Need for English Language Teacher Assessment Framework in Tamil Nadu Schools

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Abstract : India as a nation is looking towards harnessing the demographic dividend available with it by virtue of a vast majority of its population within the most productive age group. The government, in addition, has a colossal responsibility of providing career opportunities to this mammoth population by up-skilling 150 million people. Providing education and developing appropriate skills for this mammoth population are no mean task. And one of the most challenging and most rewarding skills that the population needs to empower themselves with employable skills is the English language skills. English language has occupied an indomitable role in the Indian society due to its proximity with career opportunities and the notion of social pride. And the level of English language competence is primarily based on the level of language teaching and learning, and the attraction or aversion to learn the language that is inculcated during the schooling age of the learners. Hence there is a need for a rather sound understanding on the part of the stakeholders, especially the teachers who are still considered the knowledge givers, on what and how the teaching / learning should happen. At this juncture, it is also important that the language teachers have the necessary competence to impart the language training to the learners. This need again necessitates a framework of competence for language teachers, on which they can be assessed either during the recruitment or during their service. Unfortunately, no such frameworks exist specifically for the language teachers in India, let alone Tamil Nadu, where the English language learning is markedly different from that of the other parts of the world. This paper attempts an exploratory study of the impact of a couple of widely popular language teacher frameworks available globally and tries to assess whether similar framework will be fruitful in improving standards of English language learning in the context of Tamil Nadu, where the authors of this paper normally live.

IndexTerms **- Teacher Assessment Framework, Teacher Evaluation, Teacher Performance Assessment, Language Teacher Performance Assessment, Tamil Nadu School Education.**

I. SCHOOL EDUCATION IN TAMIL NADU

Tamil Nadu, the eleventh-largest state by area and the sixth-most populous state, ranked third among states in India according to the Human Development Index in 2015, is the second-largest state economy in India, and was ranked as one of the top seven developed states in India based on a "Multidimensional Development Index" in a 2013 report published by the Reserve Bank of India [*source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil_Nadu*[. No wonder Tamil Nadu is one of the most literate states in India, and is top among Indian states with about 100 per cent Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in primary and upper primary education. At present the Tamil Nadu state has about 58,033 schools including 35,414 primary schools, 9708 middle schools, 5705 high schools and 7206 higher secondary schools [*Source: http://www.ssa.tn.nic.in/statistics.htm*]. These schools educate 1,31,85,526 students which makes it one of the huge education setup, which requires extremely careful policy design and management, to ensure quality education to all.

II. ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN TAMIL NADU SCHOOLS

English is taught as the second language from Class 1 in the government schools, and even earlier in the private schools. This means that any student who completes school education would have undergone at least 12 years of English Language training which is a substantial time spent in learning a language. However, the outcome of such training is not encouraging. Several factors including the long standing opposition towards imposing a language, official apathy to recruit qualified teachers, lack of immediate need to learn and converse in English, lack of skilled teachers, etc., play a major role in the non-attainment of the intended goals in English language education.

Among these factors, the lack of qualified English teachers, a major stakeholder in language education, is one of the major issues hindering the attainment of the objective of effective language teaching. As pointed out by Mody, Anjali (2017), "In Tamil Nadu's primary schools, one teacher teaches all subjects – language, social science, science and mathematics. … herself spoke English with difficulty. As a result, her class, like most such classes, is English medium in name only. … and most other elementary school teachers lack proficiency, never mind fluency, in English."

The situation in the high schools is not much encouraging too.

> *"Many parents opt for private schools over Corporation Schools citing quality of English teaching as a reason. One reason why the quality of English teaching suffers in Corporation Schools is the standard of teachers teaching sixth, seventh and eighth standards, said the headmaster of a Corporation School near Rajiv Gandhi Salai." (*The Hindu, July 08, 2009)

The only solace is that now the government had set Bachelors' degree in English along with a Bachelors' degree in Education as the requirements for teaching sixth, seventh and eighth standards, while earlier one who had just completed Higher Secondary Schooling and a Diploma in Teaching was eligible to become an English teacher.

III. NEED FOR QUALIFIED AND SKILLED ENGLISH TEACHERS

Officially, an English teacher in a school needs to be a graduate in English and should possess a degree in education as well. However, the sudden spurt in the number of learners within few decades made the situation at ground totally different till recently, especially in the government schools. Lack of teachers forced schools to add English teaching to the teachers of other subjects as additional responsibilities. The lack of language proficiency among those teachers, and the added burden of workload resulted in almost no real attention given to English language teaching. Consequently, English language as a subject in the school curriculum started being ignored and board exams provided to be a mere eye-wash where there was an unwritten rule that the evaluators shall try to award pass marks to any student who has attempted answering questions and has written 'something'. While this was the case with the government schools, the undue importance given for the subjects such as Mathematics and Science whose scores will decide the future career of the students, pushed language teaching into background. Again, English language teaching was merely a formality in private schools too, and often the hours allotted for language teaching were 'borrowed' by the teachers of other subjects who were under pressure to make students extremely high marks in Science and Mathematics. This widespread practice also gets mentioned in an article in the Huffington Post (19/02/2016) which reports,

> "When schools cut short the time reserved for the arts and reallocate the time for some other 'important' subject, they may not just be losing their ability to produce the artistic creators of the future, but also innovative leaders who can improve upon the world they have inherited," say Ellen Winner and Lois Hetland, both experts on arts education."

The article goes on to conclude:

> "What is the role of the arts in moulding a person? The question assumes great significance today in the backdrop of a culture - including in India -- in which arts are seen as unimportant, perhaps even a waste of time, as compared to 'strategic' subjects."

Even after the government mandated a Bachelors in English and a Bachelors in Education as the basic qualification to appoint an English teacher, situation has not improved to the expected level. This is probably due to the lack of quality of degrees offered, or the training offered during the course, or the aptitude of the learners in becoming teachers. Another factor that might affect the efficiency of the language teaching is the difficulties that the English teachers have in coping with the ever spreading technologies. Language teaching half-a-decade ago was totally different from what it is at present. The level of exposure that the learners get, the access to various sources of language, the technology that provides opportunities to 'learn anywhere, anytime', etc., have completely changed the way a language is taught. The role of a teacher being a 'facilitator' in language learning is more relevant now than at any point of time in the past. This change in the nature of language teaching and learning also calls for a radical change in the skills, attitude and values of the language teachers. Hence there is an absolute need to ensure that those the teachers entrusted with the responsibility are fully qualified for the job in terms of academics as well as aptitude.

Given the importance attached of English language skills in the present-day job market and in determining one's social standing, it becomes imperative that a serious and coordinated effort is initiated to ensure that language learning in the classroom becomes meaningful and justifies the expectations, efforts, and money invested on this process. There are several factors that might affect these meaningful transactions of lessons in classrooms, including what Piccoli et al. (2001) classifies as human factors and design factors. As Eom et al (2006) define, human factors are concerned with students and instructors, while design factors characterise such variables as technology, learner control, course content, and interaction. Peltier, Drago, and Schibrowsky (2003) define the conceptual framework of (online) education consists of instructor support and mentoring, instructor-to-student interaction, student-to-student interaction, course structure, course content, and information delivery technology.

Teacher is a major stakeholder in the language teaching – learning process and perhaps the one who decides the success of the process. While the importance of technical expertise in the subject that the teacher teaches cannot be refuted, a good teacher is not just known for his / her mastery over the chosen subject or work-related competence. Instead, (ACTEQ, 2003):

> Good teachers are recognised for their love and care for children, their passion for the "subject knowledge" they teach, their support and encouragement in helping students to achieve their best and, perhaps above all, their wholesome personality.

The other traits of good teachers may include their passion to strive continuously and keep themselves abreast of all the developments with regard to their subject as well as teaching per se. This is reflected in ACTEQ, 2003 report as,

> In this era of knowledge expansion, globalisation, high technology and rapid social transformation, the belief in effective learning as an ongoing process is a fundamental tenet of professionalism in teaching.

High quality teaching instruction is one of the most, if not the most, impactful elements on students' levels of achievement.

> As the most significant resource in schools, teachers are critical to raise education standards. Improving the efficiency and equity of schooling depends, in large measure, on ensuring that teachers are highly skilled, well resourced, and motivated to perform at their best. Raising teaching performance is perhaps the policy direction most likely to lead to substantial gains in student learning (OECD, 2005).

Hence, it becomes all the more important that the teacher is equipped with all necessary skills and tools to ensure optimal learning in the classrooms.

One of the tools that can aid ensuring quality in teachers is a framework of reference to measure the competencies of the teacher.

IV. NEED FOR A FRAMEWORK

With the access to education reaching the unreached, and millions of first generation learners being brought into mainstream education, there is obviously a transition in the whole system of learning. In addition, the technological revolution has also made this access easier, and has provided numerous tools which can be harnessed to provide quality education access to almost all those who wish to have access. As Cheney, Gretchen Rhines (2005) says,

> *"For instance, during the period 1950-51 and 2001-2002, the number of primary schools grew three-fold, while the number of middle (upper primary) schools increased 16 times. Today India has more than six hundred thousand primary schools serving 115 million students and more than two million upper primary schools serving 45 million students."*

However, (ACTEQ, 2003) reforms in education are effective only when they are undertaken by a teaching force with high professional quality. Certain qualities like their competence in English language, teaching aptitude, their beliefs and values, and the willingness to indulge in lifelong learning need to be assessed both during the entry into the teaching profession as well as at regular intervals throughout the career. The assessment on the above qualities will help in employing right people in the job or to determine the kind of interventions required to set right any deviation in providing high quality education. This calls in for continuous professional development plans to be put in place by the administrators, for the language teachers.

This responsibility of the policy makers to ensure the availability of English language teachers meeting the required standards necessitates creation of a set of rules or an assessment framework that might clearly define the skills, qualities, qualifications, aptitude, attitude, beliefs and values of an English teacher.

V. TEACHER ASSESSMENT / COMPETENCE FRAMEWORKS

An assessment framework of teacher competencies normally includes a detailed description of all the traits required for a successful teacher including their beliefs, values, knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes, aptitude, etc. It also helps evaluate the professional stature of teachers at any given point of time, be it at the entry level or through various developmental stages of their career, or even at the end of their career. The framework plays a significant role in (ACTEQ, 2003) "providing teachers with reference descriptors that assist them identifying their own strengths and developmental needs."

An assessment framework that defines the competencies of a teacher becomes important as it aids both the administrators and the teachers to have a set of descriptors against which the teachers can be evaluated. While a framework directly or indirectly helps all the stakeholders of education have an idea about what they can expect the teachers to achieve while transacting the syllabi in the classrooms, it will also give the schools an opportunity to decide on specific goals to meet their local needs. As ACTEQ (2003) states,

> *"Frameworks provide teachers and schools with an essential tool for the advancement of the planning and practice of their professional development.",* and *"It provides a template that schools can use for developing school-based professional development frameworks- one which is appropriate to their own students, background and mission."*

Assessment Frameworks also come in handy for the teachers to focus on their self-development and thereby help them work continuously towards making their classrooms a place for effective language learning. Frameworks help the teachers to establish a goal and give them a direction for professional development. Again, as ACTEQ (2003) states,

> *"TCF (Teacher Competency Framework) is a traveller's guide to the world of teachers' professional development. It lays out the landscape of professional growth and provides both individual teachers and their schools with a sense of 'where they are' in the journey to fuller professional maturity. However, the "map" does not dictate the routes that the traveller has to undertake."*

The Framework for Teaching identifies those aspects of a teacher's responsibilities that have been documented through empirical studies and theoretical research as promoting improved student learning. While the Framework is not the only possible description of practice, these responsibilities seek to define what teachers should know and be able to do in the exercise of their profession.

VI. COMPOSITION OF A FRAMEWORK

The Assessment Framework for English Teachers may include competencies related to various skills/traits required in the English language teachers for effective transaction of syllabi in the classrooms and ensure the achievement of the course objectives and intended outcomes. Some of these skills might include the following:

1. language proficiency
2. knowledge of the language teaching/learning theories
3. lesson planning
4. classroom management
5. ability to assess the learners/learning accurately
6. ability to understand and respond to the needs of the students
7. curriculum / syllabi design, etc.

VII. INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORKS

There are similar frameworks evolved and used in many parts of the world, and they too assess the skills of the teachers on competencies such as those listed above. For instance, Cambridge English's Teaching Framework – a globally recognised framework is (widely) used for teacher assessment. The framework is used by teachers, heads of departments, and heads of institutions. The framework is also being used by teacher training organisations, such as the Norwich Institute for Language Education (NILE) a specialist teacher development institute that has trained thousands of teachers from over 60 countries, to

develop and align their professional development courses for teachers. The Cambridge English Teaching Framework has 5 categories which are broken down further to make 36 framework components, as listed below:

[1] Cambridge English Teaching Framework:
1. Learning and the Learner
    a. Learning Theories
    b. First Language Acquisition and Second Language Acquisition
    c. Language Teaching Methodologies
    d. Understanding Learners
2. Teaching, Learning and Assessment
    a. Planning language learning
        i. Lesson Planning
        ii. Course Planning
    b. Using language-learning resources and materials
        i. Selecting, adapting, supplementing and using learning materials
        ii. Using teaching aids
        iii. Using digital resources
    c. Managing language learning
        i. Creating and maintaining a constructive learning environment
        ii. Responding to learners
        iii. Setting up and managing classroom activities
        iv. Providing feedback on learner language
    d. Teaching language systems
        i. Teaching vocabulary
        ii. Teaching grammar
        iii. Teaching phonology
        iv. Teaching discourse
    e. Teaching language skills
        i. Teaching listening
        ii. Teaching speaking
        iii. Teaching reading
        iv. Teaching writing
    f. Assessing language learning
        i. Assessment principles
        ii. Using assessment to inform learning
3. Language Ability
    a. Classroom language
    b. Language models
    c. Recognising learner errors
    d. Communicating with other professionals
    e. CEFR level
4. Language Knowledge and Awareness
    a. Language awareness
    b. Terminology for describing language
    c. Reference materials
5. Professional Development and Values
    a. Classroom observation
    b. Reflecting on teaching and learning
    c. Planning own development
    d. Teacher research
    e. Teamwork and collaboration
    f. Professional roles and responsibilities

As per the Cambridge English Teaching Framework, teachers are assessed against each of the mentioned criteria and, based on their level of compliance / proficiency with the criteria, they are categorised in 4 bands namely:
    i. Foundation
    ii. Developing
    iii. Proficient, and
    iv. Expert

[2] Framework For Teaching by Charlotte Danielson:
Another popular framework is the Charlotte Danielson's widely-used and research-proven Framework for Teaching (FFT). This framework is also used by numerous organisations including 900 and 1000s of schools in 44 states of the United States, and in 11 other countries.

This research-based tool used as the basis for teacher evaluation systems has 4 domains of teaching responsibility which are further divided into 22 components, as listed below:

1. DOMAIN 1: Planning and Preparation
   a. Demonstrating Knowledge of Content and Pedagogy
   b. Demonstrating Knowledge of Students
   c. Setting Instructional Outcomes
   d. Demonstrating Knowledge of Resources
   e. Designing Coherent Instruction
   f. Designing Student Assessments
2. DOMAIN 2: The Classroom Environment
   a. Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport
   b. Establishing a Culture for Learning
   c. Managing Classroom Procedures
   d. Managing Student Behaviour
   e. Organizing Physical Space
3. DOMAIN 3: Instruction
   a. Communicating with Students
   b. Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques
   c. Engaging Students in Learning
   d. Using Assessment in Instruction
   e. Demonstrating Flexibility and Responsiveness
4. DOMAIN 4: Professional Responsibilities
   a. Reflecting on Teaching
   b. Maintaining Accurate Records
   c. Communicating with Families
   d. Participating in a Professional Community
   e. Growing and Developing Professionally
   f. Showing Professionalism

Similar to that of the Cambridge English Teaching Framework, Charlotte Danielson's FFT also puts teachers under 4 bands, but named as:

   i. Ineffective
   ii. Developing
   iii. Effective
   iv. Highly effective

However, though many of the evaluation criteria or the competency categories are similar in the above two quoted frameworks, the fundamental difference lies in the fact that FFT caters to the needs of evaluating teacher of any subject, whereas the Cambridge English Teaching framework focuses solely on the language teachers.

VIII. IMPACT OF THE FRAMEWORKS:

These frameworks, and numerous other frameworks developed to suit the needs of individual or small groups of institutions, have had their positive impact on making the teaching-learning process effective. The frameworks have helped the teachers as well as administrators have a greater understanding on the potentials, shortcomings, challenges, and opportunities that might impact the educational outcomes of the particular institution. As Jo Earp (2017) points out, "we are able to be strategic with how we allocate resources, for example, or what sort of strategies might have an impact on this teacher. It really supports us to evaluate the overall impact of what we're doing to support teacher development…"

IX. CONCLUSION

Considering the fact that over 13.2 million students go through the school education system in Tamil Nadu and a majority of this population will land into better careers and lead better lives if equipped with appropriate English language skills, it is an open secret that the success of English Language Teaching (ELT) is not even remotely proportional to the efforts invested into it in terms of money, manpower, and time. A major reform in ELT shall be ushered in if one of the major stakeholders – skilled teachers, is made available. And creating an exhaustive English teacher assessment framework will be a defining moment towards this reform.

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