

New ESL Teacher for the New Education Policy: A SWOT Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The vision of the New Education Policy (NEP-Draft) 2019 reads: “. . . An India-centred education system that contributes directly to transforming our nation sustainably into an equitable and vibrant knowledge society by providing high-quality education to all.” The chapter on Teacher Education reads: “Teacher preparation is an activity that requires multidisciplinary perspectives and knowledge. . . Heartbreakingly, the teacher education sector has been beleaguered with mediocrity . . .” (p.283). The paper works on the assumption that the shift to an India-centred education necessitates addressing several issues. The author-cum-researcher attempts a SWOT analysis of the English as a Second Language (ESL) scenario vis-à-vis NEP 2019. The paper begins by listing perceptions of writers since 1907 and draws on recent research findings to propose appropriate strategies to address the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. It is hoped that the presentation would benefit curriculum developers keen on preparing a road map for ESL curriculum design and teacher training.

Keywords: ESL; India-centred education; NEP 2019; SWOT analysis.

Introduction

Since June 2019, several forums across the country have been assiduously discussing the Draft of the National Policy on Education 2019. While some perceive in it “excellent individual recommendations on school education” (Kingdon), some opine that NEP “in its current form may prove disastrous” (Robinson). Perhaps the reason for a sense of apprehension arises from the fact that the Draft does not lay out a roadmap for realizing its proposed vision.

The vision of NEP 2019 reads: “. . . an India-centred education system that contributes directly to transforming our nation sustainably into an equitable and vibrant knowledge society, by providing high quality

education to all.” In the Draft, two observations on Teacher Education in Chapter 15, which formed the trigger to the thoughts and ideas presented in this paper include:

1. “Teacher preparation is an activity that requires multidisciplinary perspectives and knowledge. . . .”
2. “Heartbreakingly, the teacher education sector has been beleaguered with mediocrity as well as rampant corruption. . . .”

What are the implications for ESL teacher training in view of the suggestions of NEP identified above? How can we refine the ‘mediocre’ teachers of English who have already entered the profession? What should be the nature of multi-disciplinary training

for ESL teachers in India? How can such training encapsulate an India-centred education? These are some of the questions this paper would attempt to answer.

To answer these questions, the author-cum researcher, who is a teacher-educator by profession, begins by attempting a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis of the issues involved. At each stage of the SWOT analysis, the author identifies pointers that give the direction for ESL teacher training *vis-a-vis* NEP 2019.

SWOT Analysis in a nutshell

For an 'India-centred education' and the evolution of a 'vibrant knowledge society', several changes have to be made at various levels. NEP 2019 has made a reference to the 'mediocre' level of training imparted in teacher training institutions. This then prompts one to inquire about those 'mediocre' products who have already assumed the teacher's role in schools across the country. This is a major **threat**. The **opportunities** of providing an India-based education through teachers likely to produce citizens who are true products of Indian culture, who will steer clear of the current tendency to ape the West, are indeed great. The **weakness** related to the issue is that no one has really thought about a way to overcome the current crisis or even proposed a proper roadmap for an India-centred education. There is, however, a great **strength** and this lies in the fact that Indians are multilingual. So ferreting out Indian treasures, particularly the knowledge database available in an oft-ignored language like Sanskrit, through multilingual instruction where English can be the lingua franca is

likely to be easy for Indian teachers of English.

Utilizing the Strengths

For years, schools in India have been following the three-language-formula, which implies the compulsory study of English, the student's Mother Tongue, and Hindi. Indian teachers of English have been particularly privileged by the fact that they could rely on bilingual instruction or even resort to code-switching while teaching a second language like English. For instance, Anderson and Lightfoot (2018), who studied trans-lingual practices in English language classrooms in India, found occasional use of other languages in the classrooms, most often for comparing and contrasting language features, explaining concepts, managing the classroom and translating for learners. Replacing or including the learning of Hindi with Sanskrit could possibly pave the way for a cultural renaissance in India. The strength lies in the fact that India is multilingual and a teacher of English who can draw on the content of Sanskrit literature while teaching English, can not only make access to our rich heritage a feasibility but also pave the way for unearthing treasures in Sanskrit literature.

In this context, it is worth noting the observation of an erudite Sanskrit scholar Ramaswami Sastri: "The writings of Indian poets and dramatists, historians and biographers contain evidence not only of richness of imagination and variety of feeling, but of a remarkable talent for expressing precisely those adventures of the spirit, which chiefly give to human life its meaning and significance." Perhaps, the path to transforming English language teaching is the

inclusion of chunks of English translations of Sanskrit literature as content of ELT course books. The rationale is that, in Indian classrooms with multilingual settings, when Sanskrit is compulsorily taught, gradually but surely, it will transform into a living language. Even otherwise, teachers can automatically rely on bilingual instruction and occasionally attempt at code switching both in the English classrooms and the Sanskrit classrooms.

A paper penned by the author illustrates the incorporation of English translation of lines from a Sanskrit story by designing specimen tasks focusing on 21st century skills for new ESL course books *vis-à-vis* NEP 2019 (Praveen, ICITELL)

Overcoming the Weaknesses

Before attempting to suggest a solution for the 'mediocre' teachers who have graduated from teacher training institutions, it would only be proper to look into the nature of prior instruction received at the undergraduate or postgraduate level by students who join the Bachelor of Education (BEd) programme with English as an Optional Subject. Incidentally, possessing a BA or an MA degree in English Literature is mandatory for seeking admission to a BEd course in English in most universities across the country. What follows is a review of the nature of pedagogy and the kind of students who register for a programme in English literature both in pre-independent and post-independent India.

In an article titled 'The English Teacher in India' published in **The Indian Review**, Fraser (1907) said: "... the English teacher in India would have his own contribution to bring forward...the first business of the

professor is to explain to his students... the ideals by which English literature is penetrated..." Analyzing the pedagogy involved, Fraser observed "...to begin with, there is the grand difficulty of language...Both students and teachers spend much of their time groping about in a fog, striving in vain to catch hold of each other. The effect on each side is depressing: but this is only the first of the teacher's difficulties. The next is the absence of those daily experiences which throw light on the views and ideas of nature. The very climate and scenery of England are wholly unknown to his pupils; much more the manners of the country and the facts of life. Of course, it is part of his task to supply information about these; yet this always remains incomplete."

Almost two decades before Indian independence, Mahatma Gandhi lamented the misplaced importance given to English language by youngsters: "... knowledge of English is necessary. . . . giving the nation the best of Western literature, thought and science. That would be the legitimate use of English, whereas today English has usurped the dearest place in our hearts and dethroned our mother tongues . . . it is doing violence to the manhood and specially the womanhood of India. . . . to rid of the infatuation for English is one of the essentials of Swaraj . . ." (*Young India*, 2-2-'21). Incidentally, quoting Gandhi, the present author recently proposed a reinventing of 'Swadesi Movement' to match an India-centred education proposed in NEP 2019 (Praveen, 2019).

More than a century has passed since the article by Prof Fraser was published, but the

craze to pursue English literature continues in the Arts stream in colleges across India. Curiously enough, one seldom asks whether the teachers of English literature in India are performing as effectively as teachers of history or geography.

Times have changed and today English Literature classrooms in the country no longer focus on a monolithic, fixed interpretation of the texts. Instead, the text is open to multiple interpretations, based on discussion, dialogue and debate, thus paving the way for a more fruitful negotiation. But what kinds of students register for a course in English Literature? Singh (2004), who studied the teaching of literature in colleges, observed: “Our students join English courses for various purposes – to enhance their social mobility, status, matrimonial prospects, prepare for competitive examinations and a few to enter and appreciate magical world of English literature and thereby enrich their literary sensibility. A good number of them are “immigrants” or “leftovers” from other faculties – would-have-been scientists, doctors or engineers.”

If this were the case, wouldn't it be a more fruitful exercise to study Sanskrit literary classics in translation instead of learning English literary texts, the social milieu of which is alien to the Indian student? Perhaps, if excerpts from English translations of Sanskrit literary texts along with English literary texts which do not demand a thorough grasp of British culture were introduced in courses in English Literature, it would not only open the rich treasures of ancient Sanskrit texts but also help prune the student's own perception of self and life in general.

One problem of immediate concern to be tackled is to develop an appropriate roadmap for actual renaissance in the Indian education system. In recent times, an approach to language teaching that is gaining currency across the globe is Content-Based Instruction (CBI). Research, both of a pedagogical and research nature, has endorsed its effectiveness in language development and content learning (Grabe & Stoller, 1997). Perhaps, an English translation of the Upanishads, texts on the Fine Arts, and various Shastra texts dealing with living crafts could be taught following the strategies applied for content-based instruction.

Online resources which we could rely on include *Samskrutam Studies*, which is an educational portal on Sanskrit language, literature, grammar, stories, puzzles and several other resources to study ‘Sanskrit-and-Indic’ subjects. Another site worth mentioning, which through many links leads to a mine of resources, is the *Portal to Sanskrit Resources*. And, finally, if one is in quest for multidisciplinary possibilities in the teaching of English, the *Indology* resource site is a must visit. Recently, the author explored such a possibility by conducting a session using quotations from Chanakya's *Neetishastra*, the translation of which is available in English, for fostering critical thinking (Praveen, 2019).

Exploiting the Opportunities

Pandey (2010) begins his article entitled ‘Aping of Western Culture by Younger Generations’ thus: “The younger generations like fun, enjoyment and adventures. Their fascination for the materialistic culture is quite obvious. They ape western culture.

They are indifferent to their great cultural heritage. Their attitude to the age-long customs and values is quite lukewarm. Sometimes they openly defy and make mockery of traditions, old ideas and ideals...” Well, it is a fact that the current generation of youngsters lives in a media-saturated world and is constantly bombarded by messages which glorify a materialistic way of life, making many acquire the false ideal that the more the money, the more the happiness, and the more money one makes, the more successful one is.

It is commonly acknowledged that with the arrival of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC), lifelong learning and ‘anytime, anywhere learning’ is becoming a reality. Incidentally, the University Grants Commission is currently exploring the feasibility of permitting students in India to pursue dual degrees simultaneously. The author believes that if MOOC’s on ancient Indian texts is offered for college-going students, it will turn out to be a window of opportunity for educators to instill in the youth traditional Indian values such as ‘simple living and high thinking’. In this context, it is worth recalling a pronouncement made in *Pragyata*: “Sanskrit forms the substratum of all achievements of the Hindu civilization. In order to access the immense knowledge of the ancients and then applying it to solve problems of the modern era, the revival of Sanskrit is absolutely necessary.”

An extract from the chapter on Teacher Education in the Draft of NEP 2019 reads: “Teacher preparation is an activity that requires multi-disciplinary perspectives and knowledge. . . .” (p.283). With regard to

higher education, there is a novel proposal for a Liberal Arts Approach. Significantly enough, the National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (2010) made significant observations regarding interdisciplinary study: “Education as an area of interdisciplinary knowledge is not merely an application of a few core disciplines, but a praxis and content where theories and practical wisdom are generated continuously” (p.10). This is similar to the current trend in the Arts stream in many universities in the country where there is a move towards interdisciplinary study. It is generally accepted that modern literature draws from disciplines of history, philosophy, sociology and psychology. Given the fact that those intending to pursue a Bachelor of Education programme to become a secondary level teacher of English in Indian schools should have undergone an undergraduate programme in English Literature, the proposal for Liberal Arts Education in NEP 2019 is an added boost: “Liberal Education through an array of different disciplines that include the Arts, Humanities Mathematics and Sciences suitably integrated with a deeper study of a special area of interest” (p.29). However, in a recent critique of the term ‘multidisciplinary study’ proposed in NEP 2019, the present author expressed concern regarding the pedagogical practices of ‘multidisciplinary’ instruction particularly in the Arts stream (Praveen, 2019).

Addressing the threat

The reference to ‘mediocrity’ in NEP 2019 with regard to the teacher education sector, has to be accepted with certain reservations. It is doubtful whether such a generalization

can be made with regard to teacher education programmes particularly in the state of Kerala whose educational programmes are often hailed as novel by the flagship of Indian school education, the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). A tangential affirmation is found in the attempt by the present author to classify Indian teachers of English in a study undertaken over a period of time. Drawing on the metaphor of soccer field positions, the teachers were classified as ‘Strikers’, ‘Midfielders’ and ‘Defenders’ and pointed out that each group had its own merits and demerits but is capable of scoring a goal in teaching the English language (Praveen, 2008). The findings of the study prompt the author to perceive the statement of ‘mediocrity’ as slightly biased and far removed from reality.

Incompetent teachers are definitely a threat to any education system. And in a country like India, where there is a great demand for well qualified and experienced teachers, incompetent teachers are likely to affect the quality of instruction being provided to the new generation who is our hope for the future. Perhaps a proper needs analysis followed by selective training of those who are already in service and compulsory in-service training with a focus on continuous professional development is the only way out. In fact, various researches and studies have shown that in-service training programmes positively improve the quality of education imparted by the teacher, which would ultimately benefit the students (e.g., Patel, 2007). Here, too, several texts from indology can be drawn to enrich the teacher. For instance, Dev (2018) explored the possibility

of drawing on the dialectical method in the *Dasopanishad*.

Summing up

In recent years, we have been witnessing a complete shift in perspective in several areas of study in the field of education. Perhaps the time has come to shed the subservient mindset being displayed by many ELT experts and teacher training institutions in the country who tend to assume that the best ideas about teaching a language like English can come only from the land of the native speaker. It is a pity to note that departments of English in major universities continue to think that western culture and literature – British, American or Canadian – are superior to those of our own and are unaware of the gems of Indology. Perhaps the time has come to refine both the teaching of English Literature and ESL pedagogy in the country to realize the aims of an India-centred education and help nurture future citizens who assimilate the wealth of our own nation reminiscent of the ancient universities of Nalanda and Taxila. Great would be the day when those who take up the teaching profession in the country are ones who are living embodiments of the dictum: *Ajnana-Timirandhasya Jnananjana-Salakaya; Chakshurunmilitam Yena Tasmai Sri Gurave Namah* [Translated as: Prostrations to that Guru who, by the collyrium-rod of Knowledge, opens the eyes of those who are rendered blind by the darkness of ignorance – **Guru Tatva**]

This article has attempted to analyze the issues to be addressed for preparing the English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher for resurgent India in terms of pre-service and

in-service training. Appropriate strategies, and pointers for the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats vis-à-vis ESL pedagogy for an India-centred education have been highlighted.

The author would, however, like to acknowledge the fact that the observations and suggestions made above are to a large extent the product of research, informal discussions and experience gained from having taught English at secondary, higher secondary, undergraduate, postgraduate, pre-service and in-service levels for over two decades. It is hoped that the views and ideas presented here would benefit curriculum developers keen on preparing a road map for training ESL teachers for a resurgent India.

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Some useful web tools for speaking skills

Podcasting Tools

Podomatic (<http://www.podomatic.com>)

Spreaker (<http://www.spreaker.com>)

Audioboom (<https://audioboom.com>)

A podcast is an audio broadcast over the web. It is broken up into parts or episodes. Most podcasts are similar to news radio programs and deliver information on a regular basis, but they can also be comedy shows, special music broadcasts or talks. You as a teacher can set up a podcasting channel in Podomatic, Spreaker, or Audioboom.

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