**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

# ENGLISH CURRICULUM AT SECONDARY LEVEL IN ASSAM

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**ABSTRACT**

Acquisition of English for the regional medium secondary students is a problem as they have lesser exposure to the language in the school curriculum. This paper is part of a qualitative research study on the impact of English language at the secondary level in the state. The paper discusses of inclusion of the approaches for the development of communicative skills based on the responses provided by the teachers teaching at this level. The regional languages, i.e. Assamese, Hindi and Bengali medium schools of Dibrugarh district are the primary sources of data for the study. The responses of the questionnaire provided by the teachers of the respective schools are some solutions to the problems faced in the teaching-learning situations. Extended Learning Activities (ELA) is suggested by the teachers for developing students' linguistic proficiency. ELA includes learning through role play, group discussion, English society activities, speaking workshop, experience sharing, debating workshop, writing workshop, phonics workshop, self-learning programme and remedial classes. Transitional bilingual medium of instruction is another suggested outcome of the study. 'Learning English' and 'learning in English' are two objectives proposed by the teachers.

**Key Words:** School curriculum, Communicative skills, Extended Learning Activities.

## Introduction

English language in India was once held only as a library language and the language for higher education. Utility of this language was for these two purposes only. The increasing demand for the language from every quarter as a means of progress and key to a better life leads to the expected inclusive society in the country. The consequence is a changing aspect of the role of this language in school curriculum. (Graddol, 2010). In many countries, extensive curriculum reforms are taking place as economies build the capacity required to operate in a globalised world. Improving national proficiency in English now forms a key part of the educational strategy in most countries. Graddol, D. (2006).

National Curriculum Framework 2005, marked the status of English in India,

"English in India today is a symbol of people's aspirations for quality in education and fuller participation in national and international life…The level of introduction of English has now become a matter

of political response to people's aspirations, rendering almost irrelevant an academic debate on the merits of very early introduction" (NCF, 2005).

> "I argue that the status of English, as the only global language available at such a fateful moment in history, is also being transformed. Inevitably, at the same time, the business of teaching and learning English is also changing beyond recognition. The relationships between stakeholders in the global English business – learners, parents, governments, employers, publishers, schools – are also evolving rapidly". Graddol, D. (2006)

A second language teaching has international goal such as careers in foreign countries, especially the country of the second language. Higher education through the second language means the knowledge and qualifications that are gained through that language. For access to job opportunity, education and research and information thus English is learnt for utility and well informed in this global era. Students' motivation to learn a second language is to travel abroad which is another international goal. The utility of the second language is an important factor of learning a second language. The students of the state should get the benefit from learning the language in their practical life. To gain the usefulness of the acquired knowledge of the second language in school level can be ascertained by a second language curriculum abridging the school life with the outside world. The National Curriculum Framework (NCF), 2005, recommends that children's life at school must be linked to their life outside the school. This principle marks a departure from the legacy of bookish learning which continues to shape our system and causes a gap between the school, home and community. The syllabi and textbooks developed on the basis of NCF signify an attempt to implement this basic idea. They also attempt to discourage rote learning and the maintenance of sharp boundaries between different subject areas. We hope these measures will take us significantly further in the direction of a child-centred system of education outlined in the National Policy of Education (1986) (NCF-2005).

**Discussion**

Attitude towards English in India is instrumental. Knowledge of English makes a person more employable and enables one to know the literature and culture of different countries of the world. Knowledge of the language helps students for higher studies and better professional and career life.  One avowed goal of language teaching is to help people to think better – brain training and logical thinking. Others are appreciation of serious literature; and student increased self-awareness and maturity; the appreciation of other cultures and races; communication with people in other countries, and so on (Cook, 2011). Instrumental motivation helps students to successful learning leading to high motivation. Positive feelings towards the target language lead to high motivation to acquire the target language. As schoolchildren lack contact with the foreign culture and have no particular interest in it, only possibility of job prospects may be interested in learning foreign language.

There are instructions for teachers in the English textbooks of this level to let the children participate in the activities to the fullest extent and if necessary adding some of their own. It provides the opportunity for more practices to acquire the target language and suggest students for further reading for self-improvement. Creativity and self-learning are two components to be developed by the students.

> 'The goals for a second-language curriculum are twofold: attainment of a basic proficiency, such as is acquired in natural language learning and the development of language into an instrument for abstract thought and knowledge acquisition through (for example) literacy. This argues for an across-the curriculum approach that breaks down the barriers between English and other subjects, and English and other Indian languages. At the initial stages, English may be one of the languages for learning activities that create the child's awareness of the world' (NCF, 2005).

Moreover it should include more activities/tasks for development of the sub-skills like enriching vocabulary and writing correct and meaningful sentences, understanding grammatical concepts. The textual contents in the English curriculum make them only familiar with English and western literature. Some of the lessons in the syllabus are based on culturally different from the local and regional aspects leading to the

difficulties to motivate students for learning. Language learning is also believed to be more motivating when students are focusing on something other than language, such as ideas, issues, and opinions (Richards and Rodgers, 2010).

The lessons in the syllabus/curriculum are full of information and knowledge, but lesser provision for task or activities in the text for doing language skills practices. There is less provision for oral practices. Regional and local culture based lessons are motivating for students' learning. The students can most effectively acquire a second language when the task of language learning becomes incidental to the task of communicating with someone…about some topic…which is inherently interesting to the student (D' Anglejan and Tucker, 1975). If the content is with high level of interest for students, learners may learn the language more willingly (Richards and Rodgers, 2010). English must be seen in relation to other subjects; a language across the curriculum is of particular relevance to primary education, and later all teaching is in a sense language teaching. This perspective will bridge the gap between 'English as subject' and 'English as medium' (NCF 2005).

Task Based Language Teaching for the communicative skill development is the approach based on the use of tasks as the core unit of planning and instruction in language teaching. Activities that involve real communication are essential for language learning as they are meaningful to promote learning and meaningful language supports the learning process of students. Engaging students in tasks provide better context for active learning processes. Thus language context provides better opportunities for language learning to take place. Language learning is believed to depend on immersing students not merely in "comprehensible input" but in task that require them to negotiate meaning and engage in naturalistic and meaningful communication (Richards and Rodgers, 2010). Tasks can improve learner motivation promoting learning by using authentic language, well defined dimensions and closure, varied in format and operation. It includes physical activities, partnership and collaboration, learners' past experience.

It is important that on which objectives the syllabus is focused. Yalden (1987), Long and Crooks (1992), and Brown (1995) have described the several taxonomies of syllabus types in language teaching. Brown (1995) lists basic seven syllabus types – Structural, Situational, Topical, Functional, Notional, Skilled-based, and Task-based teaching (Task-based) (Richards and Rodgers, 2010). It is important for the Board to decide which type of syllabus to be focused on. Students are especially interested to learn the communicative skills in English. The lessons in the syllabus are to be local or Indian culture-based to make the lessons attractive and to motivate the learner students.

The psychological situation is that making any mistake while using the language is not expected. Hence making mistake in speaking the language is a taboo which causes fear in the mind of the learners. Therefore removing the fear for the language is important. Again, it also helps students learn best when they are young, as their brain can receive as many as information of the language. Exposure to the language from the initial stage of their primary level helps students to develop communication skills, as much exposure of the language is available to them. It also helps them to understand the importance of the subject.

English must be seen in relation to other subjects; a language across the curriculum is of particular relevance to primary education, and later all teaching is in a sense language teaching. This perspective will bridge the gap between 'English as subject' and 'English as medium'. We should in this way move towards a common school system that does not make a distinction between 'teaching a language' and 'using a language as a medium of instruction' (NCF 2005). Syllabus/curriculum should contain maximum opportunity to learn the English language and to read the literature as well. It should be activity based for learning the language. Task/activity based approach sees learning arising from particular tasks the students do in the classroom and has been seen increasingly as a logical development from communicative language teaching. Content-Based Instruction was drawn on the principles of Communicative Language teaching which emerged in the 1980s. In this approach teaching is organized around the content and information to be acquired by the students. It is the teaching and content or information in the language being learned with little or no direct or explicit effort to teach the language itself separately from the content being taught (Krahnke, 1987).

Classrooms that focused on real communication and the exchange of information is an ideal situation for second language learning where content is the subject matter for teaching rather than grammar and functions of the target language. Simple experiments in physics and chemistry, biological processes in plants and animals, map drawing, descriptions of historical events and so on….It is easy to see that if such a procedure were adopted, the difficulties associated with the presentation of language use in classroom would essentially be the same as the methodological techniques used for introducing the topics in the subjects from which they are drawn (Widdowson 1978). Teachers express their views that students need to develop their communicative skills for utility in the outside world. The objectives of the curriculum at this level are to make them acquainted with the literature of the world as well as to develop their linguistic competency.  Students can learn the English language well if they love the subject, dedicated to their learning, work hard, and determined to learning. The curriculum has not fulfilled the objectives of teaching English as the students are lacking the competency in the basic skills. 'Communication in the communicative method is usually through speech rather than writing. The total physical response method uses spoken, not written, commands, and storytelling, not story reading' (Cook, 2011).

Willis (1996) presents task based activities as a logical development of Communicative Language Teaching since it draws on that several principles that formed part of the communicative language teaching movement from the 1980s (Richards and Rodgers, 2010). Extended language learning activities are useful for enabling students to acquire the language. In regional medium schools exposure is less to the language comparing to the English medium schools as only the English subject period is available to them for using the language. Hence, to reconsider the school curriculum activities/tasks are more important for language learning practices. Maximum exposure to the language helps students acquire the target language. Language skills should be practiced in the classroom situation and spending extra time after the regular classes is useful. This method believes in treating language as a whole rather than divided up into different aspects.

Reading books in English helps students for self-learning. Practicing the language through poem recitation, storytelling, group discussion, role play etc. are effective methods of teaching the language.  It is based on the belief that child language learning is based on motor activity, on coordinating language with action, and that this should form the basis of adult foreign language teaching. Orchestrating language production and comprehension with body movement and physical actions is thought to provide the conditions for success in language learning (Richards and Rodgers, 2010).

Caleb Gattegno's *Silent Way* (1972, 1976) is a theory of the conditions necessary for successful learning to be realized. He addressed learners' needs to feel secure about learning and to assume conscious control of learning. Different techniques are used in this method to train learners to consciously use their intelligence to develop learning potential (Richards and Rodgers, 2010). Conscious control of learning helps students developing their language acquisition skills. It helps students about the learning processes of the target language.

For vocabulary building the students should have to develop the habit of receiving new words actively. While reading something new the students get the opportunity to learn new words by becoming aware of the new words  and looking it up in the dictionary later. By doing reading and writing practices one can develop vocabulary building of their own. The habit of reading dictionary, word games and word puzzles can help developing the word stock of the students. Students should have to consciously develop these habits of their own for vocabulary building. Language is doing things, not knowing things.

 Students' English could be improved by the maximum exposure to the language which is one of the criteria of teaching-learning situations. Regular practice of the four basic skills is important for language learning. Group discussions, group activities and role play are some major techniques advised by teachers for teaching English language to learners. Audio-visual aids are the helpful tools for them in language acquisition. It can be improved with more and continuous task based practices on vocabularies, grammar and communicative English. These are the major sub-areas of students' weaknesses in the English language learning process. Communicative English can develop students in their language learning situation. This is one

of the expected language learning objective too. Reading habit of the books can develop their language acquisition. The task-based activities within the class are to improve their communicative competency in the English language acquisition. The whole-class activity consisted of a pedagogic dialogue in which the teacher's questions were, as in other classrooms, invitations to learners to demonstrate their ability, not pretended request for enlightenment; and learners' responses arose from their role as learners, not from assumed roles in simulated situations or from their individual lives outside the classroom (Prabhu, 1987).

**Conclusion**

All successful teaching depends on learning and the proof of teaching is found in learning. Students' diverse motivations for learning the second language affect their learning. Again the different ways to tackle their learning affect students' learning behavior. Basis of students' learning behavior lies on their previous experience of learning and using the language. Raising awareness of language is helpful in second language learning. Eric Hawkins (1984) suggested that learners' general awareness of language should be raised before they start learning the L2, partly through grammar (Eric Hawkins, 1984). Students' expectation and motivation help to their reception of the target language. Increasing awareness of language leads to educational advantages. Increasing awareness of language may be a goal of language teaching.

While teaching the communicative language skills teachers have to play very important role while some teaching methods are totally dependent on the teachers as a source of knowledge and direction and for some methods teachers' role is as catalyst, consultant guide and model for learning. The teacher has two main roles: the first role is to facilitate communication process between all participants in the classroom, and between these participants and the various activities and text. The second role is to act as an independent participant within the learning-teaching group (Breen and Candlin, 1980).

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

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