English Language Education Scenario in India: A Systematic Review for Developing Policy Recommendations

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ABSTRACT

A systematic review of relevant research articles, book chapters and government reports has been undertaken to understand the present English language education policies, teaching, and learning systems and curriculum in Tamil Nadu. The articles from authentic sources and peer-reviewed journals have been selected for reviewing the English language education scenario in Tamil Nadu to ensure the credibility of the review. The findings from the analysis of the government reports, policy documents and qualitative studies have been integrated in terms of different key factors of English language education in the state. The suggestions and analyses broadly indicate that there is a dearth of English language usage within and outside the classroom spaces. The reports reveal that teacher education needs drastic improvements in terms of pre-and in-service training. Another key factor that has a huge potential of improving the English language teaching and learning scenario in India is the proposal of a shift from an achievement-based examination to an examination-oriented towards English language proficiency through the development of national benchmarks for language proficiency.

Keywords: English language education, Tamil Nadu language education, language policy recommendations, systematic review

Introduction

A bird's eye view of the Indian education system shows the various problems embedded within the teaching and learning practices and our interest lies in analyzing English language education in India. In this paper, we aim to scrutinize the complications in the English language teaching and learning in the government schools in India, specifically, in Tamil Nadu, by reviewing the relevant research articles, book chapters and government reports. India has different boards of education which cater to the different sectors of the public majorly in terms of the economic status. There are the State Government, Central Government, International and Private (follows State Government curriculum) Boards in the school level education system.

Except for the State Government all the other boards provide only English medium education and the State Government offers both English medium and first language medium education. India has a total of 22 active languages and 29 states with 7 union territories. The first language of the students differs according to the state that they belong to and our area of focus primarily is Tamil Nadu, the southern-most state of India. The language of this state is Tamil, which is one the classical languages of the world. The Government provides free or subsidized education. The students who go to the Government schools are majorly from low economic sectors of public and the rural parts of the state. A large proportion of the student population from the state study in the Government

or the Private schools compared to the number of students in the Central Board and the International Boards (afforded only by the cream of the society).

The problem here is that after the completion of the school education the students from all across these boards are left to compete for the University education on the basis of their board examination results and entrance examinations (emphasis on the English language skills and the subject knowledge). More importantly, all the universities across the country provide only English medium instruction in undergraduate and postgraduate education. Unfortunately, the State Government has a common English language textbook for both the English and Tamil medium schools. The curriculum planners have sadly not considered the significant role of exposure to the language in the learning of a foreign language in the latter case. Also, the key factors such as teacher's proficiency and the English in the environment for learning any language are so varied across the different schools in terms of the geographical location, teacher recruitment and the socio- economic background.

As a result, the students from the English and Tamil medium schools have a huge difference in terms of English language skills though their knowledge on the subjects are up to similar levels. Eventually when the students from the Tamil medium schools enter the University they find it extremely difficult to grapple with the subjects and the environment as they are bombarded with the foreign language on all fronts and this factor becomes a huge barrier in the personal, professional and academic development. The researcher's understanding of the English language education system in Tamil Nadu is merely based on the observations made and personal experiences of learning and teaching English as a second language over the years. Hence, before embarking on the journey of optimizing the English language education scenario in the state of Tamil Nadu, it is essential to review the authentic documents which report the current data on English language education published by the government education department and researchers working in the field of English language education.

Method

Participants

A systematic review has been done where primarily the essential government reports on the English language education system in India and Tamil Nadu and the qualitative research articles have been evaluated. In this systematic review, Gough's model for the stages of systematic review has been followed. (Gough 2007)
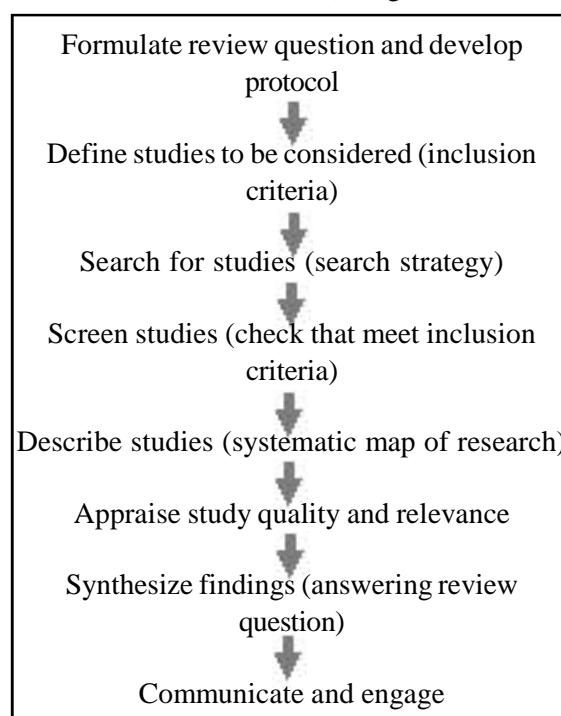

Figure 1: Stages of a systematic review (Gough 2007, p.5)

Review Questions and Search Terms

The review question is a) what is the current English language education scenario in Tamil Nadu according to the literature available?

The search terms used for spotting the relevant literature are listed in the table below.

Table 1: Search terms used for literature

Main Concept	Search terms/ keywords
The current scenario of English language education in Tamil Nadu	Tamil Nadu language education policy, Indian language education system, learning and teaching of English in Tamil Nadu, The textbook materials used in teaching and learning of English in India

Search Strategy

The researcher attempted to source the most authentic data explaining the English language education system in Tamil Nadu and so a comprehensive search of the published reports from the government bodies, organizations and researchers (who have done considerable academic work in the field of English language education in India) was conducted.

Study Selection

Searches of the published literature were conducted directly in the official websites of the government bodies, organizations and researchers' profile to ensure the credibility and the authenticity of the articles reviewed in this paper to arrive at the general understanding of the language education system in India. The research articles included in the study are contributions of one particular author who has extensively worked on this topic in India and in specific to Tamil Nadu (Ramanujam Meganathan, NCERT).

Study Selection Process

The titles, abstracts and the paper were evaluated in terms of the inclusion and exclusion criteria listed below.

Table 2: Details of the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the reports and research studies

Feature	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Type of Publication	Government reports, organisation reports, peer reviewed journals, books	Thesis, dissertations, News paper articles, magazine reports, conference abstract
Language of Publication	English	All other languages
'Subject' of the Articles	English language education policies, teaching and learning in schools, India for general understanding and Tamil Nadu in specific, State Board of Education	University level language education, Other languages, Other countries, Other states in India, Private and International board English language education
Author specifications	Government committees, organization reports and authors who have worked extensively on English language education	Novice researchers, Journalists,

Quality Assessment

In the present study, Gough's (2007) "weight of evidence" (WoE) framework was used to assess the quality of the research evidence. Gough (2007, p.7) gave "generic" and "review specific judgement" and combined them to give an overall assessment as shown in the figure 2.

Weight of Evidence A Generic, non-review specific judgement about quality of evidence e.g., generally accepted criteria by those who generally use and produce evidence. **Weight of Evidence B** Review specific judgement about the appropriateness of a specific form of evidence for answering the current review question e.g., the relevance of research design **Weight of Evidence C** Review specific judgement about the relevance of the focus of the evidence for the review question. eg. type of sample, method of data gathering or analysis **Weight of Evidence D** Overall assessment of the extent that a study contributes evidence to answering a review question, typically a combination of A, B and C

Figure 2: Weight of Evidence Framework (Gough 2004)

Table 3: Application of Weight of Evidence Framework

Weight of Evidence Criteria	Implications for Current Review
A Quality of Research	Authenticity and credibility of the source of data and authorship
B Appropriateness to the review question	English language education policy in India, specific to Tamil Nadu
C Research Design	Qualitative and quantitative reports, survey and literature review

One of the main aims of the study is to present the English language education in Tamil Nadu as close to reality as possible by reviewing the most reliable sources and thereby to ensure the authenticity and credibility of data. Hence, only those literatures that were filtered in through the inclusion criteria were reviewed in the paper. The selected reports, research papers and book chapters are evaluated using Gough's (2004) WoE framework.

Results

The research evidence reviewed has been described and their characteristics have been outlined. The following tabulation provides the general map of the reports and research studies reviewed in this paper.

Description of Studies

The following description presents a general map of the quantitative and qualitative research studies that have been reviewed.

Table 4: Characteristics of the study

Author and Year	Nature of the Study	Theoretical and Conceptual Framework	Research Objectives/ Hypothesis	Methodology	Emerging Themes
Department of School Education, Government of Tamil Nadu, 2018	Policy Document	Department of School Education, Government of Tamil Nadu's Policy note for the academic year 2018- 19	- To present the previous years' policy outcomes, financial outlay, welfare schemes and the new policy proposal for the academic year 2018- 19. elementary education,	Goals- driven policy development	Policy reforms on - Elementary education - Secondary and higher education - Government examinations -Non- formal and adult education - Public libraries - State Council of Educational Research and Training -Teacher's Recruitment Board -Tamil Nadu Textbook and Educational Services Corporation
Education First (EF), 2018	Quantitative Study	Presentation of data on English Language Proficiency across the world	- EF EPI 2018 rankings and city scores. - To establish relations of the ELP to economics, trade, innovation, workplace, society, and technology	The Education First (EF)'s, English Proficiency Index (EPI) to rank the countries across the world.	Positive correlation between EPI and economics, trade, innovation, workplace, society and technology.
Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2016	Policy Document	Government of India Report on the National Education Policy	- Need for a new national policy on education with report on the current quality and recommendation of the new policy	Sequence of meetings with subject experts and stakeholders along with discussions with the State and Central Governments representatives	Empowering India through quality education, context and objectives of the new NEP, gover- nance of school and higher education and recommendations of the NEP 2016

Author and Year	Nature of the Study	Theoretical and Conceptual Framework	Research Objectives/ Hypothesis	Methodology	Emerging Themes
NCERT, 2006	Position paper, National focus group on teaching of English	Presentation of themes for the teaching of English language in India at the school education	- To set the goals for a language curriculum - To present the shape of curriculum, the resources and procedures - To provide recommendations	Builds on the themes that evolved out of discussions in the Focus Group and individual position papers presented by each member of the committee	- Language acquisition inside and outside the classroom - Input rich environments - Multilingualism in school-Textbooks-Teacher evaluation
Meganathan, R, 2012	Qualitative Study	Policy planning and implementation	- To explore language policy-making processes in the Indian Context - Implementation issues - Place and role of English in school education	Exploratory study	- Three- language formula- Number of language available and taught- First, second and third languages taught- Media of instruction - The role and place of English
Meganathan, R, 2015	Qualitative study	English language education in India with reference to the pedagogical policies and perspective	- To cover and analyse an array of issues such as curriculum, syllabi, materials development and quality issues	Critical assessment of current state of English language education in schools in India	- Typologies of teaching situations - Complex nature of syllabi, curriculum and quality - Pedagogical and procedural implications - Socio- economic inequity and exclusion
Meganathan, R, 2017	Qualitative study	English language curriculum at the secondary stage- Perceptions of Learners and Teachers	- To present the perceptions of learners and teachers on various aspects of ELE in two government run schools in the state of Tamil Nadu - To understand the ethnograaphic language education elements through observation and opinions	Ethnography research	- Perception on English language teaching and learning in a rural setting- Number of languages known and the domains of language use- Influence of language policy and reforms on teachers' beliefs and opinions- Curricular reforms

The characteristics of the literature reviewed above are outlined.

Nature and Focus

All the seven studies reviewed above dealt with school education policies. There are two education policies reviewed here published by the Government of Tamil Nadu and Government of India. All the other documents and articles are on specific focus to the English language education in the country and in the State of Tamil Nadu.

Aim of the Study

The policy documents reviewed in the study aimed at proposing new educational and language level policies in order to improve the quality of the overall school education system. The other articles aimed to explore and understand the English language teaching and learning scenario in Tamil Nadu.

Research Design

The EF (2018) paper adopted a quantitative approach whereas the rest of the papers considered in this review are qualitative studies.

Summarized Findings of the Studies

The education policy documents (2016, 2018) and the NCERT position paper (2006) provided recommendations for improving the English language teaching and learning scenario in India and Tamil Nadu. Meganathan (2011, 2015, and 2017) traced the history of English language teaching in India and then presented the current picture of language learning and teaching within the country and state of Tamil Nadu. The EF EPI (2018) located the country of India in terms of its English language proficiency levels among the various countries around the world and ranked it accordingly.

Discussion

Philosophical underpinnings

The three major educational research paradigms are scientific, interpretive and critical paradigms. As researchers, we observe two different philosophical underpinnings in the papers discussed in the study. The language proficiency ranking reports and the qualitative survey (Meganathan 2017) are seen to have emerged from the interpretive paradigm. Whereas, the language education policy reports and the exploratory studies (Meganathan 2011, 2015) could be traced back to critical paradigm perspectives.

Positioning India in the Global English language Proficiency Map

The EF EPI 2018, rankings report, clearly illustrates how the average English language proficiency levels of the individuals in a country strongly determines various key factors such as economics, trade, innovation, social behavior and technology advancements. Among their proficiency bands, India falls in the band of moderate proficiency along with other countries such as Nigeria, South Korea, Spain, Hong Kong and Costa Rica. However, this study does not really reflect the average proficiency level of a country as their samples are only those who have taken up a particular test in the Education First (EF) website and hence are highly skewed. This data has been used to present a vague picture of where India stands in terms of English language proficiency levels in the world and to get to know which of the countries' policies should be looked into to perform a comparative study. Singapore ranks the thirds and it belongs to the very high proficiency levels and has secured the position only after Sweden and Netherlands. In fact it even out stands other European countries like Germany, Finland and Denmark. This informs the researcher that Singapore's English language education policy document should be one of the indispensable components in a comparative study.

Education Policy of India and the State of Tamil Nadu

The review of the National Education Policy (2016) was important to understand and critically analyse the Policy Note of the Government of Tamil Nadu (2018) at a later stage. There are three significant aspects to be drawn from the national education policy with respect to the English language teaching and learning in the state of Tamil Nadu.

The Three Language Formula (TLF) was formulated in 1968 National Education Policy resolution. The TLF recommends that each child should be taught three languages in the school education. However, Schiffman (1996) points out to the flaw in the execution of the formula and said that "this proposal has been honored in the breach more than in reality" (p. 167). The non-Hindi speaking areas showed some opposition, mainly Tamil Nadu. The state never followed the TLF policy and followed the old dual language system.

The policy also provides input regarding the choice of the medium of instruction and the class at which the teaching and learning of English language could be introduced. The policy recommends that the initial instruction should be in the mother tongue or the first language medium and that English language could be introduced anytime right from grade one. The policy also cites that the perception of considering fluency in English language as one of the mandatory goals of school education is the compelling reason behind the introduction of English medium classes in government schools across India.

The policy note (2018) published by the department of school education of Tamil Nadu aims at improving the overall quality of education by the introduction of various welfare schemes and the administrative efficiency of the school education system in the state. A general evaluation of the policy note shows that there are very minimal references made to improving English language teaching and learning scenario in Tamil Nadu. The report informs the researcher that the English medium sections were introduced in the government schools in the academic year 2012- 13 as a response to the aspiration of the parents to get their children educated in English medium schools. The department of school education takes a few initiatives currently to improve the language education scenario in Tamil Nadu. Their primary target is observed to be to improve and assist the English language proficiency of the teachers of English. The District Institute of Education and Training (DIET) that functions under the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT), conducts in- service training programs with specific focus to the English language skills. The in- service training is provided at the primary and the upper primary level. At the primary level the training focuses on the LSRW (Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing) skills in English. Whereas, at the upper primary level two out of the five training programmes are on English language teaching. Teaching prose, poetry and grammar are taught for a period of two days followed by training in functional grammar and classroom communication for another two days. The policy note has also proposed the development of an online platform called 'My English- an online capacity building course for teachers' in collaboration with the British Council. The platform aims at providing an online course for six weeks to improve the language proficiency of the teachers and also to train them to integrate technology in language classrooms.

English Language Teaching Position Paper

A well- drafted and theoretically sound position

paper on English language teaching was published by the National Council of Educational Research and Training in 2006. The paper sets clear goals for English language learning students such as to gain proficiency in the language and the capacity to perceive abstract thoughts and receive knowledge in the target language. The problems mentioned in the paper are still very much the same and it's an unfortunate thing that a position paper published over a decade ago still holds good for understanding the teaching and learning of English in India.

The position paper is observed to be the very first government document to have acknowledged the various layers of teaching situations in India, which was till then considered as one entity and treated in a uniform way. The two governing factors of the divisions among the schools in India are teachers' proficiency in English and pupils' exposure to the English inside and outside school. Hence, "input rich communicational environments are a prerequisite for language learning." The paper refers to those set of learners who have a poor exposure to the language as "disadvantaged learners" (NCERT 2006, p. v). We would be bo rrowing this reference term for our study as our research primarily focuses on optimizing the English language teaching and learning scenario among the Tamil medium government school students.

Secondly, the position paper focuses on the training that is being imparted to the teachers. It emphasizes on the need for an efficient pre- and in- service training programmes to improve the language proficiency and equip them with the right teaching methods and tools for promoting classroom interactions. Finally, the most important aspect which to a very large extent decides as to what really happens in an English language classroom is dealt with. The scores of the examination that are conducted at the end of every term and the midterm tests decide the students' promotion to next grade of class. Reports show that the students are detained from classes especially in class X because of their inability to score the minimum pass marks primarily in English and then in Mathematics. The inevitability of these examinations creates anxiety in the process of learning and repeated failures over the years eventually results in aversion towards learning the language among the students. To respond to the students' immediate needs the teachers plan their classes in the examination point of view and this affects the prime goal of English classroom which is of language fluency and communication development. This paper makes a significant proposal for a shift from achievement-oriented language evaluation to the measurement of language proficiency. "National benchmarks for language proficiency need to be evolved preliminary to designing a set of optional English language tests that will balance curricular freedom with the standardization of evaluation that certification requires, and serve to counter the current problem of English (along with mathematics) being a principal reason for failure at class X" (NCERT 2006, p. vi).

English Language Teaching and Learning Issues at the Ground Level

The researcher draws evidence on the claimed issues from the chosen research studies. Meganathan (2011) presents 'unsatisfactory' policy implementation issues in terms of failure to establish an enabling environment and to recruit teachers who are skilled in the English language. He briefly discusses the logistical problems in implementing new policy proposals by providing a typology of school education system along with numerical data of the number of government schools across all the states with the information

of media of instruction. The researcher points out to the pressing issue of highly unequal accessibility to the English language among the urban and rural parts of the country. The study suggests a drastic change in the teacher education system to ensure quality of the recruited teachers and a revision of the textbook materials to ensure input rich environment inside the classroom spaces.

Meganathan (2015) extends his critical review of the current English language teaching and learning system in India from the pedagogical perspectives. He cites that 90% of higher education in India is provided in the medium of English and this fact is projected as one of the indispensible needs to improve the existing efficiency of English language education. There is a reflection on how the indigenous project initiatives taken over the last two decades such as the Bangalore- Madras Communicational language teaching project of N S Prabhu have not sufficiently impacted the ELT scenario in India. "Tickoo (1971) argued that what is needed in India is a method, which should grow from research and experiment within the country and in circumstances of an average schoolroom" (Meganathan 2015, pg. 52). He illustrates how the linguistic diversity of the nation is reflected at the policy level; its implementation is questionable. Additionally, "the language remains inaccessible to those who are disadvantaged because of their economic situation, their caste, or both" (Anderson 2012, as cited in Meganathan 2015). Thus, the underlying socio- political inequalities in the quality of education provided in India is highlighted and this puts forth the serious challenges and call for attention on research- based curriculum planning and its implementation in the classroom level.

In his most recent publication, Meganathan (2017) investigates the perceptions of learners and teachers on the English language curriculum at the secondary stage. He has primarily attempted to understand students' opinion on the teaching methods, textbooks, materials, importance of English language, whether or not they are interested in learning the language and so on. Whereas, the teachers were asked for their opinions on the availability of facilities in school for the teaching and learning of English, their personal objectives of teaching English, language proficiency of the students and use of mother tongue in the classroom. The researcher selected two government schools in one of the rural districts in the state of Tamil Nadu. They were further questioned on the strategies employed by the teachers in the classroom and the amount of action research done in the classroom for specific teaching learning problems. As the final mode of investigation, the researcher observed two English language classrooms in its actual set up. He observed the teaching methods adopted by the teacher, teachers' proficiency, the students' participation in the classroom discussions and the quality of the interactions that resulted in the classroom among the peers as well as between the teacher and the students. One of the significant objectives of the study was also to evaluate the extent to which the language education policy reforms influenced the classroom spaces.

The analyses of the collected data show that the students and teachers were satisfied with the standard of the English language textbook materials and the methods in which the language was taught to them. The researcher believes it is because of ignorance of the efficient methods and materials that teachers and the students consider whatever happened in the classroom was good and satisfactory. The researcher states that "the 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 materials should be used for language teaching" (Meganathan 2017, p. 117). Through the analysis of the qualitative data, he identifies that there was fundamentally a dearth of an enabling environment and language input both from inside and outside the classroom spaces among the participants in the selected context.

Conclusion

A systematic review was conducted on the English language teaching and learning scenario in India, especially in the state of Tamil Nadu. Appropriate key words were used to find the literature and the quality was assessed using the WoE framework. After assessing, the reports and the research articles were reviewed in terms of nature of the study, theoretical and conceptual framework, research objectives, methodology and emerging themes. The major issues and recommendations emerging out of the reports were discussed categorically.

The policy reports and the research articles exhibit the complexity of issues embedded in the English language teaching and learning scenario in India. The readings show that the existing problems are not newly bloomed ones. They have been very much present over the past few decades and have been discussed over and over again for years. A considerable amount of minor and major research projects has been attempted to address these problems. The persistence of English language teaching and learning problems even to the present day shows that none of the initiatives have clearly had effective influences over the past two decades. From the systematic review it could be concluded that there are three major factors that needs to be attended to and that those three factors are possibly the key aspects of bringing out a drastic improvement in

the scenario. The three issues that demand research intervention are the absence of an enabling environment for language learning, inefficient teacher education system (both at the training and recruitment level) and finally the achievement-oriented language examinations rather than proficiency driven tests.

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