



## National Focus on English Language

### KEYWORDS

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### INTRODUCTION

English has enjoyed and still enjoys a unique place in the curriculum of language teaching in India. It has been used as an official language- the language of administration of courts, of legislature, of interprovincial, interstate and international communication, of commerce and for all international matters. Even now, English enjoys the coveted position as the National language and it is hoped that it will continue to enjoy this position. In the absence of any common medium of communications, it has served the purpose of the lingua franca in India and has been used as a medium of instruction in schools and higher education. It is one of the subjects of examination conducted by various recruiting boards such as Union Public Service Commission, Tamil Nadu Public Service Commission, Bank Service Recruitment Boards, Life Insurance Corporation and Public Service Commission of other states and the centre too. Competence in English will be an asset for studying in higher learning institutions such as Universities, technical institutions for advanced studies such as IITs, IIMs etc. and to take up employment in Government or Private or Public sector undertakings.

In Tamil Nadu, English is being taught as a second language in State Board Schools and in Matriculation, ICSE and CBSE schools, it is being taught as first language. Even in the State run Government Schools, English medium classes have been started in classes 1 to 12. Since 2012-13 academic year, English medium classes in Tamil medium schools have been introduced. For quite a long period, since we got Independence, English has been a language for children from class III and presently Government of Tamil Nadu has changed its policy so that English is taught from class I in all the state board schools. It is significant to note that the Government of Tamil Nadu appoints graduate teachers in Upper Primary classes since June, 2003 as a measure to improve the quality of education. And in the history of the state, an English graduate teacher is appointed exclusively for handling English classes in classes VI to VIII. Prior to this, only secondary grade teachers were handling English classes.

### LANGUAGE POLICIES IN INDIAN EDUCATION

The language policies adopted by the Government of India, at each step and stage from the pre-independent days and the conducive environment provided by them contributed for the development of English in India as a foreign language and also as a second language and hence a few education policies which are most relevant to the present study are discussed below.**LORD MACAULAY'S MINUTES, 1835**

Macaulay's Minutes was motivated more by a political administrative necessity than by an urge to bring about social

transformation. Lord Macaulay, in his famous "Minutes", recommended the use of English for educating the Indian masses. He felt that the English language was the only suitable medium to transfer technical knowledge and scientific bent of mind to Indians. His aim was to groom a small section of Indians who could later use English as medium of communication and bridge the gap between India and the western world. But the sole purpose was to create a body of clerks to assist in the administration of the country. Macaulay's 'Minute' very clearly argues for English as the medium of instruction at higher levels, rather than the oriental languages. The 'Minute' constitutes an example of colonialist and imperialist attitude of superiority.

### WOODS DESPATCH OF 1854

The East India Company had to renew its Charter after every twenty years. Before renewing the Charter in 1853, the British Parliament constitutes a Selection Committee to enquiry into the Progress of education in India and suggests reform. The suggestions of the Committee were issued as a Charter of Education on July 19, 1854. Charles Wood was the president of the Board of Control. So this is known as Wood's Despatch of 1854.

The Wood's Despatch, for the first time, recommended the creation of a Department of Public Instruction in each of the five provinces of Bengal, Bombay, Madras, the Punjab and the North Western provinces. The head of the Department would be called the Director and he was to be assisted by a number of inspectors. The D.P.I had to submit an annual report to the government about the educational progress in his province. The Wood's Despatch gave importance to teaching of English, but at the same time, it also stressed on the teaching of Indian languages. The Despatch realized that any acquaintance of European knowledge could be communicated to the common people and that could be conveyed to them only through learning their own mother tongue. Therefore the Despatch clearly stated that Indian languages as well as English should be used as media of instruction.

### REPORT OF THE UNIVERSITY EDUCATION COMMISSION, 1948

University Education Commission was appointed by the Government of India under the chairmanship of Dr.S.Radhakrishnan. Besides offering plenty of recommendations to University Education, the significance of learning English in India was pinpointed in this report. English however, must continue to be studied. It is a language which is rich in literature, humanistic, scientific and technical. If under sentimental urges, we should give up English we should cut ourselves from the living stream of ever-growing life. Unable to have access to this knowledge, our stand-

ards of scholarship would fast deteriorate and our participation in the world movements of thought would become negligible. Its effects would be disastrous for our practical life, for living nations must move with the times and must respond quickly to the challenge of their surroundings. English is the only means of preventing our isolation from the world and we will act unwisely if we allow ourselves to be enveloped in the folds of a dark curtain of ignorance.

#### SECONDARY EDUCATION COMMISSION (1952-53)

The Indian Secondary Education Commission reports, ".....it is suggested that no student should be handicapped by ignorance of a language which will ultimately determine the career that he should choose. It should also be recognized that even in regard to many of the diversified courses of instruction as matters stand at present, knowledge of extremely useful for understanding the subject matter and for further study of the same subject. All these considerations lead to the conclusion that a study of English should be given due position in secondary schools and facilities should be made available at the Middle school stage for its study on an optional basis".

#### INDIAN EDUCATION COMMISSION 1964-66

In view of the important role of education in the national development and in building up a truly democratic society the Government considered it necessary to survey and examines the entire field of education in order to realize a well balanced, integrated and adequate system of national education capable of making a powerful contribution to all aspects of national life. To achieve these objectives speedily, the Government of India in October 1964 set up an Education Commission, under Resolution of July 14, 1964 under the chairmanship of Dr. D. S. Kothari, Chairman. University Grants Commission consisted of sixteen members. Eleven being Indians and five foreign experts. Among the various other recommendations, the commission has recommended the following points with special reference to the school education curriculum and learning languages.

(i) The language study at the school stage needs review and a new policy requires to be formulated particularly in view of the fact that English has been mostly used as an associated official language of the country for an indefinite period:

(ii) The modification of the language formula should be guided by the following principles:

Hindi as the official language of the Union enjoys an importance next only to that of the mother tongue.

A workable knowledge of English will continue to be an asset to student.

The proficiency gained in a language depends as much upon the types of teachers and a facility as upon the length of time in which it is learnt.

The most suitable stage for learning these languages is the lower secondary (Classes VIII-X).

#### NATIONAL POLICY ON EDUCATION, 1968

Education Commission (1964-1966) was appointed to advise Government of India on the national pattern of education and on the general principles and policies for the development of education at all stages and at all aspects. Government was happy to note that a consensus on Na-

tional Policy on Education had emerged in the course of those discussions. The Government has taken the following resolutions as far as language education is concerned, for the development of education in India. "In this context, special emphasis is laid on the study of English and other International languages. World knowledge is growing at a tremendous pace, especially in science and technology. India must not only keep up this growth but should also make her own significant contribution to it. For this purpose, the study of English deserves to be specially strengthened".

#### NATIONAL CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK, 2005

The demand for English emerges from many factors, as recognized by the position paper on the teaching of English produced by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT 2006) in connection with the National Curriculum Framework 2005 (NCERT 2005): 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 a very early introduction. (NCERT 2006:1). There has been a shift in perception as the demand for English is now felt in every quarter, even though there are pedagogically sound arguments against the early introduction of the language. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the recent curricular revision at the national level – which culminated in the framework for the National Curriculum 2005 – records half a century of development in attitudes towards English. English is now an institutionalized subject in the school curriculum.

#### NATIONAL KNOWLEDGE COMMISSION, 2007

The motives, for including English in the Indian curriculum, generally, are not only social-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 urban and rural is further exacerbated by the increasing tendency to use English as a medium of instruction. This paradox of demand and suspicion is reflected through the paradox of access depicted by the report of the National Knowledge Commission (NKC): 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 make for highly unequal access. Indeed, even now, barely more than one percent of our people use it as a second language, let alone a first language. But National Knowledge Commission of Government of India 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.

#### CONCLUSION

English plays an important role in producing and promoting changes and accepting new trends in the modern Indian society. English generates modernity, imparts new knowledge and skills and gives a formal system of living which is found in the developed countries of the world. Majority of the standard journals and magazines are published in English. It is true that if we have knowledge of reading, writing, understanding, speaking English, we would have better knowledge of science and technology, social sciences, industry and health. Language experts agreed that English learning is a very important aspect of

life. English has enjoyed and still enjoys a very important place in the curriculum of Anglo-Vernacular schools in our country. It has been used as an official language, the language of administration of courts, legislature, etc. It is a language which has a rich literature and also covers the vast spectrum of science and technology as well as industries and commerce. English also plays an important role in the national life of the country. It still continues to influence the life and profession of the majority of educated Indians in every walk of life.

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