

ISSUES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN MADRASAS IN DELHI

Harvinder Kumar Negi

*Assistant Professor, Dept of English, GLA University, Mathura, India
Email: harvinder.negi@gla.ac.in*

Abstract

The study investigated teacher attitude, teaching methods, curriculum and learners' expectations in English Classroom in three Madrasa situated in Delhi, India, in a survey conducted in May 2020. The study relied on Classroom observations, personal interviews and secondary sources to study the English language teaching scenario. The theoretical framework for this study draws from the National Curriculum Framework 2005 and other relevant theories on second language teaching and learning.

Keywords: Basic education, curriculum, language teaching, madrasa, motivation.

1. Introduction

Majority of the Muslim population in India live in lower-middle socio-economic strata. The community as a whole had not been able to get access to education as other communities in India. In Madrasas, the main subjects taught are Quran, Urdu and Persian. Basic education, like Science, Math, Social Science, Computers and English language are taught at a rudimentary level. It limits the job prospects of the learners in future. Their education training is not sufficient to provide jobs or access to higher education.

Nearly 3.6 lakh students are enrolled in 3000 Madrasa in Delhi, out of which 124 are registered with the Delhi State Education Department (Singh 2020). They follow the 18th century Dars-i-Nizami pattern which has no role for English or modern education, including Science, Math or Social Science.

Indian Madrasas with its bend towards theological ideology have managed to provide free education to poor who cannot go to traditional schools. These institutions have produced a number of famous Islamic scholars. But their education is mostly oriented towards religion and are devoid of career oriented modern education. They still follow old traditional method and approach in their syllabus design.

2. About the Study

There is little work available that identifies and analyzes the problems of teaching English in Madrasa in India. The theoretical framework of this study formed its basis on the works on the teaching of English in schools in India as documented in NCERT, NCF papers on framework and methodology. Research proves that the Teacher's English language proficiency level impacts the classroom teaching efficiency (Nunan, 2003). If the teachers' proficiency level of the language is poor, it affects the conduct of the English Class.

Motivation plays an important role in the teaching-learning Classroom. A motivated speaker learns to speak a language following the exposure to the language (Corder (1967). The motivation to learn is of two types, as stated by Harmer (2001): extrinsic and intrinsic. The former is the result of outside factors whereas the latter is the outcome of the factors. Intrinsic motivation, by contrast, comes from within the individual. A person who enjoys the learning process is intrinsically motivated. According to the majority of researcher's intrinsic motivation produces better result than extrinsic motivation.

The study relied on classroom observations, personal interviews and secondary sources to study the English language teaching scenario in the selected Madrasa in Delhi, conducted in May 2020. The variables to be analysed in the study

are teacher's attitude, teaching pedagogy, curriculum and learners' expectations in the classroom. The learners and the teachers were non-native English learners. In total, 12 teachers participated in the study. Fortyfour young learners from Class 6 to 8 participated in the study by taking the language proficiency test. The research questions were answered by self observations and random interactions with the learners and by direct participation of the teachers and administrators.

Major issues that came up in the study about the Madrasas system were as follows:

1. Lack of independent financial or institutional management
2. Lack of modern syllabus and curriculum
3. Lack of accountability
4. Lack of compatibility with other educational systems in the country

These issues decided the formation of study objectives and have been discussed throughout the study here.

3. About the Madrasas

Madrasa is an Arabic term which means "place of study" (Bloom 2009), an educational institution where quranic preachings, including science and philosophy, are taught. The first Madrasa was established at Zaid bin Arkam in Safa. Afterwards the Madrasa was established in Madina. In their early days, their main purpose was to spread religious awareness and education among the masses. Their curriculum included teachings of Qur'an, Hadith, Genealogy, Calligraphy etc. It attracted large number of learners, even the non-Muslims used to come to such institutions which were secular in their nature.

The starting point of Madrasa education in India was the establishment of the two Mudrasas during the Delhi Sultanate in 1206; Muzziya named after Muhammad Ghuri of the Ghori Dynasty and built by Illtumish, and the other Madrasa was the Nasiriya built by Balban (Pederson 2009). The studies included subjects of mathematics, astronomy, and geography besides the standard subjects of law, history, secular and religious sciences, but the focus was

on religious studies. Since then to the present time, Madrasa education has undergone many changes, from religious education to adaption to the needs of modern education. It is still trying to impart education equal to other Boards in India and to prepare poor learners to face challenges of modern world order.

4. Syllabus

The Curriculum in Government-aided Madrasa is similar to the State Government-run schools with addition of Islamic Studies, whereas the Nizamia Madrasa has their own syllabus, with major focus on Islamic Studies and little role for modern education, like Science, Math, and Social Sciences. English is taught at rudimentary level from Class 2 onwards.

In the English text book for Class 8th, the stated aim was to improve language skills. In the textbook, there were prose, stories, and poems spread over ten chapters. Each chapter had exercises to test comprehension, grammar and vocabulary. It didn't focus much on speaking skills. The questions were of the nature of reading comprehension, summary, title, true/false, cause and effect and filling the blanks to check vocabulary and text usage. The book also had practice sheets for letter writing, application, essay, and notice email writings.

In grammar, lessons included were parts of speech, article, preposition, tense, verb, voice and narration, etc.

5. Schooling System in Madrasa

Madrasa are of two types: Self-financed 'Nizamia' and Government-aided 'Aalia.' The later is run by the respective State Madarsa Boards and the former is run by a Committee headed by the Nazim. The schooling years constitute of 9+ primary level years. Entry level is at age 3-4 years. The level of schooling in Madrasas is:

1. Primary level- *Maktub* (2-4 years)
2. Secondary level- *Darul Uloom* (5-7 years). At this stage, the actual learning starts (*edadia-aalim*).

3. Higher level- *Jamia*. Till the end (*Fazil*; 9 yrs). *Ifta* is part of *Jamia* and is a 2 years course that research on religious issues.

There were about 24,010 Madrasas in India, as per the Ministry of Minority Affairs records of 2018-19, out of which 4,878 were unrecognized. Unofficial records claim that Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind has over 20,000 Deobandi Madrasa in North India and many other privately run Madrasa. Besides, in the Indian states of Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal there are a large number of state-funded Madrasa. These institutions are equivalent to other education boards in their certification and recognition. The employability of Madrasa educated children is although debated due to quality of curricula and teachers.

6. Literature Review

In the present world order, no geographical borders among nations can stop people from connecting to each other via new media. In education, business, networking and other collaborations people are inter-connected in different parts of the world communicating in English. It has emerged as the language of communication in education; employment; polity; business and more such domains. It is used in all aspects of human beings' life from all ages. In India, English is the lingua franca between Hindi and non-Hindi language groups (e.g. between North-East Indian states and the rest of India, or between North Indians and non-Hindi speaking South Indians), and is the main language of knowledge in Science, Law, Finance, Higher Education and Polity.

History of English education dates back to the coming of the English Christian missionaries to India 1813 onwards. They built schools and taught English from high school level with English as the language of instruction. At primary level they kept local languages as the medium of instructions. English gained prominence in India following Macaulay's paper 'minute of education' in 1835 that proposed increasing expenditure on English language education in India to prepare Indians as mediators to administer India. They wanted to create a class of native Indians who would be

"Indians in blood and color but English in taste, in opinions and morals and intellect."

Under the British rule from 1857 onwards, English was taught in high schools and Universities. Leaders of freedom struggle in British India also supported English to gain knowledge and develop scientific aptitude.

After independence of India in 1947, various Commissions and groups stressed the need for the rationalization of English language education. The Radhakrishnan Commission (1948) recommended, "*English should be studied in high schools and in the universities in order that we might keep ourselves in touch with the living stream of ever growing knowledge.*" The Kunzru Committee (1955) stressed the importance of the use of specific methods in English language teaching and the study of linguistics as the essential for ensuring adequate proficiency in English at the university stage. According to the recommendation of the Official Language Commission (1956), "*English should be taught as a language of comprehension rather than as a literary language so as to develop in the students learning it a faculty of comprehending writings in the English language, more specifically those relating to the subject matter of their specialized fields of study.*" Kothari commission (1964) emphasized the role of English as a library language.

The Study Group 1 of UGC (1965) report recommended a program for teaching of English and comprehension be given more attention than expression. This group notes better comprehension of written materials in English as a skill as essential at the postgraduate level. The group recommended that there should be distinction between English language and English literature and the students should have choice to choose between the two.

Central Advisory Board of Education in India proposed '*Three Language*' policy in Indian school system (1957). The National Policy on Education (1968) formalized it further. The policy provided for the study of Hindi, English and modern Indian language in the Hindi speaking states and Hindi, English and the regional language in the non-Hindi speaking States. Subsequently, with partial success, first language commenced in Class 1 with the second

language being taught at Class 4 and the third language to be taught from Class 6.

Since then, English has grown in stature and status. It has helped to maintain the integrity of India by linking people from different states of India. Also, it has become a language of opportunity in education and employment (Negi 2013).

6.1 English Education and Islam

Muslims believed Maculay's 1835 minutes was a threat to Islamic values. They felt it will turn the generation's theists or non-followers. They were sure it aimed to Christianize Muslims through English education (Tahseen 1993). Further, in the 1857 mutiny, many Muslims were persecuted for their role in the revolt. In actual, Muslims were not against English language, but objected to the culture that English advanced which they saw as anti-Islam.

In a Fatwa issued by Hazrat Maulana Rasheed Ahmed Gangohi, on learning and teaching of English language, he wrote, "*It is correct to learn the English language, provided one does not commit a sin and there may be no impairment in religion.*" Under this background, poor Muslims who rely on cleric's diktat stayed away from English education which has deprived them of quality education.

ELT has taken a flight in non-Madrassa schools. They are benefitting from advancements in the global world due to their access to English language education. Sachar Committee Report (2006) stated poor situation of language education in Madrasa in India. According to the report 4% Muslims go to such schools and these schools are mostly the only option available to them due to lack of access to any good government schools or due to poor financial situation required to fund education in English medium private schools.

7. Methodology

The objective of this paper is to view the ELT scenario in 3 select Madrasa in Delhi in May 2020. The study was conducted in three Madrasa in Delhi- Masjid Darul Uloom, Mandawali Fazalpur; Jamia Saidia, Mustfabad, and Madrasa, Dakshin Puri with students from Class 5 to 10.

Total number of students in these Madrasa were 418.

The main participants in the study were teachers and students. It was an exploratory study. The initial idea to work on the topic arose from a comparative poor education indicator of Muslims in several surveys, especially among the Muslims from poor socio-economic strata. Most of these students go to Madrasa where the focus is on Islamic studies and modern education including English receives rudimentary focus.

A field study was conducted in Madrasa in Delhi. Data was collected by way of questionnaires designed for participants in the study i.e. students, teachers, and parents. Medium of questionnaire was English which had to be changed into Urdu since the participants were not able to comprehend the questions asked in English. The study also involved informal interviews and observations. The sample size of the study was not large enough to be considered a representative study.

8. Study Site

The Madarsa visited were mostly in lower-income localities wherein options of other schools were limited. Madrasa provide free education with lodging and boarding prompting parents to send their children here. Most Madrasa had permanent building with spacious and clean classrooms. Learners sit on floor. Classes run for 6 hours daily. The learners living in the Madrasa were in classes 2 to 8. Rote method is followed by teachers in the Classroom and focus is on memorizing topics. Progress of the learners is evaluated every 6 months.

In the English language classroom, medium of instruction was a mix of Urdu or Hindustani. The method of teaching was rote and Grammar Translation Method: Teachers translated books from English to Urdu or Hindustani. There was no focus on improving speaking skills. Only reading and writing was focused. Even the method used to teach grammar had pedagogical problems. Students used to memorize the rules and then apply it to the language which is faulty way to learn a language.

8.1 Teachers

Number of teachers participating in the study was 12, selected from 3 schools, 4 from each school and was aged 21-27 years. Teachers were on contractual appointments. None of the interviewed teachers were graduate nor were qualified language teachers. All they had was a 9 years Madrasa schooling qualification. Even after joining the Madrasa, they didn't receive any in-service or special English teaching training. They teach by translation method and focus on reading and listening to the lessons. Speaking or writing is ignored. Medium of instruction in the classroom is Urdu.

8.2 Variables of Language Stereotype Test

Following variables were set for teachers to elicit information on motivation and attitude towards English-

1. English speakers are at greater advantage than speakers of any other language
2. People will judge me by the level of my understanding of English language
3. English education helps to advance professionally
4. Objective of the text book is followed while teaching in the classroom
5. Prescribed syllabi is adequate to improve basic language skills (reading, speaking, writing, listening)
6. Knowledge of language teaching approaches
7. Job satisfaction/ working environment
8. There are enough opportunities of professional enhancements in teaching
9. Promotion criterion is satisfactory
10. There is enough support from school administration

8.3. Discussion

All the teachers believed that knowing English is advantageous than knowing any other language in any sphere of its use, like jobs or higher education. They agreed that the knowledge of English or lack of it is a parameter of the status of the speaker. Poor skills in the

language are considered as disadvantage. The language is advantageous in career development and growth. The text books had no well designed curriculum. The lessons were rudimentary and aimed to improve basic understanding of the learners; daily usage words, names of weeks, days, months, et al. The class sessions are like rote sessions, where the learners repeat the words or sentences after the teacher. English curriculum has benefited by developments in the pedagogy around the world. But the prescribed syllabi being taught in the Madrasas is not adequate to improve basic language skills (reading, speaking, writing, and listening). The lessons ignored speaking and writing skills of the learners. Thus the lessons were expected to develop limited abilities and were lagging behind the standards as per the National Curriculum Framework 2005 on many accounts: the language being used was Urdu, which was not a home language of the learners, the curriculum was poorly designed and failed to develop all four skills of language; reading, speaking, listening and writing. Teachers, in general, did not know about various language teaching methods. They were in no position to deliberate over the question of 'best teaching approach.' They teach the subject in ways that he knows best. The job satisfaction level of teachers was poor due to poor salaries, lack of career development, and personal improvements. The administrative support for their financial needs, training, or professional growth is missing.

9. Students

9.1 Socio-economic Status

Informal interviews were conducted to know socio economic status (SES) of the family of participants. Office records of random sixty students were accessed to gather information on SES. It was found that most of the students were from lower economic strata. They could not send their children to good schools so they had to send them to Madrasa which provided them free education. Religious factors too played an important role in sending them to Madrasa. Most of the parents were illiterate to ill-educated. Among them, there was no hope or expectations from government since they had not received schools or teachers in a long time where they could send their children for good education.

9.2 Proficiency

A total of 44 students participated in the proficiency test. A test was designed for learners from Class 6 to 8 to check their knowledge and proficiency of English language. The test level was set based on the level of the text books prescribed to them and some additional questions were included to check expected proficiency level based on the non-Muslim school's curriculum.

9.3 Variables of students Language Proficiency Test (total variables=16)

Following variables were set for students to assess English language proficiency-

1. Questions of basic grammar rules (1-5; knowledge of articles, noun, pronoun, verb, adjective)
2. Basic vocabulary test (1-5; word meaning, opposite meaning, similar meaning words)
3. Writing test (1-3; letter, email, application)
4. Language usage domains (home, classrooms, peer group)
5. Medium of instruction
6. Learners' participation in the classroom

9.4 Discussion on observable variables

Most of the participants performed poorly in the tests. None could answer questions on basic grammatical rules. English was considered a difficult subject. They did not enjoy reading English lessons. Their basic language skills, reading, speaking, listening and writing were poor. English was not used in any of the domains of language use i.e. home, classrooms, and peers. In the classroom, Urdu was medium of instruction. Learners were hesitant and not interested to ask questions from the teachers during the lessons.

10. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study identified the issues in English language classrooms in Madrasa. It was found that teachers are not well trained or educated to teach the language. Learners were not interested to learn English since they were not exposed to the language and therefore may not be aware of the importance of the language. All parents were from lower socio economic strata with poor to no education. They did not have many portions about the choice of schools for their children.

Usually Madrasa are last resource of education for them, especially with limited economic resources. From Sachar Committee Report 1996, "Government needs to provide good quality, subsidized 'mainstream' education and create an adequate infrastructure for education." The state must also fulfill its obligation to provide affordable high quality school education to the masses through the formal education system. Apart from the role Madrasa have played in providing religious education one needs to recognize their contribution towards the education of Muslims in the country.

Very often one finds that Madrasa have indeed provided schooling to Muslim children where the State has failed them. Many children go to Madrasa and thereby acquire some level of literacy/education when there is no school in the neighborhood. This effort needs to be recognized. This could be done by establishing 'equivalence' to Madrasa certificates for subsequent admission into government schools and universities. For this purpose, equivalence between the two systems of education will need to be established at different levels.

10.1 Recommendations

1. **Standardize the system of Madrasa Education.** A need to standardize and mainstream Madrasa system is urgently felt to improve employability and inclusion with other boards in India. The current education system is unable to meet the needs of learners from low to pre-degree stage. The integration of modern subjects will eventually improve standard of education among them.

2. **Centralize control of Madrasas in India.** An autonomous body is needed to aid in the standardization of curriculum and in upgrading the current curricula up to the level of other state boards. The institutions at present are

mostly fund-starved to cover cost of administration and pay for salary of teachers. An autonomous body set up by the Act of Parliament will help improve financial condition. Such Board will also be free from interference of the religious overtones in curriculum design and will therefore allow stressing on the introduction of scientific education.

3. **Improve teacher quality.** At present, the Madrasa teachers are poorly paid: they work on temporary basis with no fixed or secure pay scale. Government support will help in teachers' skills enhancement through Faculty development programs. Teachers will be exposed to modern education tools which will in turn benefit learners.

4. **Communicative language teaching approach.**

So far, the schools visited seem to use rote or grammar translation methods to teach language to its students. Their focus is on the memorization of grammar rules without focusing on the development of communicative skills. A communicative approach is more useful to improve skills in a language and it will also prove helpful to learners in the Madrasas.

Reference

- [1] Aggarwal, J. C. (1993). *Landmarks in the history of modern Indian education*. Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt Ltd.
- [2] Bloom, Jonathan M. and Sheila S. Blair. eds. (2009). *Madrasa. The Grove Encyclopedia of Islamic Art and Architecture*. Oxford University Press
- [3] Drewery, M. (1979). *William Carey: A bibliography*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House.
- [4] Evans, S. (2002). Macaulay's minute revisited: Colonial language policy in nineteenth century India. *Journal of Multilingual Development* 23(4), 260-281.
- [5] Fleet, K. (2005). *Encyclopedia of Islam*. Leiden: Brill.
- [6] Govt. of India. (1968). *National policy on education*. Retrieved from https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/document-reports/NPE-1968.pdf
- [7] Govt. of India. (2006). *Social, economic and educational status of the Muslim community of India: A report*. Retrieved from: http://www.minorityaffairs.gov.in/sites/default/files/sachar_comm.pdf
- [8] Gupta, R. S., and K. K. (1991). *English in India: Issues and problems*. Delhi: Academic.
- [9] Kachru, B. B. (1986). The power and politics of English. *World Englishes*, 5(2/3), 121-140.
- [10] Ministry of Minority Affairs. Govt of India. Annual Report 2018-19. Retrieved from <https://www.minorityaffairs.gov.in/sites/default/files/AR%20English.pdf> <https://www.minorityaffairs.gov.in/sites/default/files/AR%20English.pdf>
- [11] NCERT. (2005). *NCF on teaching of English*. Delhi: NCERT.
- [12] Negi, Harvinder. (2013). *Teaching of English at primary level in Himachal Pradesh*. LAP Lambert Academic Publishing.
- [13] Pederson, J. et al. (2009). "Madrasa". *Encyclopaedia of Islam* 5: 1123–1189.
- [14] Qasim, M. B. (2005). Curriculum of Indian Madrasa: Need for reform. *The Milli Gazette online*. Retrieved 12, 10, 2017, from <https://www.milligazette.com/Archives/2005/16-28feb05-Print-Edition/162802200553.html>
- [15] Singh, A. K. et al. (2018). *Evaluation of the implementation of the scheme for providing quality education in Madrasa*. Delhi: NIEPA.
- [16] Tahseen, R. (1993). *Education and modernization of Muslims in India*. Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications.
- [17] Yadav, Tanvi and N. A. Sole. (2019). Minorities rights in India: An appraisal. *International Journal of Political Science* vol 5(1). 73-78