
Learner-Centric Arguments in favour of the Implementation of ELT from the First Standard in Karnataka

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Abstract:

In the year 2007, the Government of Karnataka implemented the English as a second language from the first standard in Non-English Medium schools. Here, I try to analyze the opinions of the stakeholders such as teachers, parents, learners, inspecting authorities and administrators in this article. The opinions of the stake holders that I sketch here are based on the data that I have collected through the questionnaires and ethnographic interviews. My intention here is to test whether the opinions of the stakeholders meet the objectives set by the Government and policy makers or not. The Government has already declared that it had passed the order after the serious discussions relating to the implementation of the policy of teaching English from the first standard on the public demand, and it has quoted the findings of surveys in the field of English language teaching. But some of the intellectuals blamed the Government's action and complained that it was an act to secure vote bank and it did it to please capitalists. So, here I want to know the mindset of public/stakeholders towards English language and correlate it with the official objectives.

Keywords: ELT, Kannada Saahitya Parishat, Kanglish, Govt.

Some thinkers opposed the Government's decision with the support of some organizations like Kannada Sahitya Parishat. But some intellectuals stood in favour of implementation because of many reasons. We can see six kinds of arguments in favour of implementation of the policy of teaching English from first standard.

The first kind of arguments related to the psychological state of the learners. The arguers told that if the learners especially from rural and downtrodden community did not learn English, they might become the victims of inferiority complex; they might suffer from lack of self-confidence. Madan Gopal, the Commissioner for Public Instruction, opines, "English language teaching from the 1 to 4, makes the rural learners the best competitors in the context of globalization and makes their future brighter. It also gives more focus for their life which removes the inferiority complex in rural learners and develops their self-confidence" (Madan Gopal, 2007: 03). In this context, N. Diwakar says that there is a lot of difference in the rural and urban children in terms of the competence that they acquire. Urban children learn English

from the beginning whereas rural children begin to learn from the 5th standard. So, it makes the difference and develops a sense of inferiority. Thus, he suggests beginning the English language teaching from the first standard” (Diwakar N., 2005: 14-18). Ki. Rum. Nararaju, a thinker and writer says:

There is a co-relation between urbanization and English. English has acquired the status of elite language and remains the property of upper caste and capitalist class. There are two groups in our society, the persons who know English and who don't know English. So, the rural children and backward children are suffering from inferiority complex. Urban child learns English from LKG. When this kid comes to the stage of S.S.L.C. that is 10th class, he or she would have learnt it for 12 years. But, a rural child starts learning it from 5th standard. So, he would have had only 5 years of exposure to English. Last year, 4 lakh students appeared for S.S.L.C. examinations. Among them, 2 lakh children failed in English. How are they going to fare in their future life? So, teaching English as a language from the first standard is very necessary, and so does the teaching of Kannada as a language for all English medium students (Nagaraju K.R., 2006: 10-13).

The second kind of arguments is related to the future of the learners. To survive in the competitive world, for passing the competitive examinations and to succeed in life, English language is necessary. By providing the data of S.S.L.C. and P.U.C results where students failed predominantly in English language, N.A.M. Ismail shared his opinion in an article:

In 1998, 129 students failed in languages in K.A.S. examination. Among them 100 candidates failed in English. Most of the candidates scored good marks in other subjects. But those papers were not evaluated because they didn't get the minimum marks in English paper. The question paper of the examination was not at the international level, it was at the S.S.L.C. level. In S.S.L.C., most of the students fail in Mathematics and English. In Mathematics, the percentage of students who failed was more or less equal in both Kannada and English medium. But those who failed in English were mainly from the Kannada medium. In P.U.C. Science, every year students fail as they come from Kannada medium and are incapable of expressing their ideas in English medium. So, the parents think of sending their children to English medium. It doesn't mean that they are anti-Kannada. They are thinking only in terms of providing a space for their children's future life through English. So, implementation of teaching English from the first standard is a good decision. In the call-centers, the employees are given Rs. 25,000/- per month (more or less) which is equal to the salary of an 'A' grade officer in the government. They don't expect more qualification. Just they test the knowledge of English and their speaking style. If they feel we are weak at pronunciation, they provide us training too. In Malaysia, they teach science and mathematics in English from the first standard along with English language. Other subjects are being taught in regional language (Ismail N.A.M., 2008: 21-24).

Sadguru Jaggi Vasudev opines, “English is an international language. We have to teach our children from the beginning. Otherwise, they have no future. Learning English does not mean that we are following western culture and are forgetting Kannada” (Jaggi, 2007: 04). K. Lakshmanarao, a journalist shared his feeling on implementation of the policy of English language teaching from the first standard:

We must know that the people of Karnataka never demanded the government to implement English language teaching from the first standard. But, it is necessary because the Government itself made the discrimination by permitting to open the English medium schools. Now a days, English is very necessary for grabbing jobs in private sectors and is helpful for higher education. More number of students who take the admissions in Engineering and medical are basically the products of English medium schools. So, learning English as a language helps the poor and rural learners (Lakshmanarao K., 2007).

Arvind Navada says in this context, “Leave the question of prestige. Teach English as a language from the first standard. Otherwise, rural children will lose more opportunities in future. Those will be grabbed by the urban students. And remove the confusion in language policy and make English as a compulsory language” (Navada, 2008: 09). Mallikarjun Meti opines in his article:

Teaching of English language from the first standard has its social and economical importance for the backward classes. On the other side, some intellectuals who have got benefits from English are opposing it. How can this be social justice! A language policy determines the future of a community. But, it has been discarded. It is a false notion that the teaching English for the general mass in government school is wrong. In Convent schools, the rich and upper caste children learn in English before the first standard. But, it is not possible in government Kannada medium schools. It is a false notion that by learning/teaching English, our cultural roots will be uprooted. Actually, English gives the confidence and commercial knowledge for common masses. Most of our communities are bilingual groups. Their child can learn two languages simultaneously. When they are learning more than one language in childhood, is it not possible for these children to learn English? Our language policy has to change according to the needs of the time. It must touch all functional domains of life. So, receive English as a language in all modes of life (Meti, 2007: 08-09).

N. Aswin Shenai, a reader, responds, “The phobia towards English was developed by teachers and intellectuals. Let the knowledge come from all sides. We have to apply the theory of *survival of the fittest* in this case” (Shenai, 2005: 38). In this context C.N. Ramachandran shares his opinion:

Prescribe English as a compulsory language from the first standard in Kannada medium schools. It is not a passionate desire for English but a reality. Germany began English language teaching from the primary level from 2004. China, Japan knew the importance of English and that is why they have begun to teach English (Ramachandran C.N., 2005: 113).

M.G. Chandrashekharayya expresses that by implementing English language teaching from the first standard, Kannadigas can lead their lives comfortably in future. It helps their livelihood (as quoted in Lakshmanarao K., 2007). Santenahalli Kantaraj feels that teaching English language is a burden for the teachers but a boon for the learners specially rural and poor (as quoted in Lakshmanarao K., 2007). Subbu Holeyar opines that the innocent children learn English language by playing and is not a burden for them (as quoted in Lakshmanarao K., 2007).

Thus, we can see both sets of arguments on the issue of introducing teaching of English from first standard. According to Narahalli Balasubramanyam, "It is a crucial issue. On one side it is related to commercial value (English is for the sake of living) and another side it is related to feelings and sensations (Emotive language i.e., Kannada). Both need to be balanced" (as quoted in Lakshmanarao K., 2007).

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