

Impact of Teacher Training on Performance in English at the Primary Level

An Untold Story of West Bengal

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ABSTRACT

Continuous teachers' training and orientation is an important instrument for quality education at the primary level. This paper attempts to study the impact of teachers' training programme based on the experience in West Bengal. In West Bengal, a general consensus was developed on the necessity of imparting quality teaching learning of English at the primary level during the beginning of 21st century when English was reintroduced after a long gap of time. As a result, a convergent, coordinated and long-term continuous effort was made with respect to teachers' training in English. Based on the analysis of performance of the students in External Evaluation (EE) and Diagnostic Achievement Test (DAT) at the end of Classes II and III, respectively, conducted by West Bengal Board of Primary Education (WBBPE), it was observed that only due to the massive training programme, the performance of the students was comparatively better in English as compared to all other subjects.

Keywords: *External Evaluation (EE), Diagnostic Achievement Test (DAT), West Bengal Board of Primary Education (WBBPE), Minimum Level of Learning (MLL).*

Background of the Study

Free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14 years was the Constitutional commitment in India (Article 45). At the time of the adoption of the Constitution in 1950, the aim was to achieve the goal of Universalisation of Elementary

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Education (UEE) within the next 10 years, i.e., by 1960. Keeping in view the educational facilities available in the country at that time, the goal was far too ambitious to be achieved within a short span of 10 years. To facilitate the achievement of UEE goal, the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA) and many other institutions were set up in the 1960s as the research, training and resource centres.

Various education commissions had emphasised the importance of teachers' role and their proper training to equip them with basic skills of teaching. The Kothari Commission (1964), National Commission on Teachers (1985) and both the National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986 and the Programme of Action (POA), 1992, emphasised the importance of teachers' education.

The scheme to strengthen teachers' education by establishing quality training institutions such as, the District Institutes of Education and Training (DIET) was initiated in 1987. The scheme proposed to create viable institutional, academic and technical resource base for orientations, training and continuous up-gradation of knowledge, competence and pedagogical skills of school teachers in the country.

Along with the pre-service training, in-service teacher training at the primary level plays a crucial role, particularly in terms of quality. As a profession, teaching is the most dynamic than any other profession in the world. Every teacher needs to be updated, well informed and become fully conversant with the latest pedagogy in keeping with the changes in social and economic life. As the human society is changing, the psychological world of the successive generations will inevitably be changing. To make teaching-learning effective in accordance with the everchanging situation teachers should gather contemporary knowledge and developments in and around the world. Teachers should get themselves apprised about this either through self learning or through external inputs. With this objective to empower the teachers at the local level, Cluster Level Resource Centres (CLRCs) and Circle Level Resource Centres (CRCs) were proposed to be established during late 1980s and which came into existence across the country in the subsequent periods.

In-service teacher training was always present in the system of education at every level since long. But the systematic inclusion of in-service teacher training at the school level was first introduced in an organised manner with the introduction of the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) and the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA)

programmes at the national level. In the programmes of in-service teachers training, teachers are empowered through training, workshops and orientation programmes in different areas. In SSA, a 20-day teacher training programme was made mandatory for all primary school teachers across India.

A New Era of Primary Education in West Bengal

Following the recommendations of Professor H.B. Majumdar in 1974, teaching-learning of English at the primary level (Class I to Class V) was discontinued from the Academic Session 1983–84 in West Bengal. Conceded by the huge public demand and mobilisation for reintroduction of English at the primary level, Government of West Bengal reintroduced it from Class V only, following the recommendation of the Ashok Mitra Commission, 1992. Again on the basis of the recommendations by Professor Pabitra Sarkar Committee, September, 1998, English as Second Language was formally introduced from Class III with exposure of familiar words and rhymes to the learners in Class II in their second semester during the academic session of 1999–2000. Finally, under the direction of Government of West Bengal, English was introduced from Class I beginning 2004.

It was perceived by most of the Bengalis that the abolition of English at the primary level had driven back the prospects of their children, in terms of competition, at the all India level due to lack of adequate knowledge in English— one of the most important link languages in India. Recognising the grievance of general public, the Government of West Bengal decided to restart the teaching-learning of English. Plan of actions was prepared just after the introduction of English in Class I in 2004. All the stake holders were asked to converge on this agenda and work in a coordinated manner. All the activities and programmes related to teaching-learning of English by different organisations like District Primary School Councils (DPSC), West Bengal Board of Primary Education (WBBPE), SSA, State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT), West Bengal, Institute of English, West Bengal, School Education Directorate, School Education Department and various other NGOs came under a single umbrella, and the effort was led by the British Council, India division. The WBBPE was entrusted as the nodal agency for all these activities. Under the invitation of Government of West Bengal, the international consultant of British Council Dr Gorge Raymond Macay came in 2005 as a part of the development programme of teaching English at the primary level.

After extensive field survey, Dr Macay first suggested for renewal of all English textbooks for Class I–V. For composing the new textbooks he selected 25 people from amongst primary school teachers to university teachers across the State. There was a paradigm shift in the methodology of teaching-learning in English at the primary level under the leadership of Dr Macay. Books were prepared following the new methodology, i.e., importance was given to the acquisition of procedural knowledge along with the propositional knowledge. Side-by-side he also started huge orientation programmes for all the teachers and administrators, people's representatives and guardians to apprise them about the new methodology. After the appraisal programmes he started teacher training programmes. Dr Macay, prepared a team of 40 resource persons selected from Universities, Colleges, Secondary Schools, and Primary Schools who were to act as the Master Resource Persons (MRP) to conduct the teacher orientation programme in all the districts. In the presence of Dr Macay, these MRPs visited each and every district several times to prepare 200 District Resource Persons (DRP) per district in four to five phases. These DRPs were entrusted to conduct training programmes at the grass root level. Four to five MRPs were entrusted to oversee the entire training programmes at the district level. Continuous communication among the MRPs, DRPs and general primary teachers mainly from the remotest corner of the state with Dr Macay created a wave of enthusiasm with deep-rooted emotional involvement. Unlike other teacher training programmes, this programme lasted not for a single session but continued for several years till 2011 which was initiated first in 2005.

Dr Macay spent at least six months per year during this period along with this teacher training programme mainly on how to transact the new textbooks with the new methodology, WBBPE started another programme led by another British Council expert Mr Adrien to orient the teachers about how to conduct CCE on English following the new methodology.

The External Evaluation (EE) and Diagnostic Achievement Test (DAT)

In West Bengal, the policy of 'no detention along with CCE' was introduced and English was abolished at the primary level from the 1983–84 sessions. In order to understand the achievement of the students under the new system of teaching-learning, continued for a decade and a half, the Government of West Bengal felt the

urgency to assess how the students were responding and a system of performance assessment became necessary. Thereafter, the Government of West Bengal introduced 'External Evaluation (EE)' at the end of the session for Class II from 1998, and Diagnostic Achievement Test (DAT) at the end of Class IV in the session 2005–06. DAT was introduced to understand the achievements and weaknesses of the students in learning at the terminal level of primary education. Since, the objective of the DAT was to detect the weaknesses of the students and to impart appropriate remedial measures, it was shifted to Class III from the year 2007 as there was no scope of imparting remedial measures, since in most cases Class V is adjacent to either any secondary or higher secondary schools which are devoid of any data regarding the strength and weaknesses of the new students admitted in Class V. Both the EE and DAT were implemented by WBBPE, the autonomous body responsible to control and supervise all the sectors of primary education in West Bengal. WBBPE centrally prepared the questions and instructions for the evaluation and the teachers of the concerned schools evaluated the answer scripts. The performance was assessed out of 50 marks in total for each of the First Language, English and Arithmetic, the subjects taught in Class II and that of First Language, English, Arithmetic, History, Geography and Natural Science in Class IV and III. The assessment was made in terms of the percentage of students acquiring different marks/grade in the range of 0–9, 10–19, 20–29, 30–39, 40–49, and 50, i.e., a 6-point grading system. Both the EE and DAT continued till 2011.

'Teaching English Project' at the primary level in West Bengal probably, was the single largest programme of this kind in India. It was a unique programme in the sense that all the stakeholders converged on the same common goal. Funds from different sources, i.e., SSA, State Allocation and contribution from NGOs and international organisations like the British Council converged on this single programme to promote teaching-learning in English at the primary level in West Bengal. But unfortunately this enthusiastic and highly ambitious project is still unevaluated. Neither any departmental or administrative evaluation nor any academic discourse has been conducted on this project which is huge in terms of participation, coverage, time span, and cost.

Objectives and Research Questions

The objective of the study was to evaluate the Teaching English Project at the primary level in West Bengal based on the performance of the students who have appeared in the centrally conducted evaluations—

- (i) External Evaluation (EE)
- (ii) Diagnostic Achievement Test (DAT)

In this study, First Language, English and Arithmetic from DAT were considered for exact comparison with EE performance.

The performance of the students who appeared for EE and DAT are assessed on the basis of the Minimum Level of Learning (MLL). Considering the reality of the State, the Government of West Bengal fixed up the MLL as— all students should acquire at least 60 per cent of marks in any evaluation in quantitative terms (WBBPE, 2004).

This kind of performance analysis based on the evaluation, conducted by the WBBPE, a state academic authority is a unique attempt to understand the reality.

With the above stated objective, following research questions were framed to understand the impact of Teaching English Project in terms of the performance of the students in EE and DAT:

- What is the comparative performance of the students in English in EE and DAT?
- What is the comparative trend in performance of the students in English during the period of the study?

Research Methodology

Period of Study

EE was introduced in 1998 and continued till 2011. DAT at the end of Class IV was held for only one year, 2006 and at the end of Class III during the period 2007 to 2011. Since, the WBBPE introduced a uniform 6-point grading system to evaluate the students in both EE and DAT from 2007 which continued till 2011, the period of the present analysis in both EE and DAT was therefore 2007 to 2011. DAT was held in six subjects Bengali, English, Arithmetic, History, Geography and Natural Science but the present subject-wise comparative analysis considered only three subjects Bengali, English and Arithmetic in keeping with EE.

Sample Design

The present study about the analysis of primary education in West Bengal was mainly based on secondary data. The population of the study was the entire set of all the government-aided schools in West Bengal, which were approximately 49,981 in number.

School-wise performance data for all the government-aided schools which had participated in the evaluation process during the period from 2007 to 2011 were collected from all the districts in West Bengal. Then the sample of schools were selected randomly from the schools in each district in West Bengal for the study.

For a comprehensive study of the performance of the students in terms of their achievements of marks in different subjects, approximately 6 per cent of the population (i.e., total number of schools), was selected from different districts in West Bengal in each year for the period from 2007–11 for both EE and DAT, respectively.

Data Sources

In the present study, data are mainly collected from the WBBPE, DPSCs, School Education Department, Government of West Bengal and the School Education Directorate, Government of West Bengal.

Findings

Class II

This study was based on the performance of students from only the government-aided primary schools in West Bengal. According to the official data, there are 49,913 government-aided primary schools in West Bengal. Since, there was no detention at the primary level, therefore, participation in EE which is basically a written examination conducted by the external central agency was not mandatory either to the students or to school itself. However, most of the schools responded to the call of the Government of West Bengal and participated in EE throughout the period. But in no year all the schools in West Bengal participated in DAT rather the participation varied between 40,000 to 49,000. A substantial number of schools participated for several years but not in all the years during the period 1998 to 2011. Due to this variation in participating schools, there was also a variation in participation of the students ranging from 13,50,000 to 18,25,000, approximately.

The overall subject-wise performance of all the students of 2,898 (approximately 6 per cent of the total population) number of schools, those participated in EE in all the years from 2007 to

2011 is presented in the Figure 1. The percentage of students who acquired different grades on the 6-point grading system have been represented along the vertical axis and the 6-point grades have been shown along the horizontal axis.

Considering the proportion of students who acquired different grades it is observed from Figure 1 that among the three subjects—First Language, English and Arithmetic, overall performance of the students was best in English.

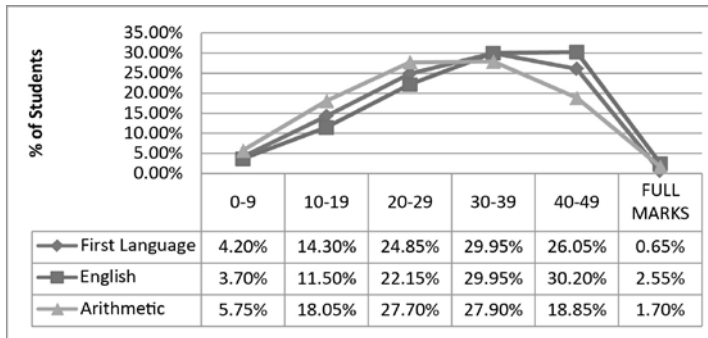


Figure 1: Subject-wise performance of students

In terms of MLL, comparative performance in English was best among all the three subjects. In Arithmetic overall 48.5 per cent students acquired MLL, i.e., at least 60 per cent marks in EE during the period 2007–11. In the First Language 56.65 per cent students acquired MLL, i.e., at least 60 per cent marks and in English the figure is 62.7 per cent. It is amazing that the performance of the students in English was better than that in their vernacular language.

Trend in performance of the students in First Language over the period in terms of MLL in EE is shown in Figure 2 and that for Arithmetic and English are shown in Figure 3 and 4, respectively.

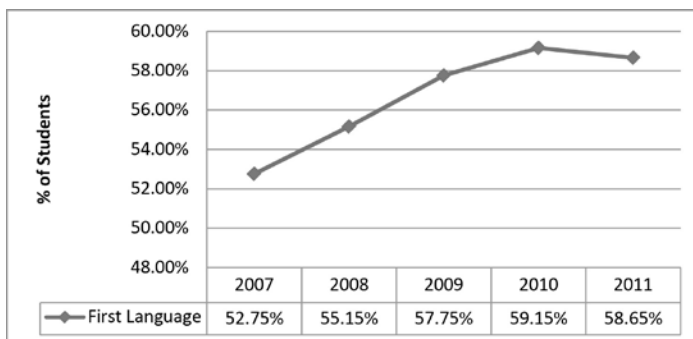


Figure 2: Performance of students in first language

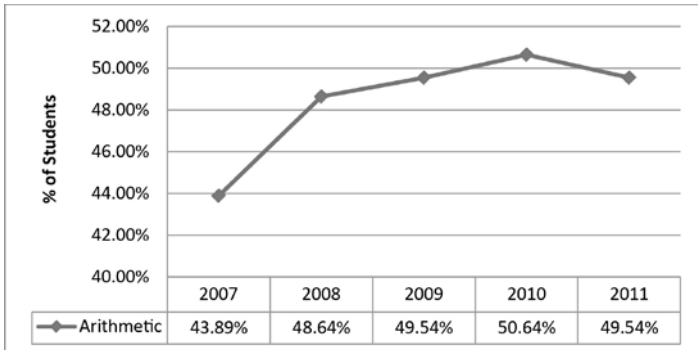


Figure 3: Performance of students in Arithmetic

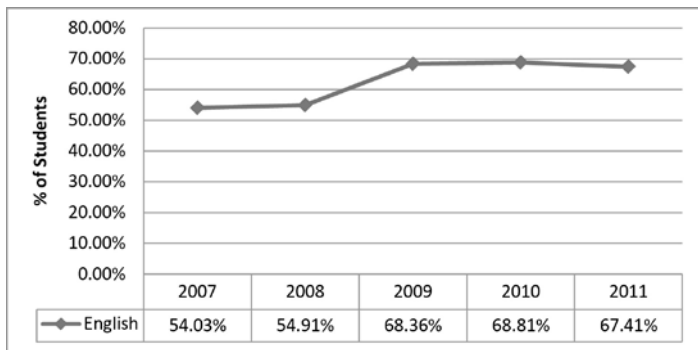


Figure 4: Performance of students in English

From the trend analysis it is observed that comparative performance of the students in English was better than the other two subjects during the years from 2007 to 2011 in terms of MLL.

Class III

Like EE, there were variations in terms of both participating schools as well as students in DAT during the period 2007–11. Number of participating schools varied from 45,500 to more than 48,000 in different years and the number of participating students differed in different years ranging from 13,60,000 to 14,90,000. The performance analysis in DAT was based on the marks obtained by the students from 2,093 (approximately 6 per cent of the total population) number of common schools which participated in each year in DAT from 2007–11.

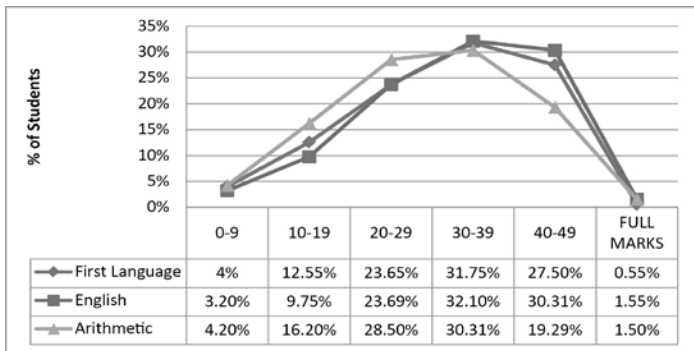


Figure 5: Relative performance in DAT in different subjects

Figure 5 reveals that the overall performance of the students in DAT was again best in English among all the three subjects as comparatively higher percentage of students acquired higher marks grades in it. Overall 51.1 per cent of total students acquired MLL in Arithmetic, during the period 2007–11. In First Language the figure was 59.8 per cent and in English it was 63.96 per cent.

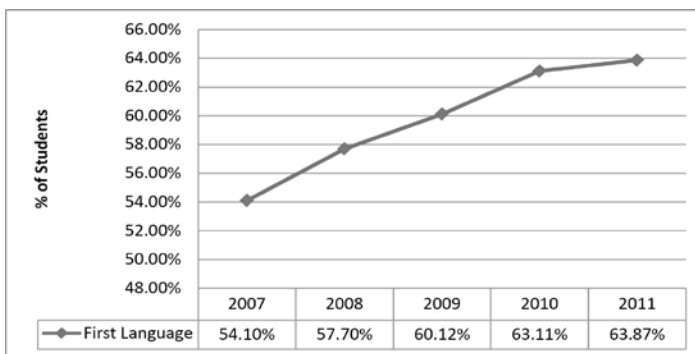


Figure 6: Performance of students in first language

The year wise performance of the students in First Language in terms of MLL, is shown in Figure 6 and that for Arithmetic and English are shown in Figure 7 and 8, respectively.

It is observed from Figure 6, 7 and 8 that there exists a clear trend of development in the performance of the students in DAT in both First Language and English during the period 2007–11. But the same development is not observed for Arithmetic. However, in all the years the performance of the students in English was better than the other two subjects in terms of MLL.

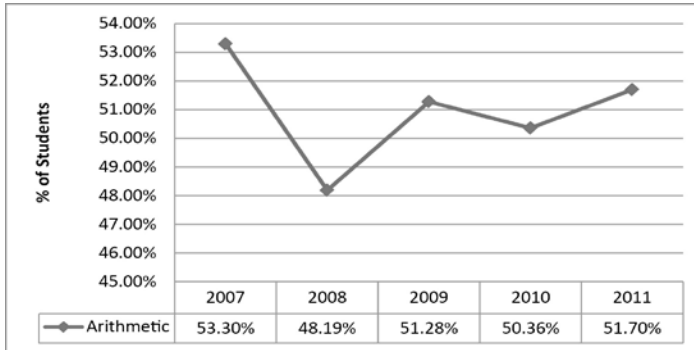


Figure 7: Performance of students in Arithmetic

Conclusion and Policy Prescription

From the subject-wise comparative analysis of the performance of students in EE and DAT, it is concluded that students' performance is best in English among the three subjects First Language, Arithmetic and English in West Bengal. This could be attributed to the massive teacher training programme during a long period of time.

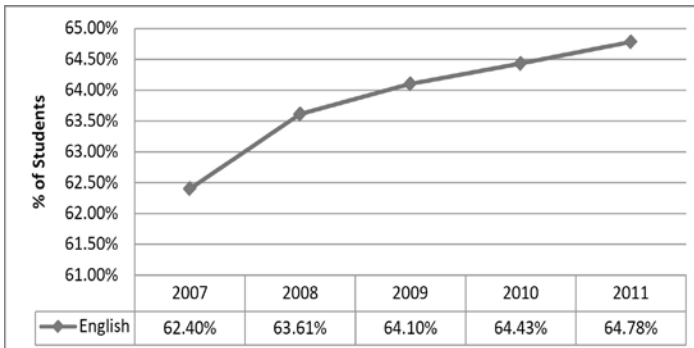


Figure 8: Performance of students in English

In-service teacher training programme is imperative for better performance of students. There are three aspects of UEE — universal access, universal retention and universal achievement. The third goal is very much important and is a cause of concern for all the policy makers and administrators which is reflected in the report of the 12th Five Year Plan by the Planning Commission of India. Lots of development has taken place in respect of universal access and universal retention in primary education in India but

still there are a lot many things to be done in respect of quality of primary education. Organised long-term in-service teacher training programme involving all the stakeholders may be prescribed in this regard.

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