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Reforming Beliefs

**WILLING HORSES: THERE IS NO WATER  
PRIMARY TEACHER EDUCATION IN NEPAL**

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**ABSTRACT**

This article is an outcome of a mini research conducted among 15 primary teachers who are currently teaching English at the primary level in the state funded schools in Kathmandu in Nepal. Basically, it deals with the deplorable condition of the primary teacher education in the country. The main focus of the study is on the English language teachers' thirst for their professional as well as English language development which has indeed confined to a bottle-neck situation for many reasons. The finding shows that primary English teachers are much willing to develop their language skills but their interests are frozen to death since there is no one to listen to their demands. It has been found that the pre service trainings has been of no use since the subsequent placement is a nightmare and the in service training never focuses on language development domain. Further, it was found that neither the trainers nor the supervisors assist language teachers after the training. On the whole, the training seems to be merely a formality rather than it being intended for the development of the primary level English language teachers.

**Keywords:** Teacher education, Teacher training, primary level

**Background**

The commencement of English education in Nepal dates back to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century; soon after the oligarchic Prime Minister Jung Bahadur Rana's visit to England in 1851. "The first English school-Durbar School- was started by Jung Bahadur Rana in his own palace" (Panta, 2006, p. 45) with a view to educating the kinsmen of the affluent aristocrat Rana regime, which substantially would fill the gap to establish good relationship with the English Generals ruling the Indian colonies. English was, thus, brought as an elite-language by the elite bilinguals (Cummins,2001) As time passed, the importance of English had been highly realized and it was

prescribed as a compulsory subject in the school curriculum making it accessible for the common people as well. In Sri Lanka too, the English bilingualism was put into effect after British opened missionary schools in the southern and northern parts of the country (Karunakarna, 2008)

In the past, English was introduced in Grade four in the Government funded public schools without any provision of recruiting English-specialized teachers. English in the primary level had to be taught by School Leaving Certificate (SLC) graduates, many of whom have no proper knowledge of English in either of the genres; Listening, Speaking, Reading or Writing. On the other hand, the proliferating private schools started teaching English right from the beginning of school education. On top of that, they recruited teachers, who could at least speak and understand Basic English. This dualism of functioning to recruiting the teachers and the operationalization of English between the state schools and the private schools ultimately resulted in the variation of SLC results; many of the students from the state funded schools failed in English. One reason for this remained the teacher competence. The situation in Sri Lanka is more or less same because the government finds it difficult to supply competent English teachers throughout the island and it results in appointing under qualified teachers to teach English in government school. Many of the primary teachers who were teaching English could themselves not speak English fluently nor did they understand others' parlence. They used to simply translate the words and texts into Nepali with the help of dictionaries and teach English through Nepali. Consequently, the students also lacked fluency, appropriacy and communicability in all the skills. Despite the allegations that the private schools prescribed all the textbooks but Nepali in English, neither the policy makers nor the concerned stakeholders like teachers deliberately strived at bridging the gap. Therefore, this demands the urgency about the change in policy.

The situation at present too does not have a marked difference except the imitation of prescribing English textbooks from the primary level. No doubt, there are a handful of schools which have drastically changed the school education scenario by switching the school to an English medium school. Majority of the government schools are still following the old tradition since they can neither get rid of their old staff, who have no English at all nor can they recruit new staff to catch up with the world. Conversely, had the existing staff been willing to gain some

training and some professional development courses to equip themselves, they would have got no water to quench their thirst. This is because of the inefficient trainers and the curriculum that suited their needs. In addition, the nightmare that these teachers are seeing to have become fluent English speakers is only a nightmare because the educational training centres, though 1053 in numbers, provide trainings to these teachers without the need analysis. What these teachers want is classroom based language not the content or the pedagogical skills. These teachers argue that content knowledge and the skills they acquire have become useless because of the lack of language competence.

Recently, the government has made a provision to start English at the primary level, i.e. right from Grade one without preparing the teachers ready for the task. The working teachers are overwhelmingly shocked at this decision since they have problems with classroom language. The training they received is also focused on content and the methodology and not the language itself. There is no teacher of English in the school too. The education code clearly mentions that anyone can teach English at the primary level with regard to their qualification. But the other side of coin has a seal or not is still a mystery. Therefore, the English teachers are obliged to take up this job not because they are intrinsically motivated towards it but because they are compelled to do so. In some schools, the English books are piled up in the cupboards without the notice of the District education office. Even if the supervisors know this they have no solution since many of the supervisors are employed without English background and they cannot conduct such trainings. Similarly, the district education office turns deaf ear despite the fact that the supervisors report the needs of the language training. Therefore, this demands the prompt action from the governmental side to raise the standard of English education in the nation as immediately as possible.

### **Teacher Training at Primary Level**

Teacher training in Nepal dates back to 1948 (UNESCO) with the opening of Basic Education Teacher Training Center in Kathmandu even during the autocratic Rana ruling. Nevertheless, this training was confined to equip teachers with basic knowledge of teaching literacy to the majority of the uneducated people of the country. Later in 1950, as a result of the people's movement, the exiled king was reinstated and consequently "a network of the normal

schools along with the College of Education was set up in 1956 for training primary and secondary school teachers” (Panta, 2006, p. 47). Truly speaking, this was the formal beginning of pre service teacher training in the country. The college of education ran proficiency and Bachelor of education Programme; both consisting of two and four years of duration part of which was allotted for practice teaching. The eligibility criteria for those programmes were SLC and Intermediate in Education (I.Ed.) passed respectively. The programmes comprised of various subjects so as to prepare teachers to teach variety of subject areas like English, mathematics, social studies and so forth. However, in-service teacher training received negligible significance even after the opening of the university.

Whether pre service or in-service training, one can vividly witness the lacunas some of which are worthy to state here. The curriculum of the programme, though it is effectively prepared, does not allocate enough room for the practical aspects of which bad effect found is that teachers are more theory oriented and the transfer of learning is almost negligible. The curriculum “gives the impression that it is a theoretical training program” (MOES, 2006, p. 15). Similarly, teachers can speak a lot about group work, pair work or the classroom dynamics but it is hardly practice in the real life situations. A language teacher should not only be a knowledgeable person in the content areas but he or she should equally be proficient in the communicative aspect but hardly a handful of teachers are found to be consummate in speaking English in the classrooms. It is observed in the schools located in Jaffna, Sri Lanka that many schools which offer English medium education suffer an acute shortage of competent teachers to teach subjects in bilingual mode. Teachers do have a sound knowledge in their discipline but lack communicative competence required to explain the contents without any hassle. In fact, the government policy is also equally liable in this respect. Anyone holding a school leaving certificate could have become a teacher and was imposed to teach English, which is not fair on the part of the teachers. Worst of all, there has never been any training programmes for developing language proficiency although significant amount of the education budget has been devised for teacher training.

The reports published from the concerned sectors also concede that the dissemination of the trainings have not gained the full-fledged satisfaction but instead only a negligible instances

of it have succeeded in transmitting the knowledge, which is still not effective. The other side of the eye-left area is also the monitoring, supervising and the follow up programmes. Feedback for instance is very hardly given in time since there is no supervision by the trainers and nor by the supervisors or the head teachers. The staple reason for this may be that many of the supervisors or the head teachers have lacked the knowledge of English Language Teaching (ELT) as they are all from non ELT background. The government's initiation to clear the backlog of the untrained primary teachers is a praiseworthy task and it has achieved a plethora of trained teachers in quantity but the quality with regard to practicality and instrumentality has been condensed into a cube of an ice.

### **Conclusion**

The situation of teacher education in Nepal needs to be paid immediate attention to train the teachers in teaching in the primary level and also the policy makers should change their mind set and do their best to change the pathetic scenario prevailing in the Nepali government schools. This paper has emphasized that teacher education has some similar issues as found in Nepal and those issues hamper the effective operation of English medium education. It is suggested that necessary changes are to be made in order to help the learners to acquire sufficient competence in English

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