



ISSUES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE INTERVENTION IN LEARNERS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD): A QUALITATIVE STUDY FROM KAMRUP METROPOLITAN AREA

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Abstract: Inclusive education of children with intellectual disability is a serious challenge for any community. One such group is that of learners with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). This study investigates the challenges in teaching English Language to children with ASD who are enrolled in various academic intervention programmes with focus on existing institutional remedies/education system, language used in therapy and collaboration of ESL teachers with special need educators. This study will show/reveal how well equipped the present local educational machinery is in providing language intervention to the target group. It is a qualitative study based on questionnaires and semi-structured interviews of n=31 participants including 10 ESL teachers, 10 Special needs teachers, 5 Speech therapists (all having more than 5 years of experience) along with 5 parents of learners with ASD and 1 Education officer. The study reveals that there is a serious lack of coordination among the various professionals engaged in the intervention process. Lack of training and instructional materials is another major concern besides lack of qualified personnel at intervention centres. In addition, mainstreaming of learners with ASD was very rare, and those who could get through have to face challenges related to rigid syllabus and untrained general educators. Involvement of parents emerged as one of the major challenge in ensuring efficient intervention programmes as most of the parents lacked the cooperation sought by the educators. Lack of professional training institutes has led to poor professional quality of intervention facilities and more so after mainstreaming. District authority need to support the NGOs through funding for infrastructural up gradation and training to provide better learning environment for the learners on the spectrum.

Keywords: Applied linguistics, ELT, Language intervention, Autism, Learners with ASD, qualitative study, Kamrup

I. Historical Appraisal

India is a country characterized by its rich diversity. Its inhabitants lead sophisticated lives, drawing on the knowledge acquired through education. Whether acquired formally in classrooms or informally from the environment, this knowledge is derived from many sources, including books, teachers, and personal experiences. Education has proven its effectiveness as a solution to countless problems.

The notion is that education is not a magical solution that yields instant results. Instead, it advocates for an education system that places the learner at its core. This system should prioritize creativity and free-thinking, and be adaptable through regular revisions of educational policies to align with the evolving societal landscape.¹ Furthermore, the statement emphasizes the importance of fostering a positive attitude towards education. Individuals should willingly pursue knowledge, viewing education not as a burden but as a responsibility. The call is for a shift from theoretical learning confined to pages to practical application on the ground. The education system of a country is of crucial importance in studying its social structure and at the same time, the education system must be seen within the context of the society in which it operates.²

The India modern education began under the British rule. Before the British, India had its educational system like the *Gurukulas* and the *Madrassas*. The East India Company, during their rule, did not care about the education of those they ruled. Its policies were mainly influenced by the British government, Christian missionaries, Indian intellectuals, and reformers. There were a few Englishmen who wanted to spread education for its own sake; the government was chiefly concerned about itself. There was a huge demand for clerks and other administrative roles in the company's functioning and it was cheaper to get Indians rather than Englishmen from England for jobs. This was the prime motive to educate Indians in English medium.

II. Colonial Education System in India

British came in the form of the English East India Company. Their prime aim was to make the best commercial benefits in Indian trade. They never intended to spread Western education in India in the 18th century. During the early phases of colonisation, the British Government never accepted responsibility for educating the masses. Later, they started their attempts to bring Western education to India but their aim was only to create "a class of educated Indians" and to leave it to this class to educate their brethren. In a way, they accomplished their task and left. It was the sole responsibility of the educated classes in India to provide education to the masses and to improve their living conditions.³

Macaulay criticised the Indian Education system in his report, he said, "I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia." He started English literature as the best literature in the whole world. And said that the money spent on maintaining Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian institutions was a waste. Further, he describes in his minute- that we must at present do our best to form a class of persons who are "Indian in blood and colour, but English

¹Singh Krishnakant, Macaulay Vs Gandhi: An Educational transformation, *international journal of creative research thought*, Volume 8, Issue 3 March 2020, Issn: 2320-2832, pp.1411

² Basu Aparna, *Essays in the History of Indian Education*, Naurang Rai Concept Publishing Company New Delhi, 1981, pp.4

³ Naik, J. P., *Elementary Education in India, The Unfinished Business*, Asia Publishing House, 1966, pp.16

in taste, in opinions, in moral and intellect.”⁴ Because they want people for their helpmate only. The main objective of colonial education was to produce a class of educated Indians who could serve as intermediaries between the British administration and the local population. The curriculum was largely Western-centric, emphasizing on European languages, literature, history, and science. The traditional Indian knowledge systems and cultural heritage were often sidelined or ignored by them.

The British system of education was neither responsive to the realistic elements of the social situation, nor inspired by any lifegiving and creative ideal. It does not train individuals to become useful productive members of society, able to pull their weight and participate effectively in its work. This system of education was unable to contribute much to the individual as well as to social development.⁵ Education was centralized and standardized to suit the needs of the colonial administration.

English was promoted as the medium of instruction, creating a linguistic and cultural divide between the educated elite and the masses. Education was often limited to the elite, excluding a significant portion of the population. To bring some social changes, quality education is very much required for all. In this context, Mahatma Gandhi's scheme of basic education was an alternative measure to establish a new social order. Gandhi's principle on basic education would be able to inspire the whole world with his ideas of truth, nonviolence, peace, and love. His idea on handicrafts is very important as it represents the culture and tradition of the country. It promotes the heritage of a country using indigenous materials.

III. Gandhian Education System in India

Mahatma Gandhi was one of the important leaders of the Indian independence movement. He is the father of the nation. His educational ideas emphasize a holistic and value-based approach to learning, with a focus on character development, moral values, and the overall well-being of individuals. His education required him to integrate traditional Indian values and skills into the curriculum. Gandhi gave a beautiful gift to the Indians through *Nai Talim* also called New Education.

According to Gandhi the aim of education is to equip individuals with some skills to make them economically independent. To transmit the age-old cultural heritage of our nation. To build the character of people, to produce ideal citizens by arousing the national consciousness and patriotic feeling of citizens, and to establish an ideal society where everybody is equal, and there are no exploitations, poverty, and worries. A society that is casteless and classless based on love, truth, justice, equality, and brotherhood.⁶ Gandhi wanted an education system which would help Indians recover their self-respect and sense of dignity. He was of the strong opinion that the medium of teaching must be in vernacular languages making education more accessible to the masses.

⁴ Sharp. H, *Bureau of Education, India, Selections from Educational Records Part I, 1781-1839*, Calcutta Superintendent Government Printing, India, 1920, pp.116

⁵ *Educational Reconstruction*, A Collection of Mahatma Gandhiji's articles on the Wardha Scheme along with a summary of the Proceedings of the All-India Educational Conference held at Wardha 1937, Hindustani Talimi Sangh Sevagram Wardha, pp.90

⁶ M.K. Gandhi, *Harijan*, March 30, 1934

As per Gandhi, education in the English language made them strangers in their lands, distanced them from their own social surroundings and crippled Indians.

The Gandhian philosophy of Sarvodaya, meaning the welfare of all, influenced the educational approach, emphasizing social equality and justice. Gandhi stated that “our system of Basic Education leads to the development of mind, body, and soul. The ordinary system cares only for the mind.”⁷ The Wardha Conference and the *Nai Talim* philosophy left a lifelong effect on educational thinking in India, influencing subsequent educational reforms and discussions.

The Wardha scheme to discuss different aspects of the scheme of education popularly known as Basic Education in India, an all-India education conference was held in Wardha on 22nd and 23rd October 1937. The conference is called Wardha Educational Conference and Gandhi himself presided over the conference. After serious discussions, the following resolutions were passed in the conference; First of all, free and compulsory education will be offered universally for seven years (7to14) across the nation. Secondly, the medium of instruction should be in the mother tongue. Thirdly during the educational period, practical and productive activities should be integrated into the learning process, fostering the development of skills that align with the child’s environment, particularly in the realm of handicrafts. And lastly, the proposed system of education would progressively be able to generate remuneration for the teachers.⁸

Gandhi stated “By education, I mean an all-round drawing out of the best in child and body, mind, and spirit. Literacy is not the end of education nor even the beginning. It is only one of the means whereby men and women can be educated. Literacy in itself is not education. I would therefore begin the child’s education by teaching it a useful handicraft and enabling it to produce from the moment it begins its training.”⁹ Gandhi talks about all-round development not only literary knowledge. He wants to students learn about handicrafts which are used in daily life.

IV. Comparative analysis of both the Education

In conclusion, when we see the comparison between colonial education and Gandhian education, we find that some major differences the colonial education rooted in the imperialistic goals of the colonial power, with a focus on serving the interests of the ruling class same the Gandhian education grounded in principles of self-reliance, simplicity, and community welfare. When we see the Social Impact of these, we find that colonial education contributed to the creation of a Western-educated elite, leading to social stratification and cultural alienation. Whereas Gandhian Education aimed at empowering the masses, bridging social gaps, and promoting a more inclusive and egalitarian society. When we talked about the legacy of colonial education, they left a lasting impact on the education system, with English continuing to be a prominent medium of

⁷ M. K. Gandhi, *Harijan*, 9th November, 1947, pp.401

⁸ *Report of the Committee of the Central Advisory Board of Education appointed to consider the Wardha Education Scheme*, Published by the manager of publications Delhi. Government of India Press, New Delhi, 1939, pp.2-3

⁹ The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. 72, p. 79

instruction. Afterwards, Gandhian education while not as institutionally pervasive, the emphasis on moral values, community engagement, and vocational skills had a lasting influence. In conclusion, we can say that both British Education and the Basic Education system possess distinct characteristics. Macaulay's Minutes marked a pivotal moment in the history of the Indian subcontinent, providing a well-defined educational framework during a period of complete colonization. On the other hand, the Basic Education system represented the final indigenous education system in the British Raj, enlightening people about their rights and preparing them for life in an independent nation.

In India, colonial education and Gandhian education represented two contrasting paradigms, with the former serving imperialistic interests and the latter embodying a vision of self-reliant and morally grounded individuals contributing to community welfare. The legacies of both systems continue to shape various aspects of India's education system and societal values.

