Instruction

The Report on education in Assam in the year 1935-36 says that the medium of government schools would be Assamese (Assam Education Department Report, dated 19th December, 1936, para.1). Assamese as medium of instruction came to be introduced in all high schools of Assam excepting for the Bengali, Hindi and Manipuri medium schools. After Independence in early 1970, Gauhati University took a decision to introduce Assamese as the medium of instruction in all colleges affiliated to it, with effect from 1972-1973, in place of English. This decision would affect not just degree classes, but pre-university classes as well. English was to continue as the alternative unit of instruction. Academic Council of Guwahati University made the following recommendations regarding the medium of instruction:

1. Assamese would be the medium of instruction in all colleges under the jurisdiction of Gauhati University.
2. English shall continue as the alternative medium of instruction for need-based courses.
3. Students may write their university examinations either in Assamese or English.
4. Council withdrew the option of answering examination question papers in Bengali which earlier used for some regions.

At the higher educational level English is the medium of instruction. There are a few schools in the state that also use English as their medium of study at lower level. The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) affiliated schools in the state use English as their medium of instruction. English is also used to teach at most higher educational institutions in Assam.

On the basis of medium of instruction schools can be divided into two main groups vernacular and English medium schools. English is considered as a compulsory subject up to the undergraduate level. In most vernacular medium

schools and colleges English is taught with the help of bilingual method i.e. both vernacular and English language are used in the English classroom.

Nowadays Axom Sarba Siksha Abhiyan provides free education in government aided schools up to class VIII. Thereafter up to the High School leaving certificate examination i.e. class X education is undertaken by Secondary Board of Education Assam SEBA while 10 + 2 level is conducted by Assam Higher Secondary Education Council AHSEC. The Degree colleges are affiliated to Gauhati University Dibrugarh University or Assam University. On the other hand the private schools are either autonomous or they form a group of their own. Missionaries play a major role in establishing private schools. Earlier private schools were almost synonymous to English medium schools but recently for the last 5 years many Assamese Bengali medium private schools have been established and their numbers are swelling day by day. On the other hand most of the government schools were once private in the sense that they were once established by the local people in order to educate the children of their locality and these venture schools sought government affiliation and later some of them were undertaken by the government of Assam. The process is going on and even today there are many venture schools in the state. But this is a completely different story. In this dissertation private schools refer only to those schools which do not seek any government aid. Neither they abide by the government holiday list nor do they follow the government rules and regulations to a greater extent. To a great extent they are guided by their own norms and principles. Up to class VIII these private schools follow a comparatively vast syllabus with two or three extra subjects than that of provincialised schools. They have few holidays and more working hours. On the other hand their admission fee monthly tuition fee etc are much higher than that of provincialised schools in provincialised schools education is provided free of cost up to class VIII. Moreover in most of the private schools bus van service are provided to carry the students and stuff the facility which is not available in government and provincialised schools. Thus expenditure being very high these private schools are affordable for only a class of people who belong to a healthy financial status. These schools are not for the

children who originate from the families living below the poverty line i.e. the greater mass and thus fail to make any remarkable contribution to the total literacy rate.

2.6 The place of English in School Curriculum:

The state policy on language education, curricular statements and syllabi and materials for teaching-learning of English along with teacher inputs decide the quality of education in schools more so in rural schools. Any curricular reform ought to take into consideration the fact that whatever appears relevant and essential today may not be suitable for tomorrow. Curriculum in countries like India bases itself on the diverse characteristics of the nation with its multiplicities. As Clark¹⁹ remarks, a curriculum addresses the common as well as the individual aspirations. *Given the diverse and conflicting values that exist within any large social group, and given a democratic concern for the valuing of such diversity, it would seem necessary for any contemporary curriculum to attempt to embody what are agreed to be common aspirations, and yet leave space for individual interpretation within and beyond these, to accord with the individual characteristics of each teaching and learning context.* Goals for a comprehensive language curriculum needs to bring in aspects of language, culture, practices of people in the learning process in accordance with the local needs and concerns so that learners are able to connect with real life situations. A national curriculum (in language education) should aim for ... *a cohesive curricular policy based on guiding principles for language teaching and acquisition, which allows for a variety of implementations suitable to local needs and resources, and which provides illustrative models for use.*²⁰ (p .3) A syllabus, which is a medium to realize the aims of language education, is driven by various needs and concerns that a curricular framework aims to achieve. We expect a syllabus to present textbook developers for designing such materials that would give scope and space for teachers to exploit the perspective to maximum

¹⁹ John L. Clark 1987. P 9

²⁰ NCERT – 2005

extent and to go beyond the textbook to engage the learners with their peers and immediate surroundings. The main objective of a good syllabus is to enable the learner to achieve proficiency in the language in different domains. The syllabus should reflect.

- i. Assumptions about language learning
- ii. Appropriate themes the texts embody
- iii. Objectives of teaching-learning English.
- iv. Knowledge of methods expected of teachers who use the textbooks
- v. Ideas on how learning materials will be constructed (What? and How?)
- vi. Ideas on how learning is to be evaluated

The state run schools which mostly fall under the fourth category of schools mentioned above would need to provide a curriculum for that ensures at least minimum level of exposure to the language, materials (receive inputs) that would present the language in contexts through authentic texts²¹, tasks and activities where children would engage with the language and interact and develop communicational skills, proficient teachers who would ensure enabling conditions for learning the language in meaningful contexts, and an examination system that would not threaten the rural learner and declare him a failure because s/he could not pass the mark of 33% in the subject as that of a content subject. But a question still remains if our state curricula provide such conditions so that the rural learners feel comfortable being in school, particularly in learning English language.

Nobody can deny the fact that it is through English that we are able to keep ourselves updated with recent developments around the world. English is also of utmost importance in case of higher studies and research in the field of science and technology and for those who want to find a good livelihood in this competitive environment. Here lies the inclusion of English language teaching

²¹ Krahsen 1985

from the early years of education. English, as it serves as the common medium for political historical and scientific thought for the people of the world, has found a place of interest in the school curriculum. The secondary education commission 1952-53 gives emphasis on the retention of English in school curriculum as it is thought that English language and literature would help in bringing unity in the political and other spheres of activity in India. The Indian education commission 1964-66 also recommended the continuance of English in the interest of national integration or for higher academic work. The three language formula first suggested by the National Integration Commission 1962 and later recommended by the Indian Education commission 1964-66 contemplated compulsory study of English either as a second language L2 or as a third language L3 for a duration of six years or three years respectively in non Hindi speaking areas and as a second language for six years in Hindi speaking areas. Even when the different educational commissions and committees at different times recommended the adoption of the mother tongue or the regional language as a medium of instruction English finds its due place in the curriculum. Though most of the universities including Gauhati University and Dibrugarh University in Assam have switched over to regional languages as medium of instruction up to graduate level they have retained English as a compulsory subject of study upto the graduate level.

T.C. Baruah 2006 finds out some objectives of teaching English at the school stage. To him it must aim at developing in the pupils the following skills and knowledge.

1. To understand English with ease when spoken at normal conversational speed.
2. To speak English correctly and fluently
3. To read English with comprehension and at a reasonable speed as to use it as a library language for gathering information and for enjoying reading.
4. To write neatly and correctly at a reasonable speed
5. To enjoy simple poems in English

6. To translate common English words phrases and sentences into their functional equivalents in mother tongue and vice versa

7. To develop interest in English

English will continue to dominate the school curriculum not only as a language, but as a medium of learning too. Given the important roles to English in education and in the larger society²², this will have greater implications for language education, particularly English language education in rural settings. The anti-English spirit or English hatred is dying out and will slowly diminish in coming years as the language is perceived as language of hope and better life. While some of our native languages are losing their battle for survival where English is taking the 'killer' role and the curricular documents calling for collaborative bi-/multilingualism, what in reality felt is subtractive bilingualism. This dangerous trend may lead to mass conversion to English medium instruction in our schools, both urban and rural schools. We must ensure that English as a language in education is fully realised in terms of the basic conditions for learning the language and those educated through native medium schools attain the proficiency that would not hamper them to move forward to higher education and employment any other urban English medium educated child would compete. Much discussed Common School System needs to be taken seriously along with right to education to realise a comprehensive language-in education strategy that would keep our rural learners comfortable.

2.7 Problem of teaching English in Assam

There are many problems prevalent in teaching and learning situation of the English language in Assam. The first problem one notices is the dismal performance shown by the Mother tongue medium learners after ten years of studying the English language in primary and secondary stage. Many students are unable to communicate orally in simple English. If the basic aim incorporated in the syllabus is to enable the students to communicate and participate in real life

²² Tickoo 1996

situations then why our students fail to do so is an emerging problem. From this standpoint it seems that the incorporation of communicative approach in the syllabus fails to produce the desired output.

In general in vernacular medium schools it is found that the teaching and learning English is very weak. The teachers of English employ grammar translation method to teach English which can't help practically to use the language productively as far as active communication is concerned. The basic objective of teaching and learning is partially fulfilled in vernacular medium schools.

These mother tongue medium learners lack communicative competence as they are facing insufficient exposure. They need to use English not only in the classroom but outside too. Because of this fact they are less familiar to English sounds and as a result of this their pronunciation is faulty. So there is a need to use as much English as possible in the classroom as well as outside it and it has to be focused on.

It is quite common in Mother tongue medium schools that teachers even knowing the importance of using English in the classroom to get the students familiar with it frequently use word to word translation from English to Mother tongue perhaps thinking that if translation not being used might result in lack of comprehension of the text on the part of the students which affects the students passing the examination. Even if the teachers start teaching English without translation students feel uncomfortable and they expect the teachers' use of translation since they are familiar and accustomed to it so far. It has also been noticed that a good percentage of teachers of English are unable to speak English as well. They become confused when they are to use English in real life situations. Sometimes even a frustrated lot opt for teaching as a career. They are not all qualified to teach English as a foreign or second language.

It is quite noticeable that many of the teachers do not even participate in teachers in service training programme conducted by English language Teaching

Institute ELTI Kahilipara and even if some teachers participate in order to update themselves for acquiring new information in the area of language teaching they hardly implement those for teaching English in mother tongue dominated English classroom situation.

At the same time the teachers face the pressure to complete the course of the text within the stipulated period of time emphasizing on the contents rather than the skills of the language. There is need to change the situation of teaching and learning English in the Manipuri medium schools where the focus should be shifted from teaching about English to teaching English. After all teaching English efficiently constitutes an awesome challenge to the teachers. While English is a skill subject they would teach it as knowledge of content subjects like History or Social studies. The skills of listening and speaking are neglected in English classroom. And there is hardly any action research undertaken by the teachers. Moreover learning English is basically dependant on the learners desire to learn. However the conditions for learning English in Manipuri medium schools are totally different. English as a subject is taken to be difficult by the students. In most cases there is no real urge to learn English since the learners can get on easily with their own mother tongue i.e. Manipuri. Motivation is a stimulus to speaking and it should be created among the students by the teachers of English.

Today in Manipuri medium schools there is a need to tackle the problems in order to overcome the pitiable scenario of language learning situation.

2.8 Educational Institutes of Silchar and English language teaching situation in the high schools

Silchar has some of the best educational institutes in Northeast India. One of the 20 National Institutes of Technology (formerly known as Regional Engineering Colleges), NIT Silchar is one of the oldest engineering colleges in the region. REC Silchar, as it was known previously, is now an Institute of National Importance.

After several years of persistent efforts, Silchar got its own university — Assam University, a central university, which imparts education in both the general as well as professional streams. The university, which came in to existence in 1994, has 16 schools and 34 post-graduate departments under them. The university has 51 affiliated colleges under it.

Among the colleges, the best known are Guru Charan College, Cachar College, Ramanuj College, Radhamadhab College, Cachar College, etc. Guru Charan College is one of the most respected and reputed colleges in Assam.

The city has a medical college, Silchar Medical College and Hospital, established in 1968, serving the southern regions of Assam. There is also a polytechnic institute, B.Ed colleges, two law colleges and one industrial training institute (ITI)

According to Statistical Handbook, Assam, 2006 the number of high schools in Cachar District in the year 2004-05 was 203²³. Some reputed schools in Silchar include Silchar Collegiate School, Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya, Cachar High School, Adhar Chand Higher Secondary School, Narsing School, Govt. Boys School, Govt. Girls School, Holy Cross School, Mukdashree High School, Pranabananda Holy Child School, South Point School, Oriental High School, Daffodils School, Maharishi Vidya Mandir, Pranabananda Vidya Mandir, a couple of Kendriya Vidyalayas, Don Bosco School amongst others. Silchar Collegiate School is of one of the best schools in Barak Valley. The missionaries started its venture of spreading English language in Cachar District by establishing Holy Cross School in 1960. But the position of teaching English in Cachar is not satisfactory rather appalling. The standard of English is falling here day by day. The active vocabulary used by the students is very poor. Quite significant number of students cannot even use the simplest structures. If we analyse the situation we are rather astonished by the sorry state of affair. Below are the conditions under which English is taught and learnt in most of the schools of Cachar.

²³ Statistical Handbook, Assam, 2006

- i. Academic conditions
 - a. lack of purpose and clear cut objectives of teaching English
 - b. Burdensome curriculum and faulty textbooks
 - c. Faulty evaluation system
 - d. lack of confident competent and qualified teachers
 - e. Faulty methods of teaching English
 - f. Apathy to new procedures and techniques
 - g. Insufficient training of teachers
 - h. lack of incentives for in service growth of English teachers
 - i. Inadequate provision of audio visual aids
 - j. Insufficient time for the subject in time table
 - k. Domination of the conservative headmaster
 - l. lack of research in the field of methodology of teaching English
 - m. Examination oriented attitude of the school authorities teachers and parents
- ii. Physical condition
 - a. unhygienic physical condition
 - b. Growth in numbers and large classes
- iii. Social conditions
 - a. lack of exposure
 - b. Parental unawareness and interference