Multilingualism and Teaching Methods: A Study with the Reference of Indian English Language Teaching Classrooms

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Abstract

This paper analyses the issues and challenges of linguistically diverse English Language Teaching (ELT) classrooms in India. In India, the English language is not the first language; the majority of them speak Hindi or their state languages. Due to this concern, numerous questions are arising for teachers, such as (a) How many languages and which specific language should be used as a mode of classroom communication to convey the message/instruction effectively? (b) What should be the number of students in a particular class? and (c) Does the teacher have competency in the native language? Most of the local schools in Tribal areas do not teach in native or "Adivasi" language in ELT classrooms. Indian speaking now many languages, they are multilingual but for communicating, we have to speak in a single language. So, the question is arising for how to tackle with this multilingual classroom to teach the English language? This is a challenge for India in the twenty-first century. Thus, we need to have some ways to accept the challenge and to increase the level of students in India. This paper suggests some solutions to those challenges and seeks the answer to such problems to enhance the quality of multilingual in ELT classrooms.

Keywords: India, English Language Teaching, Multilingualism, Multi-Culture, Mother Tongue-Based Education, Linguistically Diverse Classroom

1. Introduction

An approach to multilingualism prepares one to present her/himself before the whole world in a more confident manner and makes you competent to face the challenges of the world. Here, multilingualism refers to an individual speaker who uses two or more languages or to a community of speakers where the use of more than one language is common. Consequently, there is a need to analyze what forces are there for our students to withdraw from "mother tongue-based education". There are several mother tongues "234 identifiable mother tongues" (Census of India, 2001) in India. In India, regarding primary level education, we all accept the significance of "mother tongue-based education," where the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) plans to promote our mother language.

However, according to the survey reports of various organizations, they are showing a different phase of it. The questions arise for multilingual speakers, how to tackle English language teaching? Having 234 mother tongues, can we expect our teachers to be ready to communicate in any one of these tongues? Mohanty (2006, pp. 262−263) describes multilingualism in India as being the "grass-root level" with the use of two or more languages in the daily lives of individuals.

Linguistic diversity is the 'hallmark of India' (Bhatia, and Ritchie, 2004, p. 794). But Indian multilingualism goes beyond a simple diversity of numbers who, in themselves, are pretty overwhelming. There are 1652 mother tongues (Census of India, 2001) and much larger numbers of dialects. These have been classified into 300 to 400 languages (five language families). There are constitutionally recognized official languages (Constitution of India, VIII schedule, after the 100th Constitutional Amendment, Dec. 2003) along with English (the associate official language). Teaching in such multicultural and multilingual ELT classrooms by using a single and specific language as a medium of instruction has adversity for teachers to teach English. Without caring about the background of language (of the students) has been a long-lasting problem for teachers for long years.

A teacher teaching English in ELT classrooms in a multilingual setting should use a multilingual pedagogy to build on his/her awareness of the language. The language has been used by her/his pupils as their first language. Based on the teacher's awareness of the languages used by her pupils, a set of multilingual strategies should be developed to nurture the linguistic competence of the pupils in their first language as well as the target language.

The multilingual environment of the classrooms is seen more as an obstruction than support in ELT classrooms. Especially, when English is taught as a second language, even though (NCF) 2005, the Right to Education Act 2009 and even (UNESCO), stress the need of using more than one language for classroom instruction and the use of mother tongue wherever the learners find difficult to comprehend or fall short of expressing views in the target language. Multilingualism arises due to the need for communication across a speech community. It is not a rare but a common necessity across the world due to globalization and wider cultural communication.

Multilingualism has various advantages, as shown below into the points:
1. Accessibility to the knowledge of other culture
2. Communication between different linguistic and cultural groups becomes easier
3. Increasing job opportunities
4. High cognitive development of a child
5. A broader worldview, etc.

Multilingualism has not always been evaluated in terms of its advantages. There are two aspects of it, one is positive whereas another is negative. In the dominant monolingual countries, two languages are considered a nuisance (as its acquisition is considered a load and for some, it is an asset), three languages as uneconomic and many languages as absurd. In India, the case is the same, that is why there is division among the states based on the dominance of regional languages. This idea can be seen in the writings of Fishman.

Linguistically homogeneous polities are usually economically more developed, educationally more advanced, politically more modernized and ideologically−politically more tranquil and stable. They more frequently reveal the orderly, libertarian and secular form of interest, articulation and aggregation, greater division of governmental power and less attraction towards personalism and charisma (Patanayak, 1961, p. XVI).

Multilingualism is considered a hindrance or obstacle in the way of development. This view refers to westerns and is largely associated with the notion of 'One language, one nation!'

There are others who look at multilingualism as a "resource" for linguistic, social and advanced cognitive development. Edward Said quotes: "Knowledge of languages is the doorway to wisdom." Several studies have convincingly demonstrated that bi/multilingual children can perform better than monolingual. Indian writers have to ensure that the "ambiance of languages" in which they live do not become a curse but a blessing said Sahitya Academy President… By "ambiance of languages" he meant that no Indian had one single language. He says, "We speak one language of the street, another of the prominence, besides the language of communication." This is the unique quality of India where they have so many languages and those languages support the student to learn and enjoy many languages.

2. Multilingualism in ELT Classrooms

Indian classrooms are multilingual, multicultural, multi-religious and multiethnic languages are used as mutually supportive and to complement one another. The Indian education system is truly multilingual in its character. English "can be seen as a factor in the creation of multilingualism today" (Tessmer, 1998, p. 2). Students who study English as a foreign language often already speak two or more languages. Knowing more than one language is a necessity for many people worldwide whether it is because their parents come from different language backgrounds. After all, their home, regional, national or school language are different. Also, there are varieties of other reasons. For example, the student from 4th standard, his father is from South, Karnataka part who knows Kannada and functional Hindi whereas his/her mother is from Maharashtra, she speaks Marathi and Hindi. So, the student acquires three languages–Kannada, Marathi and Hindi. Though, it is not limited; there is also a possibility to learn other native languages.

As per the census report of 2001, the number of languages specified in the 8th schedule is 22. The report has also identified 122 languages and 234 mother tongues. Even if we overlook the politics of defining the status of language, the

criterion census has fixed to exclude a good number of languages under the category of others. Identified with such a linguistic diversity of our society, the Kothari Commission recommended 'The three languages formula':

1. Language: The mother tongue or the regional language.
2. Language: The official language of the union.

Or

The Associate official language as long as it exists.

3. Language: A modern Indian or foreign language (not covered under I and II and other than the medium of education).

From the above, these three language formulas widely in the country aims at developing and strengthening the multilingual character of an educational system as well as in ELT classrooms. While linguistically diverse classrooms give chance students to enhance their vocabulary in other languages. The classrooms are preparing them not only to communicate easily in their local language but also in a global scenario with foreign languages such as Chinese, Japanese, Bhasa Malay, Filipino and others. Research states that children who speak more than one language have more metalinguistic awareness; they are better at problem-solving; demonstrate greater creativity, perform better in school overall and express more tolerant attitudes towards others as compared to monolingual children. It elucidates how children acquire language and give reason to promote multilingualism, especially in a heterogeneous country like India. There are advantages to being multilingual.

3. Issues and Challenges Regarding Multilingualism in ELT Classrooms

"The variety and diverse numbers of Indian languages are in itself a challenge. Indian multilingualism is huge in size, having 1620 mother tongues reduced to 200 languages…with the population of many of minorities larger than European countries" (Annamalai, 2001).

It is accepted at the school level children come from diverse cultural, social and educational backgrounds, as well as their cognitive ability which differs regarding time and space. Among such diversity, there is always a challenge−Before our teachers, educationists and planners for deciding which language should be taught and which should not? Which language should be the mode of instruction? How many languages should be taught to a student? What should be our planning about language teaching at different levels of schooling? The implementations are suggested as follow.

3.1. Three Languages Formula

As far as the three languages formula is concerned, there are many problems in the implementation of it because there is no reference to the mother tongue or home language in the formula. There is no reference to classical languages and foreign languages. For example, in Tamilnadu, teachers teach only Tamil and English and in Gujarat, they follow it with Gujarati and Hindi. Many Hindi states substitute Sanskrit, a classical language, for a modern Indian language. With the expanded version of the eighth schedule of the constitution, more languages are added to the mix but there is hardly any improvement in the situation.

3.2. Language for Teaching Subject

Teaching language as a subject and using language for providing instructions in the classroom are two different perspectives. However, we learn a language or not at higher education, it is up to our own choice. But as a medium of instruction, we have to always cope with one or more languages. There should be uniformity between teachers' language and the same should be in every student. At primary education, we all admit the significance of "mother tongue-based education". But the question remains, as, besides local areas, are all the students having same mother tongue in metropolitan cities? Furthermore, there are 234 identifiable mother tongues (Census 2001), are our teachers competent enough to teach in any of these tongues?

3.3. Tribal Areas and Language Problems

The situation gets critical if we discuss and analyze the medium of instruction in tribal areas. The children from tribal areas suffer due to the language heterogeneity in the school because they have their own culture, language, tradition and religion. They can't connect themselves in a specific language sphere. On the one hand, our tribes are in a fix to remain with their culture and ethnicity or to move ahead with the globalized education system. On the other hand, our teachers are also in the same dilemma to make available our tribes in their cultural and ethnic group or to take them out of their world for competing in this globalized scenario. Possibly, the teacher may feel to build a mid-track which enables them to go ahead having their own cultural values. But the question is that are our teachers getting proper training in tribal languages? If not, then how can we expect them to have such a proficiency which makes them able to cope with the tribes? As we are getting teacher training in only some of the dominant languages like Hindi and English.

3.4. The Role of Teacher's Education

Roshan Morve and Mostafa Majid Abbas quote, "Education can be considered a lifelong learning process. In other words, learning begins when a person is born and ends with the death of such a person. Among other things, education entails being literate, encapsulated in the capacity to read and write. Also, education inculcates desirable human traits like honesty, sincerity, hard work, punctuality, productivity, innovation, patriotism, selflessness, etc." What is going on in our classrooms is much more dependent upon how we prepare our prospective teachers. Teacher education has a dominant role in the whole education system.

If the teacher's training is done, keep the multicultural and multilingual visions in our mind. Neither the teacher nor the students may face hindrances regarding the multilingual approach. Generally, the teachers are trained in some of the

dominant languages and appointed as a teacher in any of the schools of our country. How can we expect these teachers to follow the three languages formula and to promote multilingualism? What if they are not skilled with the particular mother tongue?

Besides these issues, there is always a question in the classrooms-Are we taking multilingualism positively or not? The issue is not about the acceptance of multilingualism but the approach and handling of a linguistically diverse classroom? Harmonizing with the research that state as the children who speak more than one language have more metalinguistic awareness. They are better at problem-solving, demonstrate greater creativity, perform better in school and express more tolerant attitudes towards others as compared to monolingual children. We may better understand the need to promote multilingualism. It elucidates how children acquire language and give reason to promote multilingualism, especially in a heterogeneous country like India. We have the challenge to mutilate the existing prejudices and misconceptions about racial and ethnic groups.

4. Suggestions to Enhance Multilingualism in ELT Classrooms

In such a diverse country like India at one hand, it is not enough to cope with the three Languages' Formulas. Other hand, it is not easy to accomplish more than three languages at one time. Therefore, we need to promote multilingualism by following some different methods, e.g., central schools like Kendriya Vishva Vidyala School and Navodaya Vidyalayas have practiced transferring their northern region teachers to the southern region and so on. It is also noteworthy that before appointment in a different region, the teachers should be given mother tongue or regional language training. Whatever may be the medium of instruction to be used by the teachers in the classroom, e.g., a Hindi-speaking teacher should be given at least one month of Tamil language training before appointing in Tamilnadu. However, the teacher is getting appointed in an English medium school. As far as the medium of instruction is concerned, we can't expect our teachers to be trained in all the mother tongues. Therefore, pre-job language training may enhance our teachers' quality.

Tribal languages are facing much crisis, on the one hand, there are not efficient teachers regarding tribes and on the other hand, till today, we have not assured the tribes about the practicality of their culture, language and ethnicity. So, it is a need of the present scenario to deconstruct the prejudices regarding tribes themselves and their heritage and consequently to promote them. Ex: we should not always present the tribal group as performing their folks in the pictures. The curriculum Framework should assure about the utility of tribal languages and cultures. Only then we would be able to seal the existing gap between tribes and the modern world.

Curriculum plays a significant role in enhancing multiculturalism and multilingualism. As per our suggestion is concerned, there should be 80% common curriculum and 20% curriculum should be based on cultural and linguistic differences. Because a single curriculum can't get a promotion in our diverse country, as well as several curriculums, does not promote unity in diversity.

We should make some amendments regarding teacher education. As per two years B.Ed. program is concerned, the prospective teachers have gotten more time for practice teaching. Therefore, they should be trained by using at least two mediums of instruction at different times at the place of a single medium, either in different schools or in the same school.

Besides, the teachers should use some strategies that can assure our students not to consider multilingualism as a hindrance but to promote multilingualism. Not only knowing the linguistic diversity of the students and handling them properly but also deconstructing the prejudices regarding local languages and promoting linguistic diversity is the accountability of a teacher.

Acknowledgments

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