

Multilingual Pedagogy And 21st-Century Language Competencies: Reimagining Language Education In India

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ABSTRACT

India's linguistic diversity is both an educational problem and an educational opportunity. In today's digitalized and connected world, language learning must go further than learning the grammar and communication skills of one specific language. Contemporary learners need a wider array of linguistic, cognitive, cultural, digital, and collaborative skills in order to function effectively within multilingual societies and knowledge economies of the global world. Multilingual pedagogy provides an alternative way of teaching language in comparison with traditional monolingual approach. Multilingual pedagogy views learners' linguistic repertoires as assets for teaching and learning purposes. The NEP 2020 pays much attention to the topic of multilingualism, mother tongue-based learning and the promotion of Indian languages, which creates opportunities for the transformation of language education in India. This paper discusses the connection between multilingual pedagogy and the development of 21st century language skills. It includes theoretical perspectives related to multilingualism, translanguaging, sociocultural theory, and constructivist perspective of language learning. Additionally, the role of teachers, technology, and curriculum in enhancing multilingual competencies is highlighted. It emphasizes the necessity of transcending strict language boundaries and focusing on the implementation of flexible strategies that will enable the learners to use all their linguistic knowledge. Thus, the main message of the paper is that in order to rethink language education in India it is necessary to transcend the approach to teaching which concentrates on language proficiency to competency-focused multilingual pedagogy.

Keywords: Multilingual pedagogy, 21st-century language competencies, translanguaging, multilingual education, language learning.

INTRODUCTION

Language plays a crucial role in learning, communication, distinctiveness, and involvement of humans in society. From an educational perspective, language is not only a subject to learn but also the medium of creating and communicating knowledge. The new social, technological, and economic changes in the 21st century have brought about new challenges and expectations from the field of language learning. Students today not only need to be good at reading, writing, listening, and speaking but also communicate intercultural, collaborate with other people in diverse situations, think critically, use digital media responsibly, and negotiate meaning in multilingual settings. Thus, language learning needs a total rethink. India offers a special case for the above rethinking because multilingualism is an inherent characteristic of Indian society. Many students in India grow up multilingual in their homes, communities, schools,

and even on digital media. For example, the linguistic background of an Indian learner might include a mother tongue, regional language, Hindi, English, and sometimes other languages as well. Nonetheless, amid such linguistic realities, educational institutions often follow a language separation approach, where languages are considered discrete and separate from each other. Learners might be regulated from using their native tongues during the process of learning another language, and classrooms are considered by the dominance of only one language as the medium of instruction. Such methods do not recognize the available linguistic knowledge that learners might already retain.

One of the strengths of NEP 2020 lies in its support for mother tongue or home language learning at least up to Grade 5 (ideally up to Grade 8), multilingualism, flexibility and freedom from language imposition, as well as a three-language formula with two indigenous

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Indian languages along with English. From the point of view of concepts like multilingualism, translanguaging, sociocultural theory, and constructivism, this paper makes a case for the possibility of developing 21st-century competencies in multilingual classrooms through pedagogical exploitation of linguistic diversity rather than regarding it as an obstacle. The contribution of teachers, technology, and curriculum in making such a change is also discussed, with a call being made for shifting from language proficiency-based to competency-based multilingual pedagogy in India.

The increasing awareness of multilingualism as a resource for education has brought into focus multilingual pedagogy. In general, multilingual pedagogy may be described as pedagogic strategies that take into account the learners' knowledge of multiple languages and use it strategically in teaching for improving learning outcomes. Instead of treating the existence of several languages as a factor that complicates learning, multilingual pedagogy sees it as an advantage that is worth exploiting in educational activities. As García and Wei (2014) note, multilingual people do not use separate systems of languages but combine their linguistic resources in building up meanings. This idea is revolutionary in comparison to monolingual thinking and allows exploring new possibilities for language learning and teaching.

The importance of multilingualism has found its reflection in the national policies of India. Thus, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 pays great attention to the role of mother tongue, home language, and regional languages in the educational procedures. The document confirms the importance of multilingualism as a cognitive resource that should be taken into account when enlightening the population. At the same time, the NEP 2020 efforts to find a balance between preserving Indian languages and getting prepared for national and international environments.

2. Multilingualism as an Educational Resource

For several years, educational systems around the world have been shaped by the belief that successful learning presupposes linguistic homogeneity. In the past, the language that has been dominant in schools is the language to which multilingual students have

been expected to inhibit their native languages. This attitude saw linguistic difference as something to be regulated. The contemporary studies tend to criticize this deficit approach, and recognize multilingualism as an educational asset. According to Cummins (2000), knowledge and concepts obtained by students in their first languages can serve as cognitive and academic bases for further language acquisition. Knowledge gained in one language can contribute to learning another one via common underlying proficiency (CUP) proposed by Cummins. The practical meaning of this approach to language learning is quite significant since it implies that learners do not need to neglect their linguistic knowledge when acquiring a new language. Rather, the stronger base in the first language (L1) becomes a solid foundation for language learning, thus facilitating and accelerating this process.

Multilingual learners have what can be termed as an 'array of linguistic repertoires'. These individuals may use different languages for different social functions and switch from one language to another depending on the situation. For instance, a multilingual pupil may use Urdu at home, Telugu in the local community, Hindi in wider social interface, and English in academic and technological frameworks. Being multilingual is a communicative asset rather than a lack. Asset-based pedagogies emphasize using all the resources of a multilingual student to facilitate his/her learning, considering the student's home language as an asset and not a barrier. Moving from deficit to asset approach, needs changing the way educators view multilingual learners? Instead of looking for the weaknesses of such learners, teachers should start asking questions like: "What are the strengths of multilingual learners, and how can we develop them?" The asset approach implies valuing and developing multilingual learners' linguistic and cultural strengths, expecting their proficiency in two or more languages. Recent researches into linguistic landscapes and multilingualism have shown that texts, signs, and language use can be used as resources for language learning. The multilingual situation in India is ideally suited for multilingual teaching since multilingual interaction is already a natural part of day-to-day communication. Nevertheless, the difficulty comes in how one makes this social multilingualism a pedagogical reality. Teaching more than one language should not be about teaching each

as a separate subject, but rather in making meaningful links between languages.

3. Theoretical Foundations of Multilingual Pedagogy

Multilingual pedagogy can be described using various theoretical approaches. One of these theoretical foundations includes sociocultural theory represented by such scholars as Vygotsky (1978). This theory implies that language and social interactions play a crucial role in the cognitive development of the individual. In other words, the process of learning is not isolated and occurs only inside the head of the learner. Knowledge is gained through interactions, communication, and participation in cultural and social activities. Vygotsky's theoretical concepts imply that social interactions are very important in the process of learning and cognitive development because language is not only a means of communication with the world but also a tool of intellectual development. Students who learn a new language and belong to multilingual classrooms have various linguistic and cultural backgrounds, so it is possible for them to share this experience and use their languages to communicate, collaborate with peers, and exchange ideas. They can actively construct their knowledge using language as a means of mediating this process. Translanguaging that was first described by Cen Williams and later reconceptualized by García and Li Wei is not only a pedagogical approach but also a theoretical one because it focuses on the way how multilingual speakers produce meaning.

Using a sociocultural approach to translanguaging, the process can be defined as a mediated one in which language acts as a tool for learning as well as a place of identity construction. Another reason why constructivist approaches support multilingual pedagogy is that they highlight the importance of prior knowledge in the process of learning. Learners do not come to classes as empty receivers of information. Fairly, they have experiences, ideas, and linguistic acquaintance that affect how they understand new information. Multilingual pedagogy is grounded on these existing resources and uses them as a base for new knowledge. The concept of prior knowledge from the standpoint of translanguaging pedagogy is broader than knowledge of vocabulary and grammar

of different languages. It includes pragmatic and social dimensions of language use, as well as linguistic beliefs.

Sociocultural and constructivist perspectives meet each other in their focus on student-centred, dialogical pedagogies that afford learners agency in choosing languages. Both theories acknowledge that multilingual students have funds of knowledge or cultural, linguistic, and experience-based resources which both students and educators can use to benefit learning processes. The theory of constructivism is concerned with building knowledge from what people already know; teachers build on the existing knowledge of the learners in order to introduce new knowledge. The relationship between sociocultural perspective, constructivism, and translanguaging is strong and forms a powerful theoretical basis for multilingual teaching that takes into account all linguistic resources that learners have.

4. Multilingual Pedagogy and 21st-Century Language Competencies

The concept of language competence has been greatly developed in the 21st century to include not only knowledge of grammar but also other communicative, cognitive and technological competencies. Today's students must analyze information, evaluate diverse sources, communicate appropriately for audiences and situations, and interact effectively with speakers of other languages and members of other cultures. The use of multilingual pedagogy is highly beneficial in terms of fostering such competencies since multilingual students constantly have to negotiate meanings between different languages and social settings. The capability to communicate efficiently is improved by making students sensitive to the audience, purpose, and linguistic choice, and critical thinking is enhanced by comparison of meanings and perspectives in different languages. Exposure to different linguistic and cultural expressions stimulates the development of creativity and flexible thinking, whereas multilingual teamwork encourages cooperation and collaborative decision-making. In this way, one can see that multilingualism is directly related to four key competencies: communication, critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration, which are recognized, as 21st-century skills (Trilling & Fadel, 2009).

5. Intercultural Competence and Language Education

One of the major contributions that multilingual education marks is that of intercultural competence, an essential concept in a world that is globalizing, migrating, and technologically connected. Language and culture are inherently related since language embodies the history, tradition, values, and way of looking at things from the perspective of a certain group of people. Studying and engaging in the learning process through different languages allows the learner to gain exposure to the different ways of thinking about concepts and experiences, thus making the multilingual classroom a vital platform of cultural respect and understanding. In the context of India, the inclusion of regional literatures, folklore, and oral tradition in language education curriculum can help promote cross-cultural awareness and appreciation of India's literary diversity. For instance, the inclusion of regional short stories translated into English in undergraduate English curriculum will serve as an avenue to promote inclusive education, cross-cultural sensitivity, and appreciation of the linguistic and cultural diversity of India. In the same way, multicultural folklore delivers a wealth of information in the context of language curricula in promoting cross-cultural awareness through media such as picture books.

6. Future Perspectives in Multilingual Language Education

Globalization, technological advances, artificial intelligence, and intercultural interactions in the future will form language education. The capacity to communicate flexibly and operate in several cultural and linguistic environments is going to be a need for learners. Multilingual education delivers an effective approach to prepare students for the new realities due to linguistic flexibility, intercultural awareness, and collaborative learning. Increasing access to artificial intelligence and technologies for translating will provide opportunities for language education but pose challenges of learner autonomy, linguistic authenticity, and ethical use of technologies. Technologies powered by AI may increase access, assist in translation, facilitate writing, provide personalized feedback, and open new forms of multimodal expression. Nevertheless, such

integration poses risks in terms of linguistic bias, data colonialism, and globalization of languages in the world. It is essential to conduct research on ways of integrating new technologies to enable multilingual learning while preserving learners' language development independently. Critical AI literacy as teacher preparedness, integration into pedagogies, and ethical use of AI has developed into a multifaceted competence in language education. In light of the above, therefore, the future of language education needs to be multidisciplinary, technology-driven, and culture-oriented, with multilingualism being an essential element of building future-ready learners. The suggested DETAIL approach towards leadership in language education represents varied core areas of focus: distributed leadership and diversity, ecology and equity-oriented approaches, translanguaging and technologies, artificial intelligence, inclusivity and integration, and linguistically different and lifelong learning. Some effective measures will encompass integrating diverse language and literacy practices in the curriculum and creating a culturally responsive learning environment, among others.

CONCLUSION

Multilingualism is one of the most valuable cultural and educational assets of India, and hence, should be treated as such when planning to advance competencies for the 21st century. In today's world, language learning should go beyond such traditionally held concerns of grammar and language skills and develop competencies in intercultural communication, critical thinking, collaboration, and responsible use of technology. Multilingual language learning pedagogy generates possibilities to achieve that. The theoretical frameworks of sociocultural learning, constructivism, and translanguaging further illustrate the significance of linguistic diversity in knowledge formation and operative communication. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has formed an essential policy environment for developing multilingual education, but its effective implementation requires undergoing changes in curriculum, assessment, teaching, and resource generation. NEP 2020 espoused the 5+3+3+4 curricular framework, focusing on early childhood care and education, foundational literacy and numeracy, less content in curricula, experiential learning, and multilingualism, flexible choice of

subjects, vocational exposure, teacher expansion, and competence-based assessment.

Despite the advantages of the policy, its implementation is still very slow and inconsistent due to logistical, resource, and social reasons of preferring English as the medium of instruction. It is critical for teachers to be ready to handle linguistic diversity, but schools have to provide an environment that accommodates diverse linguistic identities. In its NEP 2020, it has been recognized that teachers will require to have more than just subject knowledge; they will also have to include 21st century skills, such as creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, problem solving, and digital literacy. It will be significant for teacher training and development programs to include specialized courses that can help teachers develop the needed skills and techniques for multilingual teaching.

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