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## **Multilingual perspective of English language teaching**

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## Abstract

India is a country with diverse cultures and many languages, so it does not suit for monolingual methods. Some languages have their own alphabets, others do not. In such a difficult situation, Indian students must receive proper edification in their natal language and need to acquire the target language, here English proficiency that is the need of an hour. The Indian education system has undergone voluminous changes. Multilingualism in English classes has become the order of the day. Students with different cultural backgrounds and different native languages should teach English using their native language to familiarize students with English. It's time for teachers to get creative and explore ways to make teaching and learning in the bilingual/multilingual English classroom interesting and effective. This paper reflects the obstacles of teaching English in multilingual classrooms, the benefits of multilingualism, and innovative ways to integrate English into multilingual classrooms for more effective teaching.

**Key words:** - Multilingualism, Mother tongue, curriculum, cultural diversity, pedagogy.

## Introduction

India is a nation with distinct cultures and a multitude of languages. As per 1961 census, India has more than 1652 mother tongues, genetically belonging to five different languages families. With so many languages, multilingualism became its chief pillar. According to Liwei, "Language is a human faculty, it coevolves with us." Monolingualism is a phenomenon that cannot be implemented in India. English from a long time before independence has been coexisting with all the indigenous languages of India. And in present scenario where the entire world has entered into a mode of globalization, bilingualism/ multilingualism has become a novice normal a way of learning and India cannot be left untouched by this novel normal.

## Issues for exploration:

The purpose of the research was to find the answers to the following questions:

- What creative ways can be incorporated in curriculum to adapt to multilingualism?
- Why should multilingualism be promoted in English teaching?
- What problems do teachers face when teaching English in multilingual classrooms?



- Can multilingualism be considered as an alternative to ELT?

Multilingualism is an average human condition. “Speaking two or more languages is a natural way of life for three-quarters of humanity. [This] principle ... has been obscured in parts of Europe due to colonial history. We urgently need to reassert it, and to implement it in practical ways, for, in the modern world, monolingualism is not a strength but a handicap.’ (David Crystal 2006:409)

Multilingual classes consist of students from varied social and cultural backgrounds with different native and regional languages. For example, classes in tribal educational institutions are made up of students from various social and cultural backgrounds, with some speaking tribal languages without a script, others speaking Marathi and some kokanee. In this type of heterogeneous class, there is usually a language barrier between students, and they cannot speak to each other in their native language or solve questions among themselves. Comprehending other subjects for common understanding is also a problem, as the native languages of the students are different. Each subject can have its own terms that can be used with that subject. The only means of communication between these students is the common language, English. This situation actually offers students the benefit of stepping out of their comfort zone and experimenting with a common language, whether they are accustomed to it or not.

**Cultural differences are good conversation starters.** This cultural difference can be used as a launch pad to start new topics such as different Indian festivals and different cuisines, or provide students with new perspectives in many areas. Monolingual classes tend to be monotonous. Because all the students understand each other very well. Not because students speak correctly, but because they often make common or similar level of mistakes. For example, a classroom of all tribal students may face similar problem with some pronunciation or may have trouble articulating some sounds in English, but the students still understand what the other classmate is reading even if he or she mispronounces. However, if that seems student is in a multilingual class he /she has to articulate all the sounds correctly in order to be understood by his or her classmates. This will help the students in the class to become better speakers and listeners. This situation is quite ordinary in numbers of language classrooms, too. **Learning abilities also vary by culture and by student.** The multilingual class provides an opportunity for such heterogeneous groups to come together and learn new approaches. To study English language by breaking out of their comfort in speaking mother



tongue. As we know about the influence of the mother tongue in speaking English language. So many words are mispronounced due to their native tongue.

### **Teachers' inhibition to modify the pedagogy:**

According to Pattanayak, "The notion of one dominant language as the medium of instruction leaves thousands of children illiterate in their mother tongue and fosters low achievement levels in the dominant language itself. There is no doubt that Language is a major factor in the case of school dropouts and stagnation in Education. To a great extent the high rate of illiteracy especially in tribal areas, can be attributed to the acceptance of the notion of one dominant language in a state and the lack of proper language planning." D.P Pattanayak "Multi Lingualism and Mother tongue education", British Journal of Educational studies, Vol: 3, Issue: 2, PP.173-! 74 (1983)

The Educators or teachers, mainly at undergraduate level till date they are following monolingual teaching methods. Low-level students only care about their grades, as this can be a reason for their inability to focus on language learning. According to most teachers, multilingualism may be a great asset in life, but it is a major obstacle in pedagogy. But, in the current environment, multilingualism should be warmly embraced in our education.

In English lessons, teachers can incorporate techniques such as fairy tales, riddles, proverbs, and songs to make lessons easy to understand and interesting. These techniques allow students to associate new English terms with their native or local language counterparts, thus helping students learn English better this way. This technique helps them learn English easily, and it is also recommended by the National Curriculum Framework 2005. "By doing this, we are not only supporting the local language, but the culture is growing in tandem, allowing learners to continue their multilingual approach. Such an approach promotes effective language learning. "Anand Mahanand." Contextualizing English Language Teaching for Minority Language Learners", "Multilingual Education in India: The Case of English", Viva Books, 2017, pp. 3

The English language teacher in a multilingual class should be creative and try to incorporate the cultural differences in the class and use it as a tool to improve the language skills of the students.

As Ruthz. Hauzel states "It is crucial to Understand both the medium and context of what we teach and what our students bring to the classroom ensures that our teaching is a support rather than a barrier to student



potential "Cultural Diversity and the classroom", "Multilingual Education in India: The case for English, Viva Books, 2017, PP.166. Using L1 in the English classroom has many advantages. In fact, L1 can be incorporated into a student's improvement of her L2 learning. "L2 learning/teaching is not just teaching students how to build an annex at the back of the house and add a few rooms to the house. It is like rebuilding the interior walls. Attempts to put language into separate compartments in the mind are doomed to failure because the compartments are linked in many ways." (Cook.V.J. C1992) "Evidence for Multi Competence Language Learning", Vol. 2, pp. 557-591.

According to Cook's analysis, L1 does not have a separate memory location in the brain. Everything is connected. In many ways, they influence each other and affect the system as a whole. The world around us is evolving rapidly. The education system also needs to be developed accordingly. As the world becomes more multilingual, education, especially English education, must adapt to this welcome change for future generations. "We need education to reorient ourselves according to the demand of the job market ... Education combined with skills promises to rescue the society from its present state of ability, helplessness and frustration." Shymal Das, "Changing perspectives of Education in Northeast, India with special reference to Tripura." Multilingual Education in India: The case for English, Viva Book, 2017, PP. 204 – 205.

## Possibilities

Innovative methods should be integrated into English language teaching to bring synchronization between English and local languages. The classroom activities for effective English teaching should be made to order as per the capabilities of students. Teachers have to create an atmosphere that all the students should learn language skills equally but as per their mother tongue influence they understand differently. As students have different mother tongues at their community. All the students shouldn't be given same type of activities. The teacher should make sure that "we have equipped the learners with the necessary skills for English, that we have provided a cap that fits the head of the learner." Jayshree Mohanraj." ELT in India: Need for a cap that fits the head, "Multilingual education in India: The case for English, Viva Books, 2017, PP. 223

Another viable/feasible way to improve the learning output is to print the textbooks which are bilingual/multilingual, which will facilitate positive outcomes and it will also be helpful for the teachers to interact



with students otherwise teachers have to refer number of research books. However as per the international law (UNCRC, 1989) the children's language and cultural rights should be preserved, it is the fundamental rights of children to access their language repertoire, not just as a one-off scaffolding technique or a tolerated approach, but as an acknowledgment of their plural lingual identity, as a contribution to their socio-economical well-being and as recognition of children's agency in choosing how they prefer to learn a new language." Nayr Ibrahim "Teaching children how to learn", 2019, PP. 27.

Many educators suggest many other activities that can be integrated into multilingual English lessons. A student can use L1 skills to improve her L2 skills. "What the learner brings to the class in the form of L1 can be used to trigger use of L2 (English) and the L2 text need not be expected to be entirely monolingual but can also be a code switched text." Lina Mukhopadhyay "Two Solitude: Instructional mode in ESL writing. " Multilingual Education in India, Viva Books, 2017, pp.233 – 257.

## **To conclude**

India is a diverse country that prides itself on 'Unity in Diversity'. Connecting languages play a very important role in connecting different cultures. Language is considered the standard-bearer of every civilization. And English which came to India as a language of colonizers has now secured a prominent place in the lives of Indians. English is unquestionably the world language of academia and Multilingualism will help even the foreign language speakers of English to learn English efficiently.



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