

Learning Outcome Based Curriculum Framework and Teaching of English in India

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Abstract

The discourse regarding the teaching of English has witnessed many twists and turns in the post independent India. It has gone well beyond the initial debates whether it should continue as an official language and as a medium of instruction. From time to time various committees and commissions were set up to keep the teaching of English in tune with the demands of time but unfortunately the recommendations made by the designated bodies were either incongruous with the ground realities of an Indian language classroom or they were not implemented in their letter and spirit. Even when English language had emerged as a global lingua franca some of the commissions in India were busy in deciding whether it should be taught as a library language or as an additional language. The mismatch between the proficiency in English that our curriculum developed among the learners and the actual requirements of the learners came to the forefront after the globalisation of the Indian economy. The pass outs of our colleges and universities struggled in the job market due to their poor communication skills in English. The learners from the semi urban, rural and tribal areas were the worst victims of this mismatch as the pedagogy in vogue for the teaching of English did not train them to meet the requirements of the job market. The University Grants Commission of India issued Learning Outcome Based Curriculum Framework (LOCF) for English in 2019, which proposes a framework for the teaching of English that unlike the earlier euro-centric models in practice in India is in conformity to the Indian ground realities. The present paper will look at LOCF in the backdrop of the recommendations of the earlier commissions and committees and provide its critique in relation to the effective teaching of English in India.

Key Words: Proficiency, English Language Teaching, LOCF, UGC, Communication.

Introduction:

It may sound clichéd but it is a fact that the history of English language teaching in India has been a series of the acts of omissions and commissions. From Macaulay's minutes of 1835 till the advocacy of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the post globalised India, nothing has actually changed in the Indian classroom. The conflictory efforts to groom Hindi as the sole official language of the country and the pressure of the youth to attain highest levels of proficiency in English have put not only the policy makers but even the teachers and students of English language at the cross roads. The tradition of teaching English that took off in 1835 with the aim of training interpreters for the British mostly focussed on the development of Reading and Writing skills and the understanding the British canonical literature. This tradition continued even after independence. The University

Education Commission (1949) rather than addressing the pressing educational issues of the times made vague and globalised recommendations which helped very little in bringing about any change in the English language pedagogy in India. The recommendations made by the Secondary Education Commission (1952-53) were very poignant and if applied in letter in spirit are valid even today for improving the teaching of English in India. Kothari Commission (1966) also advocated a reasonable proficiency in English for the award of degree and its continuation as a library language. The Curriculum Development Centre (1989) set up by the University Grants Commission of India also suggested to “make education more meaningful to the needs and aspirations of its beneficiaries as well as to make it socially relevant”(CDC Report 1989:p 4). Despite having a vast body of recommendations, suggestions and policy notes from the various committees and commissions, the teaching of English in India is still in a state of disarray where in we are still enmeshed in the debates whether we should prioritise the western literature to vernacular, canonical to non- canonical, printed word to visual world, grammar translation method to CLT, use standard text books or open resources.

In the above backdrop, the National Education Policy adopted by the union cabinet in 2020 in general and Learning Outcome Based Curriculum Framework (LOCF) suggested by the University Grants Commission of India (https://www.ugc.ac.in/pdfnews/2758387_English-Generic_Elective-NEW.pdf) have taken a holistic view of the scenario and provided broad guidelines which have the potential to address the fundamental problems faced by English pedagogy in India. The LOCF suggests the “ development of all four skills taking support from literary texts” (ibid). Taking into account all aspects of language teaching, LOCF makes “linguistic and communicative competence” as the ultimate learning outcome of language study. It also aims at the development of graduate attributes like development of communication skills, critical thinking, problem solving and engagement with literary works to develop one’s critical position. It also suggests use of literary works of Indian origin as texts and spending of 50% of the teaching time on learning by doing.

The hallmark of LOCF seems to be its specificity in addressing the core issues that beset the teaching of English in India. Its emphasis on “local context”, “local resources” and “local texts” makes it far more viable and practical in the Indian situation than the vague euro-centric models that have been experimented in India. Although LOCF is just a framework, it needs to be developed into a full fledged model which would include all aspects of language teaching like materials, teaching techniques, teachers, learners and testing. The present paper would chart the significance of LOCF in the backdrop of the advisories and recommendations that have been put forward by various committees and commissions after independence.

Objectives:

- To provide a critical analysis of the language related recommendations made by various committees and commissions after independence in India.
- To study the significance of LOCF in the backdrop of the history of English language teaching in India.
- To provide a critique of LOCF vis-a-vis the problems of English pedagogy in India.

Literature Review

Leaving the pre independence charter of 1813 and Macaulay's recommendations (1835) out of the ambit of this survey, in the post colonial India, University Education Commission, also called as Radha Krishnan Commission, submitted its report in 1949. The recommendations of the commission were broad and universalistic in nature, "in other words, the commission did not, or would not go into details, contending itself with general, often vague recommendations regarding the medium of instruction" (Krishnaswamy and Sriraman; 1995; p.36). Aggarwal (1984) writes that the commission suggested that "for the medium of instruction for higher education English be replaced as early as practicable by an Indian language which cannot be Sanskrit.."(p.36). Hence no language was explicitly recommended as a substitute for English. The commission was silent on the methodology to be adopted for the teaching of English in India. "The Secondary Education Commission (1952-53) was perhaps the first official body to concern itself with the method of teaching, materials of teaching and the evaluation system" (Krishnaswamy and Sriraman; 1995; p.37). Although most of the recommendations of this commission are still relevant but unfortunately they were not implemented fully. During nineteen sixties , the confusion regarding the relative status of regional languages , Hindi and English led to the agitations and riots: where some led the campaigns advocating scrapping of English while some pitched for resistance against imposition of Hindi in the country. In this context , Kothari Commission(1966) pleaded for the continuation of both English and Hindi as link language and advocated for English "as a library language and the medium of instruction in all major universities and that a reasonable degree of proficiency in it should be essential for the award of degree"(Krishnaswamy and Sriraman; 1995; p.39). After Kothari Commission(1966), there were reports on the Study of English in India, which were submitted in 1967 and 1971. National Policy on Education (1968) or the National Policy of Education and Programme of Action (1986) too did not elaborate much about the modes, methods or materials of teaching English in India. However the most striking aspect of all these commissions and reports was that the three language formula was advocated, refined and implemented successfully in the country. Even the NEP-2020 also carries on with the three language formula. Another noteworthy intervention regarding the place of English in India was the report of Curriculum development centre (CDC) (1989) set up by the University Grants Commission of India. The CDC report on English advocated introduction of General English Course and Special English Course at undergraduate level. The former to be meant for the communicative needs of the undergraduate students ,while the later would focus on teaching of English literature and its allied disciplines. The CDC report however did not elaborate what the needs of the students were and how the teachers would tackle the situations in the classroom.

Discussion

The University Grants Commission of India came up with Learning Outcome Based Curriculum Framework (LOCF) for different disciplines in 2019. The LOCF for English is a ground breaking document that deals comprehensively with all aspects of teaching English in India. The framework proposes a pedagogy that "will help learners use English for contemporary academic and social needs. Students develop all four language skills which will enhance their communication abilities"(https://www.ugc.in/pdfnews/2758387_English_Generic_Elective-NEW.pdf.). It also encourages the faculty to make "pedagogical innovations" and sets them free from euro-centric models as " English curricula have evolved over a period of time in India. From its Anglo-centric

core, it has moved to the educated Indian variant of English with national and international intelligibility” (ibid). The hallmark of LOCF seems to be its focus on developing among learners “the ability to think and write clearly about one’s role as a located Indian citizen of the world through a reading of literatures in English and English translation”(ibid). While talking about the learning process , the framework advocates “ a shift from domain or conclusion based approach to the experiential or process based approach....where lectures contain 20 percent of the delivery(Hear); visuals 30 percent of the learning method (See); and experience 50 percent (DO)” (ibid). To minimize rote learning and to encourage positive wash back , the document advocates for prioritizing formative assessments, use of closed- book and open-book tests, team projects, viva voce, interviews, real life simulations and other innovative testing techniques for English language.

The LOCF resolves many ambiguities and grey areas that beset the teaching of English in India. It has successfully provided an outline breaking the watertight compartments between the teaching of English as language or as literature. Besides levelling the field between the proponents of Communicative approach and the practitioners of traditional methods, LOCF advocates using local context and resources to the optimum for bringing about a palpable change in the English language teaching scenario of the country.

Most of the theories or recommendations, either borrowed from the west or produced locally, have often marginalised the role of a teacher in the teaching of English in India. LOCF seems to be echoing and elaborating the ignored recommendation of the Secondary Education Commission(1952-53). The Commission says:

“ Any method, good or bad, links up the teacher and his pupils into an organic relationship with constant mutual interaction...Every teacher and educationist knows that even the best curriculum and the most perfect syllabus remain dead unless quickened into life by the right methods of teaching and the right kind of teachers” (Aggarwal 1984:p.112-13).

The LOCF allows the teachers to make “pedagogical innovations”, which sets teachers free from the procedural and methodological shackles of the methods designed for European or American contexts.

Since LOCF is just a frame work , it needs to be further discussed and elaborated so that its dividends reach to the grass root level in India. So far all debates on English pedagogy have revolved round the search or discussion of methods (usually euro-centric) which would be a one stop solution to all language teaching problems. LOCF has offered us an opportunity to look beyond the corporate backed methods and materials and focus on our immediate environment to look for the solutions to our problems as it does not recommend the adoption of any specific method but leaves the choice to the teachers to explore their experiential and environmental repositories for the attainment of teaching learning objectives.

Conclusion;

For the first time in the history of English language teaching in India we have a framework in the form of LOCF that takes the Indian realities into consideration. The framework not only brings the teacher at the centre stage but provides guidelines for transition from teacher centric to student centric teaching. Moreover it also suggests the procedures that can help the teachers in choosing the materials and evaluation models. It is however important that workshops and teacher training programmes are conducted by UGC HRDC’s, NCERT, DIETs and SIE’s to familiarize the teachers with LOCF , so that things start to change in the Indian English teaching and learning scenario.

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