Abstract

The study is an attempt at theorising ESL by using insights from curriculum studies. It perceives curriculum as social phenomenon characterised by interplay of three majors factors: the context, the content and the participants. The rationale for broadening the scope is justified by the need to look beyond the Applied Linguistics framework for conceptualising ESL. It is posited that, the educational perspective evolved by adopting the curriculum studies approach, would facilitate a holistic understanding of micro and macro level issues in ESL. Here, micro level issues refer to the syllabus specific concerns and macro level issues refer to the broad educational concerns emerging from the social, political, historical and cultural factors.

The framework of the study is eclectic in nature as it combines the practical and emancipatory orientations to curriculum theorising in order to achieve the twin goals of understanding and critically reflecting on the curriculum issues. Such an endeavour at studying the curriculum is aimed at producing a critique by adopting ethnographic methods. In the present study, a critique is interpreted as an intensive study carried out with the intention of producing holistic curricular knowledge.
The framework for conducting the empirical inquiry is guided by research methods such as ethnography, critical ethnography and critical social inquiry as adopted from the naturalistic paradigm. Here, the objectives of understanding and critically reflecting are realised using various qualitative tools such as participant observation, unstructured questionnaire, interviews and discussions. The research outcome using these tools is presented in the form of a thick description of the curricular experiences. The scheme for data analysis is based on identification of curricular themes and describing them thickly. This is presented in the form of reconstruction of the curricular site at three levels: micro, macro and critical.

Chapter one introduces the study by explaining the background to the study, its relevance, scope and limitations. It states two main points that prompted the researcher to take up the study: one, the need to broaden the scope of ESL by incorporating insights from disciplines like Education and Curriculum Studies and two, produce critical curricular knowledge by understanding the curricular site and the role played by teachers and learners in curriculum decision-making. The choice of autonomous college is also justified in this chapter. Besides, the chapter
also provides an overview of the research methodology and describes the role of the researcher in operationalising the study.

Chapter two is essentially conceptual in nature. It makes an attempt at composing the backdrop for the study by discussing critical concepts like syllabus and curriculum in ESL. Here, the argument centres on the need to look beyond syllabus-specific (micro level) concerns to larger aspects of curriculum studies (macro level concerns) in order to theorise ESL differently. It defines curriculum as a social phenomenon characterised by interplay of three majors factors: the context, the content and the participants. It also states that curriculum provides the environment for providing learning experiences with teachers and learners as key stakeholders in the process.

This chapter also introduces the three orientations to curriculum theorising: technical, practical and emancipatory, by suggesting an eclectic approach for the study that encompasses practical and emancipatory notions of understanding and critical reflection. This is followed by a discussion of ESL related issues under each of these orientations in order to highlight a different set of issues that emerge from the curriculum studies perspective. The research plan that is presented
towards the end of this chapter provides an overview of the goals, research methodology and outcome of the study.

Chapter three sets out to describe the framework for curriculum theorising by explaining the research methods and tools adopted for the study. It begins by interpreting curriculum research as defined in the study and then moves on to delineating various aspects of naturalistic paradigm, within which the study is located. Later, concepts like ethnography, critical ethnography and critical social inquiry, that constitute the eclectic framework, are explained and the relevance of these methods is also established in this chapter. Moreover, as an effort at introducing the scope of ethnography as a research method and to quote some exemplary studies in the area of ESL curriculum, this chapter includes a section on review of related research. In effect, this section is intended to serve as a precursor to the presentation of the fieldwork, by giving an idea as to how the present study could get shaped as it gets operationalised on the site. This chapter closes with a description of some important features of the fieldwork.

Chapter four renders an account of the fieldwork through an ethnographic reconstruction of curricular issues at the micro level. This
Chapter five presents a reconstruction of the curricular site at the macro level by studying various sociohistorical factors that could affect the ESL curriculum at the local level, signified by the autonomous college. Here, the objective is to bring out the importance of the historical and political factors in understand the present context. The account is based on a study of primary documents and other relevant data related to major developments in the field of ESL curriculum in India. The need to historicize the curriculum is discussed in terms of objectives of teaching English in pre- and post-independence India. Besides, the issues involved
in the process of institutionalising ESL are also examined. This is followed by a description of sample macro level interpretation of micro level curricular themes identified in the previous chapter.

Chapter six presents the findings of the study by providing an account of critical reconstruction of the curricular site. In order to critically reflect on the curricular themes, it places the micro level issues within the macro level and reconceptualises the issues. Here, an attempt is made at exploring the potential for empowerment and emancipation for teachers and learners by bringing out the underlying assumptions and hidden messages of an autonomous context. The scheme for presenting the analysis is organised in the form of the context, the content and the participants. The chapter closes with suggestions for further research.