English Language Curriculum at the Secondary Stage
Perceptions of Learners and Teachers

Ramanujam Meganathan*

Abstract

This paper presents the perceptions of learners and teachers on various aspects of English language education as it is administered in two government-run rural schools in the state of Tamil Nadu. Initially, the paper presents the language profiles of learners and their opinions on various aspects of English language education in their schools, followed by the opinions of teachers. Then, it presents two classrooms observed during the study. It attempts to seek answers to the questions: (i) How do learners and teachers perceive English language teaching-learning in a rural setting? (ii) How many languages the learners know and what are the domains of the languages used by them? (iii) Whether teachers' beliefs and perceptions are influenced by language policy and curriculum reforms? (iv) How is the English language classroom organised to promote language learning?, and (v) Whether the curricular reforms have an impact on the perceptions of learners and teachers?

English Language Education Situation

English language teaching in India is a complex and diverse phenomenon in terms of resources available for teaching-learning of the language, the English language teacher, pedagogical practices and demand for the language. It is an ever-expanding part of almost every system and stage of education

*   *Associate Professor* of English, Department of Education in Languages, National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), Sri Aurobindo Marg, New Delhi–110016.

Table 1
English as a Medium of Instruction in Indian Schools

				Upper Primary			**Secondary**		
	1993* (%)	**1993*** (%)	**2009**** (%)	**1993*** (%)	**2002*** (%)	**2009**** (%)	**1993**** (%)	**2002*** (%)	**2009**** (%)
English as medium	4.99	12.98	15.49	15.91	18.25	21.73	18.37	25.84	33.06

*(Source: *Sixth All-India School Education Survey, 1993*
***Seventh All-India School Education Survey, 2002*
**** Eight All-India School Education Survey, 2009)*

in India (Tickoo, 2004). Twenty-nine out of 35 States and Union Territories introduce English as a language from Class 1. The near total achievement of the universalisation of elementary education has intensified pressure on secondary and higher secondary education in the country. On the other hand, the non-availability of and less value attached to the native medium at the higher education level has had a wash-back effect on education at the secondary and the higher secondary level for English medium. The above table shows the increase in English-medium education. The network of secondary schools, numbering more than 1.1 lakh (Meganathan, 2011), some 11,000 colleges, universities (numbering 221 apart from 40-odd deemed universities) and other institutions of higher learning and research, whose numbers and reach keep growing, offer instruction in this language at various levels and under different arrangements. Another interesting fact is the diversity and disparity in the provision of and resources for teaching English as a second language, which includes medium of instruction in school education.

There are a variety of school systems that exist in the country—state-run schools, where the medium of instruction is the state language or the vernacular; English-medium schools known as public schools, which are actually private schools, where the medium of instruction is English; and Kendriya Vidyalayas, where children of Central government employees study. A special category of schools known as Navodaya Vidyalayas was created as a follow-up to the National Policy on Education (1986) for nurturing rural talents. These last two categories of schools follow a mixed medium of instruction i.e., to some stage or for some subjects it is the vernacular and for the other stage or subjects it is English. Mohanty (2010:168) describes how this 'mixed medium

within a school and classroom' works in these category of schools.

• English is used to teach 'prestigious subjects', like mathematics and science, whereas Hindi or other languages are used to teach the 'less prestigious' subjects, like history and social sciences. Hindi used to be the second language subject in most non-Hindi speaking states in India. Now, it has been replaced by English and is relegated to the position of third language subject in most states.

The English language teaching situation, within and across school systems, presents a mixed picture from very high to very low level in terms of Teacher Proficiency (TP) and exposure of pupils to English in and outside school, i.e., the availability of English in the Environment (EE) of language acquisition (Nag-Arulmani, 2000 quoted in NCERT, 2005). Kurrien (2005) identifies four types of schools as given below:

$\uparrow\uparrow$ = Very high $\qquad \downarrow$ = Low

$\uparrow$ = High $\qquad \downarrow\downarrow$ = Very low

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

b. $\uparrow$**TP,** $\uparrow$**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 who aspire for upward mobility through English.

c. $\downarrow$**TP,** $\downarrow$**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 backgrounds.

d. $\downarrow\downarrow$**TP,** $\downarrow\downarrow$**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 (who, however, have limited options of access to English in the environment). Their teachers may be the least proficient in English of these four types of schools. [Kurrien 2005 quoted in NCERT 2006:9, Position Paper Teaching of English, NCF–2005, NCERT]

Research on learner and teacher beliefs and perceptions reveals a mixed trend as studies focus on individual language learning and learning in the school context. Studies on learner and teacher perceptions, beliefs and attitudes (Xiuping Li, 2005; Subarna Sivapalan, 2006; Vai Ramanathan, 1999; Larisa Nikitina and Fumitaka Furuoka, 2008; Elizabeth J. Erling, Philip Seargeant, Mike Solly, Qumrul Hasan Chowdhury and Sayeedur Rahman, 2012) show how learners perceive learning of English language and teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards English language education at various stages, from school to

post-graduation. Learners believe that English language is important for upward mobility and the study of English enhances their life skills. They recognise the importance of a well-designed curriculum, syllabus and textbooks as important for learning the language. Studies also reveal how teachers' beliefs have an impact on the learning of English by learners.

Agnihotri and Khanna (1994) brought out how English language education in India has shaped itself during the post-Colonial period playing a hegemonic role. The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) – 2005 (NCERT) while advocating mother tongue-based multilingualism as a strategy for holistic language education, understands the question of introduction of English language in school as: "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 2005:1). The NCF, in reality, records the 50 years of development on the changing role and place of English as a language in school and higher education. This prompted me to explore what learners and teachers perceive of English language teaching in schools.

The Process of the Study

Students from government boys higher secondary school and government girls higher secondary school, Neyveli Lignite Corporation (NLC), Neyveli,

Cuddalore district, Tamil Nadu, were given a questionnaire consisting of items which could be categorised as below. The questionnaire aimed at knowing the perception of students on the importance of English, textbooks and use of other materials. It also aimed at ascertaining the reading habits of children the types of movies they watched, the type/category of English they preferred as their ideal model, their habit of (i) listening to radio, (ii) watching TV, (iii) preferences of programmes on TV and radio, examination in English and about the continuance or abolition of English language in India. This was followed by an interview with some selected students.

The second part of the paper presents the perceptions and beliefs of teachers about English language education. The data from the teachers were collected through interviews and questionnaire. The data were also collected through classroom observation. A total of eight classroom processes were collected and two were presented in the third part as the remaining six classes did not have much to report. Most of them were conventional as the teacher read out a paragraph or some lines and explained the same by translating those into Tamil.

Students' Perceptions

1. Languages Known to Students

Students of both the sexes know at least two languages i.e., Tamil and English (Table 2). Some of them

know a third language, which is one of the South Indian languages, Sanskrit or Urdu. All of them are confident that they can understand, speak, read and write Tamil, which in most cases is the mother tongue, and in some the second language. It is also the language of home or the locale since their birth. When it comes to speaking Tamil, only one of them does not speak the language at home, school or any other place where the child may happen to speak with his/her peers, friends or acquaintances. All others speak Tamil at home, school and other public places, like temples, markets, etc.

Almost all students feel that they know English well. It is interesting to learn that 55 out of 58 are confident that they can understand and speak the language, while all of them feel that they can write well in English. All, except but one, said that he/she could read English. But when asked why they were not able to speak in English, while they could read and write in the language, many learners said:

"We do not get any opportunity to speak in English even in English language class. Sometimes English teachers ask us to speak. Otherwise, no other subject teacher asks us to speak in English. They read out the lessons in English and explain in Tamil. (sic)"

Only 28 of 58 students said that they spoke in English at home and 51 spoke the language in school, while 42 used the language at other places, like markets, banks, etc.

We can notice that Hindi is not a language known to the learners. Tamil Nadu is the only state which has rejected India's language in the education policy since inception. The sociopolitical movement that became popular in the 1950s and 1960s took up Tamil language and culture as distinct from Hindi and opposed to the 'imposition' of Hindi on the people of Tamil Nadu. Since then, the State teaches only two languages in schools.

2. Importance of Studying English

Most students have opined that the study of English at the school level is essential for upward mobility (Table 3, 4, 5). Only two of them feel that the study of English would not be of any help, while 55 favour studying. While citing reasons for the language their choice of studying English as important, students have mixed

Table 2
Languages Known to Students (N = 58)

Language	Understand	Speak	Read	Write	Place of Speaking		
					Home	School	Other places
Tamil	58	58	58	58	57	56	56
English	55	55	57	58	28	51	42

responses with less than half feeling that it would help them opt for higher education. Quite a few have multiple opinions while favouring the study of English. The reasons cited by them include: (i) getting good jobs, (ii) migrating/going to foreign countries, and (iii) getting a job in BPOs and multinational companies.

3. The Textbook
3.1 How do you feel about textbooks in English language?

Majority of the students, 41 out of 57, feel that the textbooks are interesting. Eight of them opine that books serve the purpose of learning the language. A few perceive books as boring and difficult.

Table 3
Do You Think the Study of English is Important for Us? (N = 58)

Do you think the study of English is important for us?	Female	Male	Total
No	2	0	2
Yes	27	28	55
Total	29	28	57

Table 4
Reasons for Study of English

Reasons for study of English	Female	Male	Total
i.	6	7	13
i,ii,iii,iv	–	1	1
i,ii,iii,iv,v	–	1	1
i,ii,iv,v	–	2	2
iii	8	3	11
iv	13	10	23
v		4	4
Total	27	28	55

Note: *i. We can get good jobs,*
   ii. We can go to foreign countries,
   iii. We can get jobs in BPOs and multinational companies,
   iv. We can go for higher education,
   v. We can migrate to foreign countries, like America, Canada and Australia.

Table 5
Textbooks in English (N = 58)

The textbooks in English are	Female	Male	Total
Interesting	19	22	41
Boring	3	2	5
Difficult	3	–	3
It is okay/serves the purpose	4	4	8
Total	29	28	57

3.2 Content of the textbooks

The students perceived the content of the textbooks as new, challenging and informative/as they have stories or information on their place and culture (Table 6). Twelve of them feel that the content is new, 19 feel that it is challenging and 16 opine that the book relates to their locale and culture, while seven feel that the content is alien or not related to them.

This could be compared with the students' responses on the language of the textbooks which follows immediately.

3.3 Language of the Textbooks

The students feel that the language of the textbooks enables them to understand by one read (Table 7).

They also find the language suitable and interesting. Only three feel that the language of the textbook is difficult. This proves that the children feel that the textbooks and materials are well-designed and serve the purpose of learning the language.

4. Teaching Methods

While reflecting on the teaching methods and strategies followed by teachers in the classroom, majority of the students opine that the methods and strategies adopted by the teachers are interesting and help them learn, though a few feel that the methods are boring and it is difficult for them to follow their teachers' teaching methodology (Table 8).

Table 6
Content of the textbooks (N = 58)

Content of the textbooks as perceived	Female	Male	Total
New	6	6	12
Challenging	10	9	19
Alien/not related to us	1	6	7
Has stories/information on my place and culture	10	6	16
Total	27	27	54

Table 7
Language of the textbook (N = 58)

Language of the textbook	Female	Male	Total
It is suitable for us	6	12	18
Interesting	9	5	14
I can understand by one read	13	9	22
Difficult	1	2	3
Total	29	28	57

Table 8
Teaching methods and strategies (N = 58)

Teaching methods/strategies	Female	Male	Total
Interesting	13	10	23
Boring	–	2	2
Difficult to follow	4	2	6
I feel I learn	12	13	25
Total	29	27	56

Table 9
Use of teaching aids/material (N = 58)

Do your teachers use any other material in the classroom?	Female	Male	Total
No	16	15	31
Only in Science	1		1
Yes	11	13	24
Total	28	28	56

4.1 Teachers' use of material other than textbooks in the classroom

The students' perception about the use of material (Table 9), in the form of teaching aids and printed or non-printed material, shows their opinions. While 31 feel that their teachers do not use any material or teaching aids in the classroom, 24 say that their teachers use some sort of teaching aids in the classroom to enhance their teaching and help them to learn better.

The students also listed the material or teaching aids used in their classroom. These include (Table 10) pictures, grammar book, storybook and storytelling. However, it can be drawn from the listing by children that they could not distinguish between what other subject teachers use in the classroom and what an English teacher should use. This raises another question whether the teachers use any material at all to facilitate learning of the language they teach.

Table 10
Material Used in the Classroom (N = 58)

Material used in the classroom	Female	Male	Total
Charts	1	–	1
Charts, experiments	1	–	1
Grammar book	1	–	1
Science teacher explains with many objects and draws on the blackboard (sic)	–	1	1
Stick	–	2	2

Stick and scale	–	1	1
Storybooks, charts	1	–	1
Teach with pictures	1	–	1
Teacher tells stories	–	2	2
Workbooks	1	1	2
Total	8	11	19

Table 11
What is Important for Learning English? (N = 58)

Factors	Female	Male	Total
i	13	1	14
ii	3	7	10
ii, iii	–	1	1
ii, iii, iv	–	1	1
iii	1	2	3
iv	11	15	26
Total	28	27	55

i. A good English teacher,

ii. Good textbooks and supplementary material,

iii. Audio/video programmes,

iv. A good library,

v. An environment for speaking English.

5. What is Important for Learning English?

Students feel that an environment for speaking English is as essential as learning the language (Table 11). All other aspects come afterwards. A good English teacher, as 14 of 55 respondents feel, is important for learning the language, while 10 feel that good textbooks and supplementary materials are important for learning English. Quite a few feel that a good library and audio/video programmes are important for learning the language. However, there is a difference in the perception of male and female learners. While girls feel that a good teacher is important, boys feel that it is a good library that makes English language learning effective.

6. Reading Habits of Students

Students read newspapers, weekly or monthly magazines in their mother tongue, English and also in a third language, which happens to be the mother tongue of the family or a local language (Table 12). The NLC is a corporation which has transferable employees on all-India basis, mostly from neighbouring states, who stay here for a long period from the date of getting the job. The township is basically multilingual in nature. One can notice that the students read

Table 12
Reading newspaper and magazine in Tamil (N = 58)

Reading newspapers and magazines in Tamil	Female	Male	Total
Daily	19	23	42
Weekly	2	12	14
Fortnightly	1	4	5
Monthly	2	2	4

Table 13
Reading newspapers and magazines in English (N = 58)

In English	Female	Male	Total	In other Language(s)	Female	Male	Total
Daily	10	16	26	Daily		3	3
Weekly	2	4	6	Weekly		1	1
Fortnightly	2		2	Fortnightly	-	-	-
Monthly		2	2	Monthly	-	-	-

newspaper(s) — weekly, monthly, etc., in the prime language of the locale i.e., Tamil, then comes English, in which 26 students said that they read a newspaper daily and six of them read a weekly and two read a fortnightly. The number in Tamil is very high with 42 of the 57 students reading a daily, 14 a weekly and a few a monthly magazine. A few said they read newspapers and weeklies in other languages too, other than Tamil and English.

6.1 Reading novels

Students read novels and stories in their mother tongue, as well as, in English (Table 14). But the kind of stories and novels they read in their mother tongue includes a few known mythical stories and epics, such as the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, Tenali Raman stories, etc. Though some of them said that they read novels in English, most of them did not mention reading any particular novel recently with an exception of the popular *Harry Potter*. This is read in both English and in Tamil.

7. Watching Movies, Television, etc.

Students watch movies in their mother tongue, English and in a third language, which is often one of the South Indian languages or Hindi (Table 15). Most of them (50) responded that they watch movies in their first language or mother tongue, 29 in English and a few (16) in other language, which is either Hindi or some other local language. For those whose mother tongue is not Hindi, they watch movies in one of the South Indian languages, and for

Table 14
Reading Novels in English and Tamil (N = 58)

Do you read novels?	Female	Male	Total
No	8	8	16
Yes	9	17	26
Total	17	25	42

Table 15
Movies Watched in a Month (N = 58)

Language of movies	Female	Male	Total
Mother tongue	25	25	50
English	14	15	29
Other language	4	12	16

Hindi-Speaking students, it is English movies. The students' responses also show that the movies they watched depended on the availability of tickets in the area's theatres. They also say that they watch movies because they "want some entertainment".

8. Listening to Radio and Watching Television Programmes

When it comes to listening to radio and watching television programmes, most students listen to radio in their mother tongue and watch television programmes in the same language only. However, they do watch television programmes in English and other language, most often it is Hindi. Most of them watch English programmes.

9. Which English

Students said they watched programmes once a week and some said that they watched every day. Even in television programmes, most of them watched only serials and movies. A few said they watched news.

Students' opinions about the kind of English that should be a model for Indians reveal that they prefer General Indian English (GIE) (Table 16). GIE is the acceptable or intelligible English spoken by educated Indians. Thirteen out of 57 opine that the BBC Newsreaders' English should be taken as a model for Indians to be intelligible. Some feel that AIR/TV newsreaders' or the English spoken by actors in American movies should be the model for Indians. In his interactions with students, the investigator felt that all Indians wanted to learn English to lead a prosperous life and to cope up with the forces of globalisation.

Table 16
Model of English preferred? (N = 58)

Which model of English preferred?	a	b	c	d	e	f
Female	1	7	2	4	12	2
Male	1	6	8	4	6	1
Total	2	13	8	8	18	3

a. Queen's English of London,   b. BBC newsreaders,

c. AIR/TV newsreaders,   d. Actors of American movies,

e. General Indian English,   f. Tamilised English.

Table 17
Examinations in English (N = 58)

What do you feel about the examinations in English?					
	Difficult	Easy and interesting	Threatening	It helps us to learn	Total
Female	1	12	2	13	29
Male	6	18	1	3	28
Total	7	30	3	16	57

10. Examinations in English

Evaluation in English seems to be the most troublesome area for the students. However their opinions show that they are satisfied with the existing examination system (Table 17). To the question 'what do you feel about the examinations in English?', most of them said it was easy and interesting and it helped them to learn. Forty-six out of the 57 were happy with the examination system and felt that examinations helped them to learn better.

10.1 Preparation for the examination

Students, who said that examinations were easy and interesting, responded to the question 'How do you prepare for the examination in English?', differently (Table 18). While a majority felt that they understood and wrote on their own in the examination, nearly one-fourth (i.e., 15) of thestudents opined that they mugged up some of the answers and some said they understood answers and then wrote in the examination.

Table 18
How do You Prepare for Examination in English? (N = 58)

How do you prepare for examination in English?	i	ii	iii	Total
Female	2	15	10	27
Male	4	19	5	28
Total	6	34	15	55

i. Memorise and write,

ii. Understand, prepare and write,

iii. Some memorise and some understand.

10.2 Some aspects of teaching, examination, classroom, etc.

In a set of statements, the students were asked to agree or disagree on various aspects of examination and teaching of grammar and teachers' efforts to make them speak in English, the students responded with much insight (Table 19). They feel that there is a direct relation between what is taught and what is tested in the examination and feel that examination is an important aspect of learning and schooling. Thirty-nine out of 58 students agree that examination in English is a must. Majority of them feel that spoken English should also be tested. Students feel that the course book in English serves the purpose of teaching-learning. They do not agree with the statement that "course book is only full of literary pieces, nothing for learning the language".

Table 19
Some Aspects of Teaching, Examination and Classroom (N = 58)

There is no relation between what is taught and what is tested in the examination	Agree	Disagree	Total
Female	8	16	24
Male	11	16	27
Total	19	32	51
There is no need for an examination in English	**Agree**	**Disagree**	**Total**
Female	9	16	25
Male	5	23	28
Total	14	39	53
Spoken English needs to be tested	**Agree**	**Disagree**	**Total**
Female	19	7	26
Male	21	6	27
Total	40	13	53
The English course is only literature, there is no place for language aspects	**Agree**	**Disagree**	**Total**
Female	8	16	24
Male	12	16	28
Total	20	32	52
Grammar should not be taught	**Agree**	**Disagree**	**Total**
Female	4	21	25

Male	16	12	28
Total	20	33	53
Grammar is important for learning English language	**Agree**	**Disagree**	**Total**
Female	22	2	24
Male	18	7	26
Total	40	9	50
My teacher makes efforts to make us speak in English	**Agree**	**Disagree**	**Total**
Female	23	2	25
Male	3	14	17
Total	26	16	42

Teaching of grammar, according to most students, is essential for learning the language. Eighty per cent of them opine that grammar is essential for learning the language.

As far as teachers' efforts in making children speak in English and using the language in the classroom is concerned, students are divided in their opinion. Over 60 per cent of them say their teachers take special efforts to make them speak in English, while 16 of the 42 feel that the teachers do not make an effort to enable children to use the language in the classroom.

11. Opinion about the Continuance of English in India

In their opinion about the continuance or abolition of English in India, students on the whole favoured the continuance of the language. Their responses to the move to abolish English shows a mixed reaction.

Table 21 tells us the opinions and the longing for learning English in the country, in general. Only a few said that they would support the abolition of English.

It is also interesting to note that some students have expressed affiliation to the language devotion movement prevalent in the political and social life of the region. The movement launched by Dravidian political parties in the 1950s and 1960s for 'Tamil only' is reflected in their thoughts.

Some of the statements by students are mentioned below:

"We should not forget Tamil. Tamil medium should be continued."

"We need to oppose English as we opposed Hindi. But English is helping us get jobs."

"We are Tamilians, we should be proud of Tamil."

"Without Tamil, there is no life for Tamilians."

Table 20
Speaking to Classmates in English (N = 58)

Do you speak to friends/ classmates in English?	No	Yes	Sometimes	Total
Female	9	19	1	29
Male	10	17		27
Total	19	36	1	56

"English will one day kill Tamil. But we should have both English and Tamil in school."

PERCEPTION OF TEACHERS

The most important problem or aspect of English Language Teaching (ELT) in schools is that teachers have not studied English as their specialisation subject in graduation or postgraduation. Baring a few, all of them are teachers of science, social sciences or mathematics. The reason, as described by one of the headmasters, is, "If you appoint a science, social science or mathematics person, he/she can teach English also. If you appoint a trained English teacher, he/she can teach only English. There is always a problem of teacher shortage. We have to manage the classes at least with teachers who can do some justice. So, we prefer a science graduate teaching English."

Of the five teachers I interacted with, except one who holds an M.A. in English, all of them are science or mathematics teachers. Even this teacher, with an M.A. in English, took up the degree to get a promotion. He was a science teacher for long he could not do postgraduation in the subject by distance mode. So, he chose to study English. The teachers are aged between 30 and 55 years, with an experience of 3–30 years. Since these teachers teach Class VI–X, they are designated as B.T. assistant/graduate assistant. B.T. was the nomenclature of the first degree in education, which is now known as B.Ed. All teachers

Table 21
Learners' Opinion on the Continuance of English in India,
or move to Abolish English from the Country (N = 58)

Opinion	Female	Male
I would support it	1	5
I would support it to some extent	2	3
It would not make a difference to me	1	1
I would oppose it to some extent	3	2
I would oppose it strongly	20	19

hold a graduation degree and a degree in education i.e., B.Ed., too.

The teachers were given a questionnaire and were interviewed about the status of teaching of English, their perceptions and the problems they face in the classroom and outside. The stage or class at which English needs to be introduced in the school system has been responded by the teachers almost in unison. They feel that the introduction of English from Class I is the most ideal as it will enable the learners to learn the subject from an early school stage. One of the teachers felt that it is better to introduce english from Class V.

Explaining how it will help children in learning the language, the teachers' perceptions differ a little. Some of the opinions are as follows:

"The students know the basic alphabets from the beginning of their curriculum (sic)."

"It would enhance their listening and understanding capacity."

"The foundation of the language is good. They can compare English with their mother tongue. Early learning is good for them."

"The basic foundation will be good. Later, when they enter higher classes, they can speak and write in English well."

Due to parental and societal pressure, teachers feel the need for English in schools to enable children to move forward in the society. They consider English to be important for the 'upward mobility' of students. Instrumental motivation is the major reason for them to support the introduction of English at the early stage of schooling.

i. Facilities

The teachers feel that the school has adequate facilities for the teaching of English. Only one teacher has said that the facilities available in the school are not sufficient for teaching and learning of English. Almost all teachers believe that the school has books for extensive reading in the library. The other facilities which the teachers said should be available in the school are:

(a) Required number of English teachers.

(b) Books for extensive reading in the class and school library.

Though some teachers said the school has both a class and a library with books in English for extensive reading, I could not find any class library. Besides, the school library has books in science, mathematics and social sciences, but not many in English.

Every teacher has said that he/she uses some teaching aids in the classroom and believes that they benefit children in learning the language better. There is a contradiction in the opinions of teachers and students. Students said that most teachers did not use any support material or teaching aid.

The opinion of one teacher given in the following page reflects what the teacher believes or perceives about

the use of other support material and teaching aids as they are referred to generally.

"I cannot use all these things as time factor is important to us. I am teaching only Class X. Studies are carried out but in an exam-oriented mode (sic)."

ii. Objectives of Teaching English

While responding to 'what do you think are the major objectives of teaching English in school?', teachers as we can see, are not clear about it. Some of the objectives mentioned by the teachers are given below:

(i) increase the vocabulary,
(ii) improve spoken English,
(iii) write without grammatical mistakes,
(iv) improve knowledge in learning English,
(v) improve communication skills
(vi) improve understanding,
(vii) since it is a globally accepted language, one should know it,
(viii) enjoy English literature,
(ix) get jobs both in India and abroad, and
(x) keep pace with the changing trends of the modern world (age of computers).

iii. On Textbooks

Teachers believe that textbooks achieve the intended objectives of the syllabi. Textbooks give scope to teachers to realise the objectives of language learning.

Teachers also feel that the content of the lessons or poems printed in a textbook is relevant to the children's age group and serves their regional, cultural and language needs. The textbooks, according to the teachers, give scope to them to create their own activities and they are confident that they can explore more activities using textbooks. However, no teacher has given an example of how he/she exploited a unit or a poem to create his/her own activity. Teachers have only cited the title(s) of a poem or two where they designed their activities. While rating the textbook on the five-point scale, almost all teachers found it as 'very useful for teaching-learning English'. We can notice a paradoxical feeling when the teachers describe as "very useful for teaching-learning English". And also, "It is very difficult to learn from it". One or two teachers remark that the content of the book does not facilitate learning.

iv. Language Proficiency of Students

Teachers are unanimous in their opinion when they say their students' proficiency in English is average or poor, barring a few who feel that some of their students are 'good' in English and can communicate with others. Teachers' opinion is more or less the same on all aspects — language skills i.e., understanding, reading with understanding, spoken English and writing skills. However, we may recall what has been mentioned in the students' perceptions section, what the teachers have opined about

their students (that they are not good as they are from low-economic background).

v. Hindrances in Learning the Language

Teachers have listed the possible reasons and causes for bad state of affairs in learning the language. The hindrances for learning the language include:

  (i)   lack of interest in learning,
 (ii)   fear of learning the foreign language,
(iii)   shortage of teachers, particularly at the primary level,
 (iv)   lack of basic knowledge,
  (v)   faulty methodologies,
 (vi)   importance of learning the language is not realised,
(vii)   teachers handling the language classes are not specialised in the language,
(viii) language is taught only with the examination point of view (sic),
 (ix)   there is not a conducive environment to learn the language.

vi. Strategies Employed by Teachers in the Classroom

Teachers use lecture-cum-discussion as a major method or strategy in the classroom during the teaching-learning process. The other methods or strategies that teachers use in the classroom are — pair work, group work, lecture, etc. Teachers believe that the strategies they use in the classroom help their students learn the language and communicate in English. Two opinions of the teachers would show us how they feel about the effectiveness of their strategies:

"…A good understanding will be there (sic)."

"…It enables them to converse louder in English (sic)."

When asked to describe how they organise pair work, group work, debate, etc., most of the teachers have no response to that, except two who have said the following:

"By forming a group according to their ability, height, etc." (sic)

"Pairing a good student and a below average student and allow them to discuss a known topic." (sic)

vii. Use of Mother Tongue (Tamil) in Classroom

Teachers use the language of children in teaching English as a strategy to facilitate learning of the language. They feel that it is desirable to use the mother tongue while teaching English. Most teachers said they use Tamil 'once in a while'. Teachers say the reasons for using the mother tongue of students or Tamil are:

"It is language problem." (sic)

"The children are from rural areas. They feel uneasy to understand the language." (sic)

viii. Teacher's Role and Relationship with Students

While accepting that the role of a teacher is evolving in the changing scenario, the teachers have attempted to list the different roles a teacher has to play. He/she has to play the role of a facilitator, monitor and co-learner.

One teacher has opined that the role of teacher is to transmit knowledge only.

In their opinion about the kind of relationship the teacher and the student should have, teachers have mixed feelings with some saying 'friendly and as equals' others describing it as 'parent-son/daughter relationship' 'brotherly' and 'counsellor'. One teacher has said that 'teacher as *guru*, student as *shishya*' and 'teacher as giver of knowledge and students as receivers of knowledge'.

Teachers have also said that they adopt various strategies to identify the needs of students in learning English. The strategies followed are:

 (i) talking to students,
 (ii) through class discussions,
 (iii) through the results of their tests/examinations, and
 (iv) individual discussions with students.

The teachers recognise the roles that they have to play. However, in my interactions with the students, I felt that there is a distance between the teachers and students. Thinking that the students (most of them) cannot do well for they hail from lower middle class and their parents are not highly educated and work in lower positions, teachers have made the students feel that they are not as bright as the wards of officers and those who study in Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas or missionary schools.

ix. Research in Classroom by Teachers

No teacher has ever attempted to carry out any kind of research in the classroom on the problems of children or any aspect of teaching-learning of English or even in their own main subjects which they teach as part of their major duty. Most of them have not even heard of action research.

The English Language Classroom

This section presents two of the eight classrooms observed by me during my visit to the two schools. The description of the classrooms is presented as it was. This is followed by reflections of the teacher and the researcher (me).

i. Classroom One

School : NLC Girls Higher Secondary School

Class X

Lesson/Topic: Poem 'Six and Out' (Permission was obtained from the teachers to use their names)

The classroom was spacious and the furniture was old and large in size. The teacher's table was small with an old chair. A large blackboard painted on the wall had on one side the timetable and schedule of the tests and a quote for the day, and on the other side the map of India was drawn. There were three rows of desks, of which two had bigger desks to accommodate five students, while the middle row had smaller desks to

accommodate three students. Each row had seven desks.

The class had the poem 'Six and Out'. The poem was about a street cricket match played by children. The teacher, a woman in her 50s, was present in the class. As I entered the class, she directed the children to get up and wish me, which the students did. She began by saying, "Girls, shall we play some game today?" The girls looked somewhat puzzled and did not reply. They all replied in one tone, "cricket". The teacher went on to say, "Why do you say cricket?" There was silence for some time. She started again, "I know all of us like cricket and India is doing well in the game, isn't it?" Some of them said, "Yes". The teacher then said, "We will play cricket. Are you ready? We will play here in the classroom only." The students were taken aback for a while and said "Yes". "Take your English reader and turn to page 9 and we will play cricket here just now," she said. She started reading the poem a loud giving out relevant information. She did not read the poem as a whole. She read one stanza, and then, started explaining line-by-line. She asked the meaning of the words in the first stanza.

Teacher: "What is a 'pitch'?"

One student: "Playing field."

Teacher: "Is that correct?"

Another student answered in Tamil. The teacher said, "Go ahead, no problem, speak in Tamil or English, whichever language you could express better."

(The teacher herself judiciously used Tamil to enable the students to understand.)

Teacher: "What is crease?"

Students could not get that. She drew a cricket crease on the blackboard with wickets near which two players were seen standing. Moving on, she read out the next stanza, explained it line by line and asked questions:

Teacher: "What do you mean by 'motorcar', 'baker's cart'?"

She kept saying, "Answer either in Tamil or English. I want you to understand and enjoy the poem".

At the end of the second stanza, she asked them to list the rhyming words from the two stanzas. The students in chorus said, "Parts/carts, crease/peace, etc."

She read out the third stanza and made an attempt to sum up the poem by asking three questions:

"What is the poem about? Have you seen such scenes in your neighbourhood? Which cricketer you like the most and why?"

Then, she asked one of the students to read out aloud. When the student completed reading the first paragraph, she asked another child to read. And then, the bell went off.

a. Teacher's Reflections

"I tried to give children an opportunity to speak. This is a good class, where most of the students are good in English. However, they have no support at home. Parents cannot help them in English, and for that matter in any other subject. So, school is the

only place where they can hear and practise English. I make it a point to make them speak in English, and wherever needed, I use Tamil. If I do not use Tamil, they would not understand anything at all. This makes them feel interested and listen to the teacher.

Researcher: "What is the purpose of teaching poetry?"

"I understand poetry is for enjoyment. I don't know whether I was able to make them enjoy the poem. I made the class interactive and the theme of the poem is cricket. This is how they can relate to it. So, there is not much problem. I think they enjoy the ideas of the poem and I made attempts to bring in the language elements of the poem."

b. Researcher's Comments

This is an experienced teacher and has been teaching English for two decades along with science. To some extent, she was able to make children interact with her. The teacher dealt with the poem like a prose piece, though she made attempts to draw the attention of the learners to poetic elements, such as rhyme scheme. She did not even read the complete poem once, nor did she once ask children to read the poem individually or in groups. She gave an introduction through some questions and started explaining line by line. She was happy that the ideas of the poem were made known to the learners. She assumed that the learners were passive recipients with a token participation of responding to some questions asked by her.

The teacher believed that she kept the classroom interactive by posing questions and making them speak. Most children participated while answering the questions or in discussion. The interaction was between the teacher and the learners. There was learner-learner interaction.

The teacher was proficient in English as she spoke well. She spoke in simple language and was able to make the children listen and understand. The students felt at home with the teacher for she had tought in the school for 27 years. Though she spoke in English most of the time, she used Tamil sometimes, which helped the children to understand better. When she used some Tamil words to explain some difficult English words, I saw the faces of some students, who seemed to understand what the teacher spoke. When asked about the use of Tamil in the English language classroom, she said, "These children have not been exposed much to English language. Moreover, I use the vernacular language only as a tool to make them understand and enjoy the ideas of the poem". The teacher does not keep speaking in Tamil as that would be disastrous. "Though I use Tamil to make them understand better, I do not want them to use the language much. Students have to speak in English as an unwritten law. A kind of bilingual approach would help in learning with understanding," she shared.

The teacher tried to use some strategies and was aware of the methods and approaches to be employed in teaching the second language. She said that she had to follow different strategies when she went to a Tamil-medium classroom. In general, she remarked, "Children who come to the school are not bright in terms of the marks they score. Bright children go to Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya or Cluny, the missionary school. We get students who could not do well there, and of course, those who cannot afford to study in these schools."

My interaction with the students before and after the teacher taught gave me some impression about the nature of learning and the characteristics of the way the school was being conducted. The general assumption was that the children who came to this school were not so bright — in the sense that they could not compete with children in a better school in the same township and did not get an opportunity to use English outside the classroom. They had to devote time to other subjects, in which they needed to score high marks, so that they could choose science stream, and ultimately, opt for some professional course(s). Most of students were able to speak in English. But they felt that they were not good in it. Teachers were also one of the reasons for this low self-esteem as they felt that they only got children rejected by 'better' schools and lower middle class families, such as children of Class IV employees, technicians, drivers, etc.

ii. Classroom Two

School: NLC Boys Government Higher Secondary School, Neyveli

Class X

Topic/Lesson: Integrated grammar/ Rearranging of sentences.

The classroom was spacious with big desks for learners. The class had a strength of about 30 boys accommodated on 12 desks. It also had a table and a chair for the teacher, a blackboard and three charts on science. It was the English grammar class and the teacher was teaching 'jumbled-up sentences'. Jumbled-up sentences have to be rearranged in a way to make the events of a story in order. The processes of the class are described below.

The teacher was received with a loud chorus of "Good morning, sir!". Having said, "Sit down", he opened the grammar workbook that he had in his hand and told the students, "Today, we are going to do rearranging of jumbled sentences." All students took out their notebooks and started copying what the teacher was writing on the blackboard. The teacher wrote the rubrics on the blackboard. "Rewrite the following statements in a meaningful order. This carries 3 marks i.e., $6 \times \frac{1}{2} = 3$," the teacher said.

Teacher: "Boys. This question, rewriting the jumbled statements in an order carries three marks. It is easy as most of the questions are

narrating an event in order. (The children listened to him in rapt attention.) I am going to dictate the statements in a jumbled order. Write them down in your notebooks."

The teacher dictated the statements as he went around the class. Here are the sentences which the teacher dictated:

  (i) It fell into the river.

 (ii) It threw the leaves down into water. (The teacher said: throw, threw, thrown)

(iii) Once an ant felt thirsty.

(iv) A dove was sitting on the tree.

 (v) The ant climbed on the leaf and reached the branch safely.

(vi) It went to the river to drink water.

The teacher now talked about coherence.

Teacher: "Coherence is important for making sense in any language. Coherence has to be in meaning as well as in language. Students, let me now tell you the story in Tamil and you try to understand it. (Teacher narrate the story in Tamil.) Now, you do it."

The students started rearranging the sentences as they discussed it in Tamil. Once they finished, the teacher asked them to come forward one-by-one and read out aloud. One student came and started reading. He said, "a ant". The teacher went near him and said, "an ant". "You know the word 'ant' begins with a vowel 'a', we should use 'an', okay. The students came out individually with their rearranged narratives. Once the class

completed the work, the teacher read out the rearranged order of sentences and asked them to correct, if there were mistakes. Then, he read out the rearranged statements and asked the students to repeat after him. He again narrated the rearranged statements in Tamil. He then asked them to read out the rearranged statements in English. The activity took about 55 minutes. He gave another exercise as homework from the workbook.

a. Teacher's Reflections

When asked why the student chose the activity and why he did the activity the way he did. The teacher reflected, "I did not have any special preparation or decision to choose this activity. This is what I planned to do as this carries three marks in the annual examination. Also, this is Class X and English is a difficult subject for them. You must have noticed, I had to read out the whole narration in Tamil to make them understand. So, I prepare them for the examination and how to get a good percentage. This is important for me as a teacher that they all pass and with a good percentage."

About the group work, he said, "See, the group work does not work most of the time. You must have noticed that I did not insist on their discussing in English. They can speak in English, but not well. There is no environment to speak in English. So, we manage using Tamil most of the time. What to do! This is a rural school."

b. Researcher's Comments

The teacher's language was good. He used both English and Tamil — almost each sentence he spoke in English, he translated that into Tamil. This made the students get the meaning of the narrative cohesively. Students' English was poor and there were mistakes in most of the sentences they spoke. Almost everyone said, "He do not speak (sic)". Though the teacher, noticed it, he did not pay much attention to the mistakes. When asked later what he thought about the mistakes committed by students, he said, "If I tell them anything, they will not try to speak in English. Generally, in most of the classes (science, social science and mathematics), they do not speak in English at all. They are not allowed to speak as most of our teachers simply follow the lecture method."

The teacher in this class was seen interacting with the students. The interaction was between the teacher on one side and the students on the other. The teacher asked for an answer (what comes next while rearranging the sentences) to which some students answered it as a whole. She did not devise any strategy (like pair or group work) to discuss and rearrange the sentences. The importance of teacher-learner and learner-learner interactions was not felt by the teacher. The teacher had to supply most of the sentences in order.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The learners' language profile and perception on various aspects of English language education in the two schools show that they know at least two languages. It also shows that language in the state education policy has an impact on the number of languages known to learners. None of the learners have marked Hindi as a language known to them. This is the result of the State language policy, the three language formula, which rejected the study of Hindi in schools.

Learners, in general, believe that the material and methods used in teaching English are good and serve the purpose. Teachers also have more or less the same opinion about the material used. Learners' views on many aspects reveal how the teachers of English have an impact on their perception. Since they do not have much exposure to any method, except what their teachers follow, they feel that whatever happens in their classroom is good. We can also notice more or less the same in the opinion of teachers. None of the teachers have undergone any training since the beginning of their appointment. So, they teach either 'the way they were taught', or do whatever way it comes to them. This is revealed when teachers answered the question — 'what would be the objectives of English language teaching and the methods they follow in their classrooms'.

The analysis of the perceptions of learners does not show much difference between female and male

learners, except in a few aspects, such as the one about the discontinuance of English in India. Reading habits also show some difference as more female learners read than males.

Two classrooms presented and analysed in the previous sections show how two experienced teachers understand and practise actual teaching in their classrooms. Teachers lack an understanding of what language is, how a language is learnt, why interaction is important for language learning, what should be the objectives of language teaching and what material for teaching of English should do. No training, lack of resources and 'faulty' methods are the order of the day for the teaching-learning of English as a language in the two English-medium classes. Every teacher was aiming to teach for examinations and the examination wash-back effect was felt in every day teaching in Class X. This has led to teaching English language as a content subject.

Teachers feel that they try their best to support learners in their venture of learning the language. However, their opinion about learners is that they have no support at home to learn the language and they are not the brighter lot. This affects the self-esteem of learners. The irony is that there is not much opportunity to learn the language even in school. Teachers, who blame or regret that the home environment of learners is not supportive for learning English language do not provide much for learners to use the language in school. This shows how teachers feel that they are not part of the problem (low proficiency of learners). But at the same time they do not want to be a part of the solution or attempting to arrive at a solution. This cyclical blame goes on.

The analysis of the perceptions of learners and teachers and the two classroom processes presented in this paper tells us many things. Firstly, how teachers who are not meant to be teaching English are teaching the language with no understanding of what the language is and how it is learnt (assumptions about language and learning). It is not the lack of training; it is no training in any form for any one. There is an urgent need to orient English teachers on language pedagogy, in general, and strategies for teaching-learning of various components of the language, viz. teaching of reading, poetry, grammar, pronunciation, etc, in particular.

Schools need to provide an enabling environment for the learning of English language. Learners need exposure to English language through various means viz. print, visual and other media. Peer interaction (learner-learner and learner-teacher) in the language is essential for learning English. These opportunities to use the language would support learning it better.

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