

Running Head: Teaching English Sans Cultural Baggage: Review Of Indigenous Practices In Kerala 1



**Teaching English sans Cultural Baggage: Review Of Indigenous Practices In Kerala**

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## Running Head: Teaching English Sans Cultural Baggage: Review Of Indigenous Practices In Kerala 2

### **Abstract**

The south Indian state of Kerala at the turn of the century, implemented an ‘activity-based, learner centred, process oriented curriculum’ in the constructivist paradigm with a pronounced focus on ‘Discourse-based Pedagogy’. There were however variations in transactional patterns particularly in tribal and rural areas where teachers showed a pronounced affinity for the bilingual method. An NGO, the English Language Teachers’ Interaction Forum (ELTIF) attempted to train teachers and also teach school children in villages using novel tasks and activities which were conversation driven and ‘interactive’. A variant of all these was the attempt by a school in a remote town to introduce an ‘immersion programme’ where native speakers from the UK, lived and interacted with the local community and also engaged sessions for school children.

Which of these practices actually improved the competence of learners? Were there any tangible benefits? How was the issue of ‘cultural baggage’ addressed? To find answers to such questions, the investigator collected data from documents and studies published in journals and corroborated it with data collected from the field through observation, and interviews with teachers, students and the community.

The study found that each strategy has its own benefit and flaws and a lot depends on learner interaction and willingness to use the target language, English. It is hoped that the findings of this study would help curriculum developers to design more need-based, learner friendly materials and employ strategies that enable learners to use the language effectively in an increasingly globalized and technology driven world.

Running Head: Teaching English Sans Cultural Baggage: Review Of Indigenous Practices In Kerala 3

**Key words:** Community, Culture, Innovation, Learners, Strategy, Teaching

### **Teaching English Sans Cultural Baggage : Review Of Indigenous Practices In Kerala**

Those who attempt an in-depth study of cultures know that thought and behaviour are invariably embedded in the language of each culture. So it is not surprising to find language teaching as inevitably language and cultural teaching. Today, the ability to use and master a foreign linguistic system is increasingly perceived as a key factor in learning about any specific culture.(#1)

Recently, Barry Tomalin writing in the ‘Teaching English’ Blog of the British Council/BBC posed a couple of thought provoking questions: “...how can we best incorporate cultural material in our teaching materials? Should we provide more cultural input in our ELT textbooks or should we ‘deculturalise’ our textbooks to give them the widest application?” Similar questions were also posed by Chia Suan Chong in ‘English Teaching Professional’: “...can we teach a language without teaching its culture? If not, then what exactly is the culture of the English language? And what does it mean to teach it?”

There have been attempts to teach language by focussing on the functional aspects of the target language necessary for fluency and linguistic comprehension. In such contexts, educators had the responsibility of developing methods that can be engaged to support linguistic autonomy in the target language. (Casteel & Ballantyne, 2010) And in contexts where students were keen on gaining cultural input, the television or pop culture associated with the target language were perceived as a source. (Sybing, 2011)

Running Head: Teaching English Sans Cultural Baggage: Review Of Indigenous Practices In Kerala 4  
**Background**

In 2006, the Position Paper- National Focus Group on Teaching of English advocated approaches and methods “supportive within a broad cognitive philosophy incorporating Vygotskian, Chomskyan, and Piagetian principles” (p.v) Taking the cue, several states in India, introduced curricular reforms particularly with reference to the teaching of English. By the turn of the millennium many parents had begun to see the advantages of an English medium education for their children. This in fact was affirmed in the conclusions drawn by David Graddol in ‘English Next India’. He observed that there are three main drivers for English - Education, Employment and Social mobility.(#2) During the last two decades, many in India had begun to perceive the increasing importance of English in a globalized world. For instance a State of the Nation Poll conducted by the Indian TV Channel CNN-IBN, in August 2009 found that 87% feel that knowledge of English is important to succeed in life. Indians have realized that a knowledge of the English language will help dismantle communication barriers and facilitate smooth communication between different cultures. So it was not surprising to see Misra (2021) state that the widespread usage of English as the medium of instruction and the medium of assessment in educational institutions had largely contributed to upward socio-economic mobility.(#3)

However a marked difference in approach and attitude to teaching English is evident in private and government-run schools as pointed out by Karthik: While many private schools invariably adopt a ‘total English pedagogy’, government-run public schools focus purely on native languages and English is introduced as a second language only from fifth grade. (#4)

Kerala state had come with up with timely policies like the District Primary Education Programme(DPEP) and the Second Language Acquisition Programme(SLAP) for making students proficient in English language

Running Head: Teaching English Sans Cultural Baggage: Review Of Indigenous Practices In Kerala 5

transaction and also to keep pace with the celebrated skills displayed by students in private schools. (Ahamed, 2014). But in 2018, an article appeared in the Deccan Chronicle with an alarming title: 'English standards lax at Kerala schools'(Thomas) The report mentioned that though the Government of Kerala had introduced a 'General Education Protection Mission' to improve the quality of teaching in government and aided schools, it had failed to address the issue of teaching English.

### **Rationale for the study**

The investigator while serving as a teacher educator under the department of collegiate education, Government of Kerala had the opportunity to gain a firsthand knowledge of the actual classroom teaching of English in both government and private schools in urban, rural and tribal areas. The investigator noted the strong affinity for bilingual education and the regular code switching practised by teachers while engaging classes in the English classroom in several schools. As a member of the voluntary organization of teachers – English Language Teachers' Interaction Forum (ELTIF) which has for its mission "Empowering rural India through English language education," the investigator was familiar with the strategies employed by the facilitators. The use of an 'immersion method', where native speakers from the UK lived with a local community and interacted and engaged classes in a local school was also studied by the investigator.

Such widely different practices can trigger a series of questions related to culture and language teaching. The familiarity with the strong cultural ethos prevalent in tribal communities in Kerala and the pride which Malayalees have about their own culture led the investigator to explore the issue of 'cultural baggage' with relation to the teaching of English in Kerala.

Running Head: Teaching English Sans Cultural Baggage: Review Of Indigenous Practices In Kerala 6

### **The research questions**

In Kerala state, an activity-based, learner centred, process oriented curriculum formed the basis of the pedagogic strategy advocated by the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT). But in the tribal belt, teachers of English, preferred bi-lingual education. The voluntary organization of teachers-ELTIF employed a conversation driven approach and trained teachers and taught English to learners in rural areas. The 'Immersion' method of native speakers from the UK living in the community and engaging sessions was an innovative method employed by a school in Nilambur in North Kerala. To get to know the different strategies employed, the following research questions were listed down:

- \*Which practice improved the competence of learners?
- \*Did any strategy employed have any tangible benefits?
- \*How was the issue of 'cultural baggage' addressed by teachers in each context?

### **Method applied**

To find answers to the questions, the investigator collected data from documents and studies published in journals and corroborated the findings with the data collected through field studies and interviews with teachers. The methodology and strategies followed in each -Schools following the State syllabus, schools in tribal areas, the ELTIF approach and in the school which adopted an immersion programme was studied and listed. Then a critical review was undertaken to identify the potential benefits and demerits of each approach/strategy.

#### ***A. Teaching of English in schools following the State syllabus***

## Running Head: Teaching English Sans Cultural Baggage: Review Of Indigenous Practices In Kerala 7

The introduction of English language education in Kerala State dates back is almost two centuries.(#5) Since Indian Independence there were several reforms. By the turn of the century, the State Council of Educational Research and Training, (SCERT), Kerala had taken the lead role in school curriculum design and preparation of text books. The Teacher's Source Book for Standard VI issued to trainers by SCERT, Kerala in 1999 observed that the "... books have been prepared on the basis of the theoretical insights gained from the recent researches and studies in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) done both in India and abroad" (#6). By then, Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) had been introduced. As part of CE in English the areas for CE for Standard X, included projects, assignments, practicals, collections and class tests in Paper I and Projects, assignments, seminars, records and class tests in Paper II. (Sourcebook on Evaluation p.3)

The Government of Kerala introduced a new Pedagogy called 'Discourse Oriented Pedagogy' for teaching English during the academic year 2006-07. Following the Kerala Curriculum Framework 2007, a 'New Curriculum' was launched in 2008. By then, as per the New Curriculum, which turned out to be a paradigm shift, Behaviourist practices were abandoned and Constructivist practices were adopted for curriculum transaction. The number of papers for the SSLC English Paper was slashed from two final written examination to one only.

By 2013, the specific strategy being followed in schools following the State syllabus was circulated to schools authorities by the SCERT. (#7) A couple of years later the Teacher Text prepared by the SCERT for Standard VIII in 2015 made a direct mention of the status of learners. It pointed out how the demand of the public, compelled the authorities to introduce English from Class 1 onwards in the schools of Kerala.

Running Head: Teaching English Sans Cultural Baggage: Review Of Indigenous Practices In Kerala 8

(p.24) The gap between the required and the existing levels of language proficiency of the learners that needs to be bridged was also highlighted. It affirmed that English requires intensive focus in the process of its teaching and learning.”[p.25] The struggle commonly perceived among learners of English was also mentioned. (#8)

## International Journal of English Learning and Teaching Skills

### ***B.Teaching of English in Tribal schools***

In the early years of this century, the Government of India initiated steps to improve the tribal economy. Programmes were also implemented in tribal areas for education of children. For instance, under the supervision of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) Multi Grade Learning Centers (MGLC's) were introduced in tribal hamlets for making primary education accessible for the tribal children. After providing basic education in MGLC's the learners are shifted to Government schools, where they are taught the same curriculum and syllabus taught to non tribal learners. Since most such schools are situated far away from the tribal hamlets, the tribal children reside in special hostels.

Such initiatives helped the tribal communities to come out of their self-imposed isolation and soon they began to mix with non-tribal communities. The arrival of mobile phones and Cable TV in tribal villages close to towns began to create an awareness among tribal youth and children regarding the scope for social mobility and empowerment possible through a study of a global language like English. But seamless learning and acquisition of English depended heavily on the extra effort of tribal learners were expected



## Running Head: Teaching English Sans Cultural Baggage: Review Of Indigenous Practices In Kerala 9

to put to overcome the differences in linguistic features of English and their own tribal language. Hence success depended entirely on the way in which language is taught in tribal schools.

### ***C.The ELTIF approach***

The English Language Teachers' Interaction Forum (ELTIF) is a voluntary organization of teachers who have taken it their mission to empower rural India through English Language Education. The basic philosophy of ELTIF was clearly spelt out in a flyer of their recently launched online programmes: "Born out of the felt needs of a group of village English teachers in north Kerala in 2003, ELTIF started functioning as a means of self-empowerment, a radical alternative to the conventional training programme for teachers."(#9)

Till date "ELTIF has organised more than 500 programmes for students, teachers and parents in various parts of the country. They also directly caters to the individual professional developmental needs of language teachers and academic needs of language learners. Their website claims that the members of ELTIF are "... driven by their passion for education and motivation to make a difference in the world...We have faith in the fathomless potential of the individuals and we support them to achieve their best."

### ***D. The teaching of English in the 'Immersion Programme'***

In the US, immersion programmes had for its goal enriching the education of native-English-speaking students by teaching them all of their academic subjects in a second language. The goal is for students to become proficient in the second language and develop increased cultural awareness while reaching a high level of academic achievement.(Eric Digest)

Running Head: Teaching English Sans Cultural Baggage: Review Of Indigenous Practices In Kerala 10

An obvious pedagogic advantage of English Language Immersion Programmes is that it will enable learners to think, using the English language, and force them to speak it because no one else will speak to one otherwise. Further, every time one speaks with grammatical errors, the community members will immediately correct the mistakes and one can learn faster from the mistakes by repeating the corrected way to speak the same sentence.

### International Journal of English Learning and Teaching Skills

Since the Government initiatives to decentralize power, local Panchayats and Municipalities began to have a greater say in the way in which school education should be imparted. The growth of English as a global language and the scope for social advancement made possible through good English language education led a Municipality in a town in northern Kerala, Nilambur to conceive the idea of an Immersion Programme. With the assistance of officials from the SCERT, Kerala and the Department of General Education a programme of action for implementing an Immersion Programme was charted out. Faculty from the United Kingdom were invited to come and stay in Nilambur where they were given free accommodation. They were allowed to mix freely with the local community and even engage classes in English after school hours in the local educational institution, the Govt. Manavedan Vocational Higher Secondary School, Nilambur.

Months after the implementation of the programme the present investigator and a team of researchers were directed to study and submit a report of the effectiveness of the 'Immersion Programme'.(Praveen et al., 2012)

Running Head: Teaching English Sans Cultural Baggage: Review Of Indigenous Practices In Kerala 11

### **Critical review of the approaches and strategies**

What follows is a critical review of the approaches and strategies under three sub heads: A. Methods and Strategies, B. Teaching Materials and C. Issue of Cultural Baggage. An attempt will also be made to answer the three research questions identified earlier related to the four types-Government run schools following the State syllabus, Tribal schools, the ELTIF approach and the 'Immersion Method' followed in a school in Nilambur, north Kerala.

#### **A. Methods and strategies**

**A1.In Government-run schools\***A close reading of the Kerala Curriculum Framework 2007 will make clear the paradigm shift with regard to English education. With the introduction of social constructivist practices, critical pedagogy and issue-based curriculum, the dynamics of the English language classroom shifted the thither to focus from learning to acquisition, from form to meaning (and function ) and from individual effort to collaborative interaction. When the curricular revisions was in progress in SCERT, Kerala, a conference was organized to discuss the curricular reforms. One of the invited speakers was P.Mani, Director, Regional Institute of English South India, Bangalore who made a very significant observation: "Whatever may be the basic principles of a language curriculum, while transacting the curriculum, the teacher has to do a juggling act that calls for an intuitive response to the instant situation. The factors that impact this process of decision making are often in contradiction with one another, giving rise to dichotomies. This polarity often leads to a fractured process of teaching, stemming from what the teacher knows he should do and what the teacher actually does in the classroom".

Running Head: Teaching English Sans Cultural Baggage: Review Of Indigenous Practices In Kerala 12

\*The findings of a study by Nair,(2004) is also worth recalling: "...merely by developing a new method of teaching or by raising the standard of the syllabus, little improvement could be effected in any of the subjects in the schools. The greatest problem is that very little teaching is done at all. There is also the absolute lack of commitment on the part of a large section of teachers..."(p.43) The investigator too noted during field visits that teachers of English in the government run schools though familiar with strategies often attempted to teach to ensure that their students pass the examination which often resulted in translating the English text into Malayalam and even supplying specimen solved questions to enable the learner to pass than to develop competence in using the language. (#10)

Further, the Discourse-based Pedagogy implemented in the State was perceived to be effective, in students' acquisition of four language skills and on the self efficacy of the students in using the four basic skills (LSRW). But a research study (Relish English) found that the performance level of the children has deteriorated considerably due to excessive written tasks including examinations and that students are not able to express their talents through English in a multitudinous level.(#11)

**A2.In tribal schools** A paper prepared for the UNICEF by Chandrasekhar et al. (2001) regarding issues in school education in Kerala reported the existence of deprivation of many kinds among the tribal population in Kerala.(P10). It also reported that drop-out rates in Kerala in the primary and upper primary sections declined in the 1990s, though dropout rates among dalit and adivasi pupils are higher than among all students.(p.70)

Varghese and Nagaraj (2012) reported lack of proficiency in English language as a major obstacle to the education of Schedule Tribe learners. It also reported that tribal learners have adjustment problems with the school curriculum and the teaching of English language. The heavy contrast between the mother tongue and English was identified as a major cause of learning difficulty. The study found that for the tribal learners, the

Running Head: Teaching English Sans Cultural Baggage: Review Of Indigenous Practices In Kerala 13

home and local environment is not favourable enough to create a linguistic bridge in the inter-language process. They concluded their study by affirming that the pedagogy followed in teaching other learners will not be effective in the tribal classrooms. “The questions relating to content, process, teaching, and learning follow only when the issues of language is addressed at first”. (#12)

\*For developing competency in using a language there should be opportunity for interaction both inside and outside the classroom. It was found that often teachers had to translate English into the mother tongue of the learners and the tribal children seldom took the initiative to speak in English.

\*Studies on tribal education, previewed by the investigator, revealed that teachers usually attempted to find ‘fix-up’ strategies to develop reading competency among tribal learners. Many failed to directly address learner deficits such as poor repertoire of vocabulary, lackadaisical attitude to learning spelling and practising pronunciation and absence of motivation to learn the rules of English grammar.

\*A study conducted by the NCERT found the absence of teaching strategies that foster communication skills: “Mostly, the teacher asked the questions, students were not motivated to ask question, this deprives the students of practice for communication, command and confidence. Across all the states, just 5 to 10% of students asked questions.” (Dutta & Bala Synthesis Report)

**A3.The ELTIF approach** \*The Resource Persons and Facilitators prioritized ‘learning’ over ‘teaching’.

\*A sense of camaraderie prevailed during the sessions and the Resource Person and the Facilitators treated the participants as equals.

Running Head: Teaching English Sans Cultural Baggage: Review Of Indigenous Practices In Kerala 14

\*They adopted the ‘bottom up’ process for teaching English.

\*The investigator visited a ‘Village Fest’ organized by ELTIF to observe and document the special strategy employed by facilitators. The findings were presented at a virtual conference. (Praveen, 2021) “The activities included:

- ✓ Acting, singing, dancing and everything except teaching.
- ✓ Using realia - ones which can be made by the teachers themselves or ones that are available locally.
- ✓ Stories to promote reading habit using illustrated pictures.
- ✓ Tongue twisters.
- ✓ Skit and Mime.
- ✓ Rhymes and songs.
- ✓ Games such as Name, Place, Animal, Things; Word chain which requires one to frame new words with the last letter of a word; Riddles and puzzles.
- ✓ Collecting any object one can find and naming it.

The instructors in fact invariably make use of several linguistic resources which are indigenously available and cost effective. The resources from the local language is discreetly tapped to help learners master the target language. Code switching and borrowing often appeared to be the norm and this indirectly paved the way of language acquisition especially because English is not the preferred language for communication by the learner.”

Running Head: Teaching English Sans Cultural Baggage: Review Of Indigenous Practices In Kerala 15

**A4.Immersion programme** \*Sometimes all the faculty from UK dealt with the same theme/topic but the method varied according to the demand of the class. They discussed among themselves and repeated effective methods. When the class seemed to appreciate games, they tried to give new and useful games like ‘Hangman’. Each UK teachers employed individual methods to meet his/her objective.

\*The teaching of Communicative English by native speakers from the UK was implemented in Govt. Manavedan Vocational Higher Secondary School, Nilambur in north Kerala. The schedule of instruction was as follows:

The classes were held from 8.15 AM to 10.15 AM as per a set Time Table for classes VIII and XI from Monday to Thursday. Each division of Standard VIII and Standard XI used to get two hours of instruction every week. The students used to get a class by the native speakers on one day and by the local Communicative English teacher on the following day.

\*Almost all the children in their causal chat said that they highly enjoyed the programme. Interacting with the UK faculty was something they really liked. The most striking feature of the programme was that the children were motivated to speak English and English alone as the UK teachers did not understand a word of Malayalam, which is the local language.

\*The local teachers observed that the Programme would be more effective if it is implemented at the Primary level as the children of that age will be more receptive to a foreign language. But at any rate, such Programmes helped underprivileged children of Government schools get an opportunity to get exposed to good English.

Running Head: Teaching English Sans Cultural Baggage: Review Of Indigenous Practices In Kerala 16

### ***B. Teaching materials***

**B1.In Government-run schools** \*In the foreword to the English Reader for Class XII the SCERT spelt out the nature of the course books prepared and how it is to be transacted: "...This Textbook, prepared as a continuation of the class XII English Reader, aims at realizing and refining the language competence developed by the learners in the lower classes... the approach to curriculum in English is activity-based, process-oriented and learner-centred, rooted in constructivism focusing on the desired learning outcomes... this textbook has been developed giving the learners ample opportunity to use the language for varying purposes in real-life situations. Equal emphasis is given to the development of literary and communicative competence. The learners are also given opportunities for the construction of various language discourses and further enrichment of linguistic and literary skills."

A recent study of the textbooks used in Kerala by Joy et al.(2019) found that the methods used in the textbooks are not enough for teaching because they more focussed on contextualization.

**B2.In tribal schools** \*The NCERT study found that : the text books used in tribal schools are not written with an integrated approach where integration of all the four skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) and integration with other subject areas (EVS, Mathematics, Arts) takes place. More significantly the text books did not link the child's life at school to life outside the school. (Dutta & Bala Synthesis Report, p.91)

**B3.The ELTIF approach** \*ELTIF appeared to have come up with their own strategy for facilitation of learning. In a very non-conventional way, they make use of songs, stories and whatever materials are available in resource-poor environments and then they attempt to adapt them for teaching English in a novel



Running Head: Teaching English Sans Cultural Baggage: Review Of Indigenous Practices In Kerala 17

and creative way. This in fact reminds one of the Dogme Approach popularized by Scott Thornbury who found fault with the overdependence on published course books and the overuse of materials.

**B4.Immersion programme** \*Teaching materials for the project was supplied by the State Institute of English. The local Communicative English teachers meticulously followed the module prepared by the State Institute of English.

\*According to the UK faculty, the materials provided did not work well with the students of Standard VIII but was effective with Standard XI classes. Indian names and references to Indian culture caused difficulties. They felt that they should be allowed to teach English language through English culture which they are familiar with. For according to them it would give exposure for children to English ways of living and their customs.

### ***C. Issue of cultural baggage***

**C1.In Government-run schools** The approach advocated in the curriculum is based on Chomsky's (2006) concept of innate language system. According to it, the environmental factors contribute to the process of language learning. Interestingly, children had acquired snatches of British culture and tradition through their regular exposure to English films they watch on Cable TV at home and in some cases from the English medium education they received. But culture, we know includes fashion, dress, manners, greetings etc. which students tend to copy from the media. However, the failure to socialize with native speakers from UK or even celebrate British festivals and customs and the teachers teaching English without in any way referring to cultural aspects resulted in learning English without a cultural overtone. So Indian

Running Head: Teaching English Sans Cultural Baggage: Review Of Indigenous Practices In Kerala 18

English and Indian English vocabulary, tended to be common and acceptable rather than Received Pronunciation or Standard English!

**C2.In tribal schools** \*Schumann(1978) had asserted that the degree to which the second-language learners acculturate themselves towards the culture of target-language depends on social and psychological factors. The investigator found that, no specific strategy was being employed to reduce social or psychological distancing of tribal learners with the English language which necessarily carries a cultural baggage.

**C3.The ELTIF approach** The ‘issue of cultural baggage’ was effectively tackled by the founder members of ELTIF who demonstrated that there is no need for teachers of English alone to teach English. For this, they educated parents in rural villages to help them shed the commonly existing fallacy: “If you want to learn English you should be rich and send your children to English medium schools”. And for this they followed Krashen’s theory of Second Language acquisition : *“The best methods are therefore those that supply 'comprehensible input' in low anxiety situations, containing messages that students really want to hear. These methods do not force early production in the second language, but allow students to produce when they are 'ready', recognizing that improvement comes from supplying communicative and comprehensible input, and not from forcing and correcting production.*(Schutz,1998)

**C4.Immersion programme** \*The informal atmosphere helped develop a love for English among school children. The sessions by the faculty from the UK were warmly welcomed by the children. The atmosphere in the class was relaxed and playful. The children sat throughout the session with a cheerful look on their faces.

**Implications of the study**

Running Head: Teaching English Sans Cultural Baggage: Review Of Indigenous Practices In Kerala 19

If educational attainment and empowerment through English is the goal, governmental agencies, school authorities, local tribal community leaders and NGO's have to work together and devise effective methods and strategies. The observation by Gautam in this regard is worth pondering on : "Teaching- Learning Process is the flower that does not grow in every one's garden.' But we should find a proper remedy for it... the lessons taught should be nearer home. The students take interest in learning English through give-and take process which makes language richer..."

International Journal of English Learning and Teaching Skills

### **Scope for future research**

Practitioners know that Digital literacy can provide incredible opportunities to read, write, and communicate with others. There is also great scope for teaching cultural aspects through digital texts. But hardly any study referred to by the investigator in this paper makes specific mention of this. In fact, during the spread of the Corona virus pandemic, there had been a surge in online teaching and learning and many teachers in government run schools and even in tribal schools were forced to make a profuse use of multimedia texts. The scope for imbibing cultural aspects of the English language through visual texts may be undertaken.

### **Conclusion/Inferences drawn**

A review of text books in English prescribed for schools- be it of the State syllabus or the NCERT will reveal that they invariably include texts written by native speakers. Often the texts have a cultural overtone and the language employed tend to carry meaning beyond itself. There will be umpteen references to British customs and manners too. So it would only be naive to assume that learning a language like English means learning its form- the alphabet, the meaning, the grammar rules and the arrangement of words! But in

Running Head: Teaching English Sans Cultural Baggage: Review Of Indigenous Practices In Kerala 20

Government-run schools, the prime thrust appeared to be teaching the functional aspects of the target language necessary for fluency and linguistic comprehension. The code-switching often practised by teachers bringing into the classroom, local texts for fostering communication tended to reduce the time spent for providing exclusive English language input for learners. The failure to focus on English diction, pronunciation or sensitize learners to what Prof. Higgins in 'My Fair Lady' preferred every speaker of the English language to know: "...the majesty and grandeur of the English language...its extraordinary, imaginative and musical mixtures of sounds...", resulted in learners acquiring a type of English that to an extent helps them communicate, but lacked grace. And at times, the target language use tended to be 'clumsy' owing to the failure to distinguish between spoken and written English.

Edward Sapir as early as 1929 made a very significant statement: "No two languages are ever so similar that they represent the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct, not merely the same with a different label attached". This implies that the chosen strategy to teach a language like English which has its own cultural baggage to children in tribal schools who already have their own language and culture by using the constructivist paradigm where learners interact and create meaning will be an herculean task. So even today, it is not surprising to find student dropouts tending to rise in tribal schools!

Gao (2005) found that 'immersion teaching' accelerates the acquisition of cultural knowledge and the integration of language and culture learning. Because, using the language as medium for the continuing socialization of students is a process which helps the student develop cultural competences. Observing on a daily basis the life style including dress, manners and customs of the faculty from the UK paved the way

Running Head: Teaching English Sans Cultural Baggage: Review Of Indigenous Practices In Kerala 21

for the children living in the community where the Immersion programme was implemented to be receptive to cultural aspects associated with the English language. Further, it is commonly accepted that individuals learn how to use gestures, glances, slight changes in tone or voice, and other auxiliary communication devices to alter or to emphasize what one says through casual observation and informal learning. Regular interaction with the faculty from UK, helped the children to observe and imitate gestures and interaction patterns common among native speakers. More significantly, the game-based strategies which the faculty from UK employed, not only made the children enjoy the learning process but also consciously learn the necessary vocabulary for participation in games thereby transforming the regular learning paradigm from one of imitation to cognitive learning.

Linguists have shared ideas that can light the pedagogic strategy to be employed in teaching languages. For instance, according to the Whorfian theory, our words are coded in language and so are our thoughts and this linguistic pattern dictates more than just the language we speak. (Comrie). This is true not only of English but of any Indian language. So in teaching any language, teachers cannot just focus on morphemic, phonetic, pragmatic, semantic or syntactic aspects alone but also has to focus on cultural connotations of the language found in its suprasegmental features and specific usages such as slang, idiom and literary references which adds meaning and colour to an utterance! That is to say, teaching a language like English, shorn of cultural aspects, be it in a Government-run school, a tribal school, the rural environment where the facilitator of ELTIF operates or the school where the Immersion Programme was implemented will not in any way have a long term positive impact on learners.

Running Head: Teaching English Sans Cultural Baggage: Review Of Indigenous Practices In Kerala 22

An argument commonly advocated by Indian teachers that that no native English speaker can speak an Indian language like an Indian so why should Indian learners try to speak and use English like a native English speaker and bother about pronunciation, grammar or cultural aspects is like stretching an argument to its extreme. The failure to learn cultural aspects of a language like English will sooner or later make the learner realize own incompetence while interacting with the outside world. The learner will then have to consciously un-learn and re-learn the kind of English language taught in ones school days and try to acquire aspects related to culture that is embedded in English language use.

From a cultural perspective, the teacher in classrooms in Kerala has a high status. So if the students tend to perceive the teacher as the benchmark to which they can emulate, and if the teacher provides the essential cultural input necessary to acquire a language like English, which has its own cultural baggage, by tailoring it to the needs of individual learners, seamless learning of cultural aspects related to the English language can take place.

Perhaps it would only be appropriate to conclude this study by referring to an observation in the United Nation's State of the World's Indigenous Peoples: Education:

*"...the transformation of education from an instrument of assimilation and integration into a means of self-determination is a multidimensional and complex long term process, which advances at a pace that depends on the conditions of the region, country and community concerned..."*(-Vol 3, Overview p.5)

## Notes and References

1. The Bellagio Declaration of the European Cultural Foundation and the International Council for Educational Development stated: *“For effective international cooperation, knowledge of other countries and their cultures is as important as proficiency in their languages and such knowledge is dependent on foreign language teaching.”* Quoted in Nabi (2017)

2. According to Graddol, there are three main drivers in India towards the greater use of English: *“...education (increasing demand for English-medium schools, widening access to higher education, incorporation of English training in vocational education); employment (many jobs in the organised sector now require good English skills); social mobility (English is seen as an access route to the middle classes and geographical mobility within India and beyond)...”* (p.14)

3. Misra observed: ‘Indian English’ retains our uniqueness as a multicultural community as well as acts as the window to realise the impossible dreams that globalisation has made possible. English, and to be specific, British English is the language of our colonizers, a colonial legacy and a lingering symbol of neo-colonialism. However, as we have, over the 70 years since Independence, taken up the project to decolonize, we have also sought to globalise... today we stand at an important juncture in the history of English language education in India as along with decolonizing, de-globalizing is also being sought.

4. Karthik observed : *“Many public schools, due to political compulsions, have the state’s official languages as the primary school language...Some states also mandate learning of a non-native third language from grade*

Running Head: Teaching English Sans Cultural Baggage: Review Of Indigenous Practices In Kerala 24

*6...Many (private) schools also discourage the use of native language by completely banning any conversation in the native language-even among peers and friends.”*

5.English education was taken care of by Rev. Dawson and the English school in Mattancherry was set up in 1818. The Maharaja of Travancore as early as 1834 established a Free School to provide English education. Cochin State too set up schools soon. (SIET, Kerala)

6. Claiming that the approach is innovative it went on to state that the *“...basic assumption which serves as the backbone of the whole new curriculum of English is that it treats language as communication. Therefore, it is assumed that language is best learned when the learner actually starts using it and not by learning the rules of grammar and mastering a few words.”* (Introduction pp.3-4)

7.A document circulated to Higher Secondary Schools related to the Kerala School Curriculum 2013 specified the general approach: *“...The idea of constructivism put forth by NCF 2005 is the basis for the Kerala School Curriculum 2013 too. In constructivism, learning is the process of the construction of knowledge...the striking features of the curriculum transaction approach are: i. Activity - based ii. Process- related iii. Ensure learning iv. Focus to attain learning outcomes v. Environment- friendly vi. Highlights development areas vii. Suitable for the nature of the learner viii. Integrates learning and assessment ...A learning process based on constructivism is the foundation of the curriculum...The freedom to employ suitable learning strategies which are learner-centred and activity-based, taking into consideration the development and growth in the learning ambience rests with the teacher.”*(pp.10-11)

8.A distinct statement regarding poor learner competence in English is found in the ‘Teacher Text English Standard VIII’, Government of Kerala, Department of Education 2015:



Running Head: Teaching English Sans Cultural Baggage: Review Of Indigenous Practices In Kerala 25

*“However, a large number of learners are found struggling to use English for real life purposes, even after a fairly long period of language learning. The continuous study of English for years hasn’t enabled the learners to use the language in their speech and writing effectively. A satisfactory proficiency in English is still a distant dream to most learners...”[pp.24-25]*

9. The rationale for the strategy was also made clear in the flyer: *“By negating the roles of the “well-informed” trainer and the “ill-informed” trainee, the hundreds of ELTIF gatherings at the grassroots level firmly believed in interaction among equals, wherein the teaching-learning practices which “worked in my classroom” were shared among the participants, which included parents, as well. ELTIF’s holistic approach drew large numbers of parents to its programmes. The discussion of these practices eventually used to culminate in theorization at the annual national and international conferences of ELTIF. That is to say, the much-celebrated ‘bottom up’ model and the currently prevailing notion of ‘theorizing from the field’ have been in practice at ELTIF ever since its inception. We believe that, the mission of ELTIF –Empowering rural India through English language education– can be fulfilled only through such democratic practices.”*

10. The plight of teachers and teacher trainees of the Bachelor of Education programme had problems which were similar. The investigators post in a Blog of the Kerala University English Teacher Educator’s Forum (KUETEF) entitled ‘A Relook at the Old Curriculum’ made a reference to it *“We employ activity-based teaching in our schools, but our trainees show an inability to connect activity with the ‘issue’ being taught. We claim that we follow the process approach but have failed to relate it to societal issues. Language Optional trainees often show an inability to help pupils in classrooms acquire the skills of Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing...”*

Running Head: Teaching English Sans Cultural Baggage: Review Of Indigenous Practices In Kerala 26

11. The study also reported on the strategy being employed: “ *treats language at the discourse level... not viewed as a set of disconnected sentences but as a set of linguistic discourses such as stories, songs, conversations, diary entries, descriptions, narratives, slogans, etc. ... The textbooks also present language discourses as inputs and the learners are expected to produce different language discourses in meaningful contexts. Learners have to work in collaboration in small peer groups and present whatever they have understood after reading a text, and they are also expected to present the written products they develop. There is also a slot for self-assessment by the learner which is done with the help of a set of self-assessment questions based on the most important features of the task at hand. The mechanical repetition of constructing language discourses without taking care of the quality of languages, which should be reflected in them, has adversely affected the organic and vibrant nature of language learning experience...*”

12. Regarding the teaching of English, the study found that the inappropriate syllabus and teaching method of English develops a negative attitude in learners towards learning. The fear of learning a foreign language is one of the factors that makes them discontinue their education because English language is a criteria rather than an option at higher level. The tribal learners are not motivated well. Further, the tribal learners live in a different culture and setting and experience difficulties in learning a foreign language, unlike other learners. The tribes live in a community where they have a mother tongue of their own, apart from the regional language of the state.

Running Head: Teaching English Sans Cultural Baggage: Review Of Indigenous Practices In Kerala 27

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Running Head: Teaching English Sans Cultural Baggage: Review Of Indigenous Practices In Kerala 32

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