

Karnataka's creative approach to demand for Eng medium

deccanherald.com/opinion/karnataka-s-creative-approach-to-demand-for-eng-medium-761101.html

September 13, 2019

DH



DECCAN HERALD



Aanchal Chomal, Rishikesh B S,

- SEP 13 2019, 14:06 IST
- UPDATED: SEP 13 2019, 15:41 IST



The demand for English medium education in Government schools is a long-standing one. It is, however, not merely an educational issue, but social and political as well. Educationists will agree that children can learn many languages in their early years, and there is also an agreement that the best medium of instruction is the language that children are most familiar with, which is the mother tongue or the language that is spoken in the immediate external environment.

Hence, most education systems advocate the mother tongue or the local language as the medium of instruction at least until the completion of primary schooling. However, this does not mean other languages should not be taught; in fact as many languages as possible should be encouraged. It is in this context that even the National Education Policy 2019 (NEP 2019) presents the multi-lingual approach for the early years before narrowing it down to studying at least three languages and aligning it with the medium that is chosen for the child.

This approach is a pragmatic one in diverse cultural settings such as ours and an approach which also allows children the choice of English as a medium in the later years. It is keeping these principles in mind that English was introduced as a subject by Karnataka many years ago – initially from Class 5 and later from Class 1 itself.

However, over the years, the affordable private schools began to offer English medium from early years which attracted parents who pulled their children out of the government schools. The demand from parents, many of whom are from multiple socio-economic

disadvantages, is based on the opportunities that English medium is perceived to provide and also based on the societal trend wherein a majority of the burgeoning middle class send their children to English medium schools.

Therefore, states across the country have been forced to think and act on this before the government school enrollments fall further. No state can keep this demand unaddressed any more. Most governments have two options – one, introduce English across all their schools immediately with whatever resources and hope it puts a stop to the depleting numbers in government schools or two, strike a balance between the parental demand and educational principles and offer good quality education, in more than one language, with appropriate allocation of resources; Karnataka has opted for latter.

Responding to parental demand

In Karnataka, the state has adopted a strategy by which the section of parents desiring English medium would have that option in the government schools, but it would also keep educational principles in mind and ensure the language familiar to children and teachers – Kannada – is also used. It is in this mode that the state launched the first set of English medium sections in 1000 schools across the state and recently announced that it would set up another 1000 new English medium sections in the academic year 2020-21. This means by June next year we would have 2000 schools running one section of English medium across all 34 districts of the state – in total close to 3000 sections across Classes 1 and 2.

Hence, the model of English medium sections being followed in Karnataka government schools is a creative response to a societal demand. In this model, Kannada and English languages are given similar weightage in the time-table; through the day the child is provided with enough and more opportunities to learn both the languages and in the classrooms, there is emphasis on bilingual or multilingual instructional strategies along with materials like textbooks of Mathematics and Environmental Science available bilingually. These schools have been selected using multiple criteria, of which the most important has been the availability of at least one teacher with English proficiency.

The anecdotal evidence and some of the pilot data collected by us indicate that enrollments have significantly gone up in the schools. There are nearly 26,500 who have enrolled in grade 1 of the 1000 English medium schools; this is in addition to the 12,000 who have enrolled in Kannada medium sections of the same schools. This gives an average enrollment of 38 children per school this academic year which the government schools have not seen over many years. In fact even more staggering are the numbers for many underserved North Karnataka districts wherein the average Grade 1 enrollment per school is around 50 children!

District	Schools	Grade 1 admissions	MEAN
	(with EMS)	(Kann+Eng)	per school enrollment
Bagalkot	28	1439	51.4
Ballari	39	2030	52.1
Belagavi	38	1758	46.3
Koppal	20	1082	54.1
Raichur	33	1540	46.7
Yadagiri	23	1228	53.4
<i>Note: Table based on raw data from Samagra Shikshana</i>			

Buoyed by the demand, there is positive energy among the key stakeholders. In several schools, teachers have designed creative display materials to make the classroom environment print-rich and in many of these schools, one would find students reciting several rhymes in English with actions and few are also able to explain the meaning of rhymes. The one thing we see in common is the excitement that the children have on the idea of them learning English.

All this has been witnessed within the first quarter of the launch of the English medium sections which indicates the excitement it has created and the robustness with which the program is implemented. A girl child in a Bangalore school asked us this question with all her seriousness: ‘What will happen next year when I go to class 2? It doesn’t have an English section in my school!’.

Amidst the positive stories, there are quite a few challenges. The most critical challenge is to make sure that English as a subject is taught very well in the Kannada medium as well. This would then give the parent a good choice, without compromising on the opportunity that English brings. Going forward, other creative bilingual approaches as suggested in NEP 2019 could also be tried wherein some subjects with lots of English terminologies such as the Sciences are taught bilingually even in Kannada medium sections.

This would make education in the government schools a truly enriching one allowing the children to have a good grasp over multiple languages as well as have conceptual clarity. Once the quality of teaching in all mediums of instructions are at par and both English and Kannada are taught well as languages, it will enable the parents and children to make a choice based on equally viable options thereby making the medium of instruction a non-issue.

Aanchal Chomal and Rishikesh B S are faculty at Azim Premji University and deeply engaged in research on topical educational issues.

The views expressed above are the author's own. They do not necessarily reflect the views of DH.

Sonia targets PM Modi at Congress' Chintan Shivir...

Northwest India dry amid 78% less pre-monsoon showers...

DK Shivakumar, MB Patil call truce in Udaipur...

No medical bail but pvt hospital treatment for Malik...

Sonia agrees change within Congress 'need of the hour'...

3 IAF officers get life term for custodial killing...
