

# Book Review

## Language Education Teaching English in India

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The sociocultural paradigm of each society is unique, necessitating resources for negotiating its bends and curves at every step. Ever since Macaulay's Minute, language teaching stakeholders in India have been grappling with all kinds of challenges ranging from ivory tower policies to language bias to acquisition-poor ecosystems. Along with suggested solutions and created resources has come a range of changes that demand a refresh of the entire system. In order to provide guidance to all practitioners, the Centre of Excellence in Teacher Education (CETE) at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai launched a series of textbooks under the theme 'Principles-based Adaptive Teaching' (PbAT) (<https://www.routledge.com/Principles-based-Adaptive-Teaching/book-series/PAT>). Based on the NCFTE 2009, these textbooks make an effort to prepare teachers for the future. In fact, the word 'textbook' could be a misnomer in this case because the volumes in the series are designed to trigger curiosity and the urge to explore further, much beyond the content of the series. Each volume is a strong and well-equipped launch pad that contains key concepts, constructs, theories and contemporary discourse around the topic of the volume.

The book under review belongs to this series and is definitely a value addition to the list. The introduction candidly throws the gauntlet, "The English language classroom continues to remain a politicized space, with English being the language of aspiration, social and professional mobility." Gracefully, space is granted to readers to be free to interpret and apply: "This book is a reflective piece rather than a prescriptive one." The interdisciplinary nuances of the volume provide a good amount of leeway to experiment and innovate.

Chapter one describes and presents various notions of language and how these impact the learner, the teacher and the classroom. It looks at language learning and teaching from the perspective of literacy. The ELT-aficionado mostly approaches policy writeups on India warily. The reason for this is dual-toned. Most accounts of language policy in India tend to focus on the lopsided nature of the whole endeavor. The other set of accounts tend to situate India in a never-never time that is out of the universe and plods on towards a hazy horizon of its own making.

The second chapter on Language and Policy is a treat to read for it does not mince words, tells it the way it is and refreshingly enough, takes into account the impact of policy not just on the Indian

scene but in the world too. The approach taken is both synchronic and diachronic. Chapter three contains an overview of Language Acquisition and Learning.

Chapter four describes perspectives and approaches to language and literacy. It adds value to the topic by examining literacy as critical literacy and considers the dimension of improvement in teacher development. The next two chapters focus on the teaching of language. Given the school education-based nature of the volume, the division of these chapters into Communicative Language Teaching and Language Through Literature should be helpful for teachers. Most schools follow some form or the other of the Communicative Approach; the term has emerged as a useful umbrella term for pedagogy. The role of literature in the language classroom has always been a matter of discussion and innovation.

Hence, the division helps to cut across a lot of redundant material in the area of language teaching. The only puzzle in chapter six is the representation of the language skills as RWLS as most teachers go by the LSRW sequence.

Chapter 7 gives a workable definition and description of literature and goes on to link literature to critical literacy. Dividing literature into the sub genres of fiction, poetry and drama, the chapter can be quite useful for teachers although the section on teaching interpretation and critique maybe pitched at a higher level than the level of most school classrooms. But then, a volume that aims to promote reflection would need to challenge minds while raising the bar. In the same vein, the concluding chapter on assessment and evaluation for language and literature keeps the bar high but one can sense the purpose to this expectation. Teachers need to be a part of the planning and policy-making

stage of evaluation in order to take away the ivory-tower feel of most assessment policy. The education and development of teachers as assessors depends upon their capability and capacity to reflect.

Chapters 7 and 8 are geared towards enabling teachers to make a difference. The volume is thought-provoking and also a delightful reading experience. The authors keep the promise of not being prescriptive; the tone all through is one of suggestion and a reader- friendly approach is evident from the boxes within chapters and summary that follows each chapter. The exercises are designed to provoke teachers into tweaking them and creating some more according to their unique context. The book promises to enrich the space of ELT in India that has seen earlier teacher-friendly volumes such as Nagaraj 2008, Saraswathi 2006 and Tickoo 2003, just to name a few.

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