

Protest and Debate against Implementation of ELT from the First Standard in Karnataka:

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Abstract:

In the year 2007, the Government of Karnataka executed the English as a second language from the first standard in Non-English Medium schools. The Government has already approved that it had acknowledged the order after the serious examinations connecting to the implementation of the rule on the community appeal, and it has quoted the results of studies in the field of English language teaching. But some of the scholars suspected the Government's move and objected that it was an act to protect vote bank and it did it to satisfy investors. The entire state observed tempestuous discussions around the rule.

Key Words: medium, implementation, first standard, policy, learners, language,

Introduction:

The Government of Karnataka favoured an early introduction of English language in schools under the pressure from the public, political parties, parents and other stakeholders. The Kannada Sahitya Parishat and other Kannada Organizations decided to protest against the Government's decision to implement teaching of English from the first standard on 1 June 2007. Chandrashekhar Patil, the President of Kannada Sahitya Parishat, announced that the protest would be inaugurated by Rashtakavi G.S. Shivarudrappa. Intellectuals, educationists and 34 organizations including Kannada Rakshana Vedike would be involved in the protest (Patil, 2007: 10). Finally, they protested against the Government's action. Savita Nagabhushana took the statement made by the then Chief Minister Mr. Kumaraswamy that he feels a sense of inferiority while speaking English for a serious comment and said "He is afraid of it, because he commits mistakes" (as reported in Prajavani-18 October 2006. pp.01). She continues her argument that the CM has to learn from other Chief Ministers of the neighbouring states like Karunanidhi, Jayalalita, and MGR who use their mother-tongue before the delegates, reporters and also in international discussions without a sense of inferiority. They told the reporters to translate their speech from their languages into English (Nagabhushana, 2006: 28-39). In this scenario, RIESI Director Gayatri Devi Datta tries to convince the team who opposed the implementation and says, "There is no teaching of English from the first standard. Actual teaching will begin from the 3rd

standard. For 1st and 2nd standard, it is introductory English. There's no reading and writing exercises in these classes, it is not teaching English but playing with English language" (Datta, 2007: 01).

Arguments against Implementation of the Policy:

Most of the arguments of the intellectuals were around the present condition of school system and teachers. The arguers accused the teachers who were incompetent to teach English. They also commented that most of the schools were overcrowded. A Kannada writer, B.M. Puttayya who wrote a book on this issue *Ondane Taragatiyindale Urulu* (2007) (Hanging from the First Standard), dedicates the book to those learners who dropped out because they failed in English subject. He complains that the teachers are not teaching English language from LKG to PG. Instead of teaching English language, they teach English literature. This is the real problem in teaching English. But, without addressing this problem, the Government wants to expand the learning years of English. He opines that it is not a solution for good learning of English. Then, he raises his voice against the supporters of implementation and complains that without knowing the fact, some Dalit leaders and some intellectuals are behaving like puppets of the Government. They must know that the children have different social backgrounds, the classrooms are overcrowded and teachers are not trained properly. He wonders at the belief of the parents that whatever the teachers teach as English is learnt by the students and they get jobs because of it. He states that his advice to the Government to reconsider the issue of teaching English would be portrayed as 'anti-Dalit and anti-progressive. Here, he tries to highlight the plight of Dalits and backward class in Karnataka who are striving very hard in order to get the BPL (Below Poverty Line) cards. Nearly 40% of them are not sending their children to the schools. Most of the child labourers are from the backward classes. Thus, he condemns the Government which is busy in heeding to the capitalist designs. It considers only the demands of some organizations and some parents. In other words, the Government is concerned only about the demand of the dalits with regard to teaching of English language; not the will and wish of the learners. Totally, the Government is in the hands of capitalists, industrialists, IT and multi-national companies. He tries to draw the attention by saying that the intellectuals of Karnataka never demanded the Government to teach English from the first standard. When the government announced it, they stood in favour of it. He opines that there is a lot of difference in teaching language and teaching other subjects. Teaching ABCD...is not English. The special methods need to be adopted while teaching the languages. It should be in D.Ed. and B.Ed. courses. Most of the teachers think that teaching is all about completion of syllabus. There should be a serious rethinking of the way we teach languages whether it is Kannada, English, Hindi or Urdu. This rethinking should involve all aspects such as syllabus, contents, examination, evaluation and trainings. He points out that the teachers are making mistakes in teaching. It is not the mistake of learners. The arguers thought that learning English is memorizing. Some illusions have developed in the minds of the

parents and they are: 1. If our children learn English, they will get the jobs 2. If they learn English, they will become civilized and modern. Without the classrooms, there is no environment of English outside. Finally, he suggests to the Education Department to change the teaching methodologies and syllabus with regard to English. Learners have to acquire the language not through the letters and alphabet but by listening and speaking. So, communicative English should be practiced (Puttayya B.M., 2007).

After considering the statement of the teachers that they are ready to teach English, D.S. Nagabhusan says that he is in confusion whether to laugh or weep because of the recent report which was published in almost all newspapers in Karnataka. According to him, the report highlights that 53% of learners in the rural area between 7 to 10 years old are not able to read a simple sentence in their mother tongue, 60% of the learners do not know the addition and subtraction and 90% of them do not know the division. He wonders all these children are the products of those teachers who are ready to teach English. At the end his argument turns towards some of the newspapers and magazines and he accuses that these are acting like agents of the Government especially, Prajawani and Agni (Nagabhusan, 2007).

Shantarasa, a senior writer of Kannada literature, opposed the teaching of English from first standard. He urges to teach mother-tongue at least for two years and teach English language from the 3rd standard. He regrets the linking of the present issue with castes and communities. He wants to know how many teachers are appointed to teach English among 50,000 government schools where there is a scarcity of Kannada teachers. He puts the pressure on the Government to improve the working conditions of government Kannada medium schools and also make Kannada as the medium of instruction at the primary level before teaching English (Shantarasa, 2006: 08). Hoskere S. Shivaswamy argues that it is an illusion that the parents will be attracted towards government Kannada medium schools if the teaching of English begins in primary schools. He points out that there is a mistake in methods of teaching English and suggests to improvise it. A panwala in a five star hotel can learn English within 6 months. Thus, he concludes that language should not be taught but it should be acquired (Shivaswamy H.S., 2006: 54). Ramanna Kodihosalli opines that the Government has to continue the present condition of teaching English i.e. from the 5th standard because there is no suitable condition in the rural primary schools to teach it in a systematic way. The learners may drop out of the schools. So, make it an optional subject. Thus, he urges the Government to re-consider the decision to teach English (Kodihosalli, 2010: 40-41).

Some of the arguments were around the nature of English language. The arguers urged the Government not to start teaching English language from the first standard because the language has confusing structures and spellings. They demanded not to confuse the learners in the beginning of their schooling with this kind of language. In this context, L.S. Sheshagirao opines, "I oppose the implementation of teaching English from the first standard. It is very

difficult for rural children to learn English along with Kannada which creates confusion in the minds of the learners as both languages have different structures” (Sheshagirirao. L.S., 2007: 04). D. Jawaregouda, popularly known as De.Ja.Gou., a Kannada litterateur says, “Don’t teach English from the first standard as the language has confusing character in its trait, confusing pronunciation and confusing spellings. So, don’t confuse the child at the beginning. It can be taught after obtaining the mastery over the first language i.e., from the III standard” (De.Ja.Gou., 2007: 140-143).

The next categories of arguments were around the standard from which the teaching of English as a second language has to commence and its consequences. The arguers to the Government to begin the teaching of English from the third standard after acquisition of mastery over the first language by the learners. M. Chidanandamurthy opines that the primary education should be in regional language. The teachers can teach English from the 3rd standard. Before implementing this policy, he suggests that some issues have to be considered: 1. There should be a discussion on child’s physical, psychological capacity whether it is suitable for learning two languages simultaneously, 2. It is necessary to ascertain again whether our social reality and other factors really warrant teaching of English to children from first standard (Chidanandmurthy M., 2007: 04). Chanaveer Kanavi, a Kannada writer opines, “Teach English from the fifth standard. If you want children to pick it up early and then at least teach it from the III standard” (Kanavi, 2007: 19-20). Baraguru Ramachandrappa opines that English can be taught from the third standard as a second language. But, it should be made optional (Baraguru, 2007: 63). Gouri Lankesh, a journalist speaks about how teaching English language is more important than when to teach. According to her, it should be taught from the fifth standard (as quoted in Lakshmanarao K., 2007). K.V. Shrinivasamurthy opines that by teaching English, Kannada medium schools become chou chou medium schools (mixed-medium). According to him, the learners feel it difficult to learn two languages simultaneously because the structures of the two languages confuse the learners as they are different. So, he suggests introducing the second language teaching after the learners get mastery over the first language i.e. from the third standard. (Shrinivasamurthy K.V., 2006: 42)

Multi medium or dual medium education was the concern of other set of arguments. This argument demanded the Government to implement multi-medium schools. It was opined that English, science and mathematics subjects should be taught in English and rest of other subjects should be taught in learner’s first language. Sanjaya Havanur, working as an engineer at California says: “English should not be introduced from the first standard. Maintain the language policy as it is. But, at the high school stage, learners must be taught science and mathematics in English. Then, the competency and proficiency of a child will be developed” (Havanur, 2005: 37). According to Anantamurthy, “All should learn all the subjects in Kannada and learn English as a communicative language. By this formula, we can live more comfortably. We can run the

multi-medium schools in which science and mathematics are taught in English medium and other humanities subjects in Kannada medium. Then our children can think independently” (Anantamurthy U.R., 2002: 30-42).

Conclusion:

Thus, English language teaching in India has witnessed unanimity among the states on teaching English. The level at which it has to be introduced has now become a matter of pleasing to the populist thoughts and needs. This is particularly true of Karnataka. Language became the symbol of social reputation and execution of English language became the question of social righteousness.

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