CHAPTER III

THE CONCEPT OF STANDARDS IN ENGLISH

Fall of educational standards - Standards in English - Measurement of standards - Causes for the deterioration of standards in English - Concept of standards.
The term 'standard' means a "basis of measurement" or "a definite level or excellence or adequacy required, aimed at or possible."¹ It is sometimes used to show the average measure of actual attainment and other times to denote the goal of achievement. The Dictionary of Education² refers to minimum standard as "formal statement of the lowest acceptable degree of excellence for various phases of the educational programme eg. the minimum standards that a local school unit must maintain in relation to buildings, equipment, curriculum etc."

In relation to school, 'standards' mean:

i. the criteria used in judging the quality of a school or of its programmes of studies, representing the judgment of a person or group making the appraisal and frequently the findings of objective tests and ratings;

ii. requirements for credit in courses taken or for graduation from school;

iii. goals or ideals of achievement accepted as worthy of attainment.³

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³ Ibid., p.387.
The concept of standard varies according to time and place. The aims of education have been different in India during the different periods. When the aims of education change, there is corresponding change in content too. The standard of achievement of pupils will, therefore, be in accordance with the content of education and the standard of education will depend upon the aim of education. With the change in the aim of education, a revision of the syllabus, and preparation of textbooks in accordance with the syllabus, become inevitable. The method of teaching and evaluation also must necessarily change accordingly.

Fall of educational standards

Educationists and others are concerned about the fall in standards. The Education Quarterly\(^4\) of March 1964 conducted a symposium on "Are our educational standards falling?" The eminent educationists who took part in the symposium were Hiren Mukerjee, A.E.T. Barrow, P.C. Goswami, P.N. Kirpal, Samuel Mathai, S.C. Sen, M.N. Kapoor and S. Bhattacharya. The consensus of opinion expressed by them shows that the term 'standard' in education is elastic, capable of many interpretations. It may have relevance to achievement in public examination, degree of physical fitness, level of moral integrity, intensity of faith in the value of life, quality of gentlemanliness and the like.

\(^4\) The Education Quarterly, "Are our educational standards falling?" - A Symposium, Vol.XVI, No.61, March 1964, pp.4-29.
There can, however, be no absolute standards in education, for education is dynamic, ever changing.

Hiren Mukerjee\(^5\) says:

Today's best is better than yesterday's best. One hears too often that the educational standards have fallen, but no systematic study of the matter has been made. Our youth should be educated through our own language. Then only they can imbibe knowledge. English should be an indispensable tool language for all higher studies and we must impart to education the scientific orientation. Let our best and most fearless thought be given to these tasks and the problem of standards would solve by itself.

A.E.T. Barrow\(^6\) is of opinion that our educational standard does not measure upto international standards. He suggests some remedial measures to attain and maintain high scholastic standards. He believes that fall in standard is due to change over from English to the regional languages. "Let us not for political reasons displace English and lower our scholastic standards and so threaten the very existence of our nation. The interest of the nation must not be sacrificed".

Prof. Samuel Mathai\(^7\) points out the two schools of thought in the field of education. One school says there is deterioration in educational standards and the other is of the opinion that our standards are rising. According to him

\(^5\) Ibid., pp.5-6.
\(^6\) Ibid., p.8.
\(^7\) Ibid., pp.11-14.
standard is a matter of opinion and it is based on both observed phenomenon or what might be called 'rumours'. The word standard is not used exactly; it is used interchangeably with achievement. When people say that standards are falling, what they mean is that the students of today achieve less than students of yesterday. He said that in certain senses the products at the first degree level of our universities are inferior to those of two or three decades ago, but in some other sense, our universities are doing a much more complex job at a higher level and are doing many things that were not done twenty or thirty years ago.

Prof. A.C. Deve Gowda in his presidential address at the eighth conference of the National Association of Teacher Educators held at Taradevi in June 1965 says:

After the attainment of independence and particularly during the past few years, we hear everybody talking about fall in standards and the need to maintain quality in education. There are some people who argue that if you look at education as a whole, there has been a rapid rise in standards and not a fall ... Our secondary schools are now catering to lakhs and lakhs of students who in the past could never dream of entering a high school. Most of them come from the middle and lower classes of society with an unfavourable home environment and a poor social heredity. The secondary school curriculum has also expanded considerably. It should however be admitted that standards in English are definitely lower than they were 15 to 20 years ago. But we cannot make an equally categorical statement regarding other subjects like Science and Mathematics.

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8 Report of the 8th Conference of the National Association of Teacher Educators held at Taradevi, 12-14 June 1965, pp.5-6.
T.S.Rao\textsuperscript{9} writes:

The children a few decades back belonged to a selected strata with long and rich cultural and educational backgrounds, and to economic sections which provided a study atmosphere in the houses for them. Naturally, the average standard of the children has fallen, but this is not to say that the bright boys and girls of today are in any way inferior to those of twenty or thirty years back.

He has also stated that there is dilution of content in English at all stages. According to him "the criteria of examination results cannot serve as a logically defensible measuring rod for educational standards".

Dr.S.Shridevi\textsuperscript{10} writes:

It is common knowledge that the quality of education is not at all up to the mark. The real problem that stares hard at us, in the field of education today is the lack of standards. The poor performance of students in the examination, the employer's dissatisfaction with their work, the assessment of teachers themselves indicate that all is not well with the quality of our education. The content and quality of subjects taught are not adequate for our present needs and future requirements. In fact, they compare unfavourably with the standards in other educationally advanced countries ... We don't want to be left behind in this space age.


\textsuperscript{10} Dr.S.Shridevi, "Standards in Education", Indian Association of Teacher Educators, Hyderabad, 1974, p.36. \textit{Souvenir XVII}, Annual Conference of the Indian Association of Teacher Educators, Nov.4th to 7th, 1974.
Some teachers say that a sickness has come over the study of English in the high schools. Pupils in the past could for all practical purposes communicate with teachers in English. The pupils of the present day have lost self-confidence and willingness to try to speak English. It is true that the former had this advantage over the latter, English was their medium of instruction. The present day pupils get very little chance to hear and use English and the time available today for teaching English in our schools is much more limited than it used to be.

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru\(^{11}\) has stated:

If we are going to keep up English we must try to keep up certain standards in English. It is a fact people tell me that standards in English have gone down considerabily in India. They are bound to go down as it ceases to be the medium of instruction. It is desirable to keep them up and the effort made here in this institute to keep them by teaching English is a basic one and an important one and I hope it will succeed.

Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad,\(^{12}\) Education Minister said:

So far as general studies are concerned it was never my intention to suggest that there should be any falling in the standard of education. English has today become one of the major languages of the world and Indians can neglect its study only at the risk of loss to themselves. I am convinced that in the future as well, the standard of English should be maintained at as high a level as possible.

\(^{11}\) Souvenir, Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages, Hyderabad, 1973, p.1.

The preface to the "Selections in English Prose and Verse" for the S.S.L.C. Examination, 1957-58 reads as follows:

This book of selections has been put together to provide pupils with a ladder up which they may climb to University standard. The prose, especially in the earlier lessons, has been simplified so as to bring it within the range of present day pupils. It may therefore appear very easy in comparison with the prose of the book compiled in 1951. Owing to falling standards in English, that prose has become too difficult for schools.

The following is an extract from the lesson 'changes' in the Kerala English Reader for Std.VIII, 1962.

Kerala is so thickly populated that many people cannot find land to cultivate or job to live on. Some of them try to find work outside Kerala though they cannot speak any language except their own. Though they say they have learnt English at school, they cannot write it properly or speak it at all. While the standard of living has been going up, the standard of English has been going down. Many people have been saying this during the last fifteen or twenty years. Now the Government has determined to pull up the standard. Pupils must learn English in a way that will be really useful to them. Otherwise it is no use to them or to anybody else at all. It is simply waste of time.

Prof. V.K. Gokak has expressed his views as follows:

... Indian, British and American experts are pooling their energies together to fight this menace of a fall of standards in English. No doubt, the problem needs a simultaneous attack on all levels, if it is to be solved satisfactorily. It seems to me that five cardinal ideas have to be adopted before any improvement can be registered on a nation-wide scale in this field.

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1. The discovery and implementation of a method of teaching in schools which is acceptable to the large majority of teachers of English in our rural schools and regional medium schools.

2. A genuine appreciation of the need to use literature for language teaching purposes and the adoption of new methods of teaching which makes this possible in colleges.

3. A clear distinction between the use of literature for language learning purposes and for humanistic purposes. English literature can no longer be used for humanistic purposes in our compulsory English classes without carefully choosing and simplifying the specimen passages that we wish to teach. We shall have to use our regional literature more and more for serving the humanistic purposes of education.

4. A clear realisation of and provision for the fact that learning a second language means acquiring skills and that this is a matter for tutorial work with pupils day by day, rather than for lecturing.

5. A genuine appreciation, on the part of all concerned, of the fact that our current test procedures are far from satisfactory and do not at all indicate student achievement. These procedures have to be radically revised if there is to be any progress.

Measurement of standards

Educational standard is judged according to the performance of pupils in the examination, in college or their profession. This judgment is usually made after comparing the present pupils to the pupils of the past. But pupils of a few decades ago belonged to a selected strata with cultural and educational background. But most of the pupils of today come from the middle and lower classes of society with unfavourable home environment. Hence it may not be fair to compare the
present pupils with those of the past. Standards are of two kinds, expected standards and the standards achieved. Expected standards at the secondary level can be obtained from a study of the syllabus, textbooks and examination papers. Regarding the textbooks, the Education Commission\textsuperscript{14} has stated:

Textbooks can indicate the standard of attainment far more precisely than any curricula or syllabi and their successful application in schools is the surest method to raise standards.

The standards of achievement in English in secondary education should be determined. The syllabus must show clearly in terms of vocabulary, structures etc. and the level of proficiency that pupils at a given stage are expected to attain, and suitable, quality textbooks should be prepared in accordance with the syllabus. Teachers must be aware of the level of attainment at the end of each of the six years of a planned course and adopt modern dynamic method in teaching English.

Causes for the deterioration of standards in English

There are various causes for the deterioration of standard in English. The following are the main causes:

1. The objectives of teaching English are not clear.
2. Uncertain attitudes to English since independence.
3. Unsuitable textbooks.

4. Poor method of instruction. The structural approach is little understood by teachers.

5. Use of translation method and poor English on the part of teachers.

6. Teachers are not given proper training.

7. Insufficiency of teaching aids, materials etc. The available audio-visual aids are not properly used.

8. Unmanageable size of classes.

9. Lack of oral practice in the class. Speech is neglected.

10. Pupils are passive listeners instead of being active participants.

11. Conditions are not conducive to good teaching and to good academic standard.

12. Pupils are not keen on learning and have no motivation to learn.

13. Different levels of perception among pupils.

14. Reading is neglected. Lack of incentives for extra reading. Inadequate library facilities.

15. Neglect of proper and systematic correction on the part of teacher.

16. The very dryness of our education scheme.

17. Lack of remedial teaching.

18. Defective system of evaluation.

19. Loss of a large number of working days.
**Concept of standards**

The enumeration of reasons for fall of standards in English reveals that both standards of attainment and achievement have gone down. Studies in the area show that standards of achievement have been the measures taken as indices. Qualitative and quantitative evaluation of the objectives of education and teaching of English and the provision of their implementation have not been studied extensively. Standards of achievement are related very closely to standards of attainment. Textbooks indicate standards of attainment and through an analysis of them, it becomes possible to measure concept of standards in English.