

Rethinking Language Education and Teacher Preparation

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Abstract

Language has always been a key concern in the field of education. Due to the rapid advancement of science and technology in the existing era there is an increased mobility and, therefore, communication between and among people of different spheres of life is crucial. Globalisation demands that an educated person should not only possess knowledge and a knack but also should be well-versed in the art of communication. A mere traditional way of teaching languages may not be adequate to ensure the quality upgradation in language education aimed at developing the desired outcomes in multilingual, multicultural and multi-ethnic society. Language education necessitates rethinking in the present globalised world as it is a pre-requisite for all education. Globalisation which was initially conceptualised in the context of economy, has gradually enveloped various dimensions of our life encompassing the whole of our knowledge and society. Globalisation has made enormous impact in the input process and product of language education in general and instruction and learning in particular. India is a multilingual country with several languages and dialects. Multilingualism presents a challenging issue in the schooling context. It also refers to a situation in which more than one language is used in or out-of-school setting. Developing a language curriculum for a multilingual country like India is a tough task. The present paper intends to reconsider language curriculum and pedagogy for Indian schools in a multilingual, multicultural and multi-ethnic context with an aim to exploring and explaining an operative model of language education in the era of globalisation.

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INTRODUCTION

India is a multilingual country with several languages and dialects. Multilingualism presents a challenging issue in the schooling context. It also refers to a context in which more than one language is used in or out-of-school setting. Evolving a language curriculum for a multilingual country like India is a difficult proposition. The quandary is not merely in the choice of L1, L2 or L3 but in making the right decision on the quantum of each language in the curriculum. It is rather difficult to decide without a polemical dissatisfaction of one language group or the other. If one permutation satisfies one language group, it will certainly dissatisfy a large number of other language groups because language is not just a language. Language is very much rooted in a particular culture and it is directly connected with the identity of an individual, a society and a nation. Culture gives meaning to the utterances of a language. Inclusion of a language in a curriculum or exclusion of it indicates inclusion or exclusion of that particular culture. This is tantamount to passing judgment on the culture. One has to be very careful in such a delicate matter as prescribing languages for schools, especially in India which has 1652 languages (Teaching of Indian Languages, 2006). The linguistic anthropology of our country is unique in the

world and highly complicated. The agency which undertakes to design a national curriculum in language will have to grapple with the challenge more carefully than other subjects. Ideally speaking, all languages must get their due recognition in the curriculum. But, it seems to be practically almost impossible. A pragmatic formula must be worked out, which can accommodate regional languages including dialects to the extent possible.

Nevertheless, globalisation alternates the situations under which language learning takes place. In this domain as in others, some of the most significant changes are social and economic. Communication skills and the new literacies demanded by new technologies, as well as competence in one or more second or foreign languages, all represent valuable *linguistic capital* to use Pierre Bourdieu's term. In fact, languages are being treated more and more as economic commodities, and this view is relocating traditional principles in which languages were primarily symbols of ethnic or national identity. The usefulness of language influences people's motivations for learning languages and their choices of languages to learn.

THE CHOICE OF THE FIRST LANGUAGE

The medium of instruction at the primary stage is a crucial choice. The curriculum has to take cognisance of it. And, the choice of the medium of

instruction should also be the same until the child's cognitive abilities are fully developed. It is closely connected with the process of the child acquiring the language. The child's entire personality—emotional as well as intellectual—develops around that home language which more often than not is the regional language for a majority of children. Language learning is not something that the child does; it is something that happens to the child placed in an appropriate environment, much as the child's body grows and matures in a predetermined way when provided with appropriate nutrition and environmental stimulation (Noam Chomsky, 2001). It is only natural that their cognitive development, (i.e. their ability for logic, reasoning, critical thinking, imagination, understanding, storing knowledge, interpreting information, visual associations, retaining and retrieving information, etc.) takes place in that language. It is, therefore, appropriate that their language of learning in early formative years is the same language. Any deviation here would damage the cognitive growth of the child. If our culture matters, the languages of India should be the language of learning. Language carries the whole culture with it. We need to have faith in our culture. We should teach our children in our own languages in the early formative years. This prepares them to receive instruction in English at higher level. If regional languages are not taught to them as it is

happening in Central Schools, Public Schools and Convents, the damage done to their cognitive performance would be enormous and profound; nothing could be more devastating than this to our country. We must do everything to design a curriculum that should protect our languages. The individuals without their regional language would suffer a loss of cultural identity in their own land.

THE CHOICE OF THE SECOND LANGUAGE

The National Education Policy, 2020 says that out of three languages, at least two must be native languages and regarding the third one, the policy is silent. According to the NEP, 2020, English does not come under the category of native tongues in Indian context. But, the fact remains that in this global world it is difficult to underestimate the importance of English as a means of communication in the twenty-first century. Unquestionably, English enjoys the privilege of a global language in a multilingual country like India. English is a language of social mobility and of people's aspirations for quality education and is arguably essential for a fuller participation in national and international context. Moreover, the usefulness of language influences both people's motivations for learning languages and their choices of languages to learn as well.

THE ISSUE OF THE THIRD LANGUAGE

The National Education Policy, 2020 states that there will be a greater flexibility in the three-language formula, and no language will be imposed on any state. Obviously, every state is free to choose a third language according to its convenience and priority. However, keeping in view of the linguistic scenario in our country it may be suggested that the status of Hindi in India is almost identical of a link language (*lingua franca*). But, as far as the choice of language is concerned it may be from any one of the twenty-two languages included in the eighth schedule of the constitution including Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Odia, Urdu, Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Marathi Punjabi, Manipuri, Nepali, Sindhi, Konkani, Bodo, Santhali, Maithili and Dogri. Language is for communication. What the school curriculum should do is to design the language teaching programme in such a way that it develops in them, the desirable communicative competence. A bridge course in L3 should be developed and taught to students at the appropriate stage of schooling. We should also plan to utilise the massive spoken language material available on the electronic media like in films, serials, advertisements, news bulletins, cricket commentary and other short TV programmes. It is a matter of great satisfaction that the new policy emphasises that the States, especially

States from different regions of India, may enter into bilateral agreements to hire teachers in large numbers from each other, to satisfy the three-language formula in their respective states, and also to encourage the study of Indian languages across the country.

UNDERSTANDING INDIAN LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS

We have not taken adequate note of the phenomenon of understanding language classrooms. Normally, Indian school classrooms are heterogenous on a variety of parameters including caste, colour, socio-economic status, gender and disability. The whole community including the teacher and the social environment need to be sensitive to these issues. We are aware that language is constitutive of being human. It is possible to ensure inclusion of all voices in a classroom if we actually believe that all children have systems of Universal Grammar and multilinguality in place and their voices need to be heard if we don't wish to push them to the margins, from where, the most marginalised get pushed out of school (Agnihotri, 2015). It is argued that if education is a potential site for initiating social change and if education must ensure quality teaching, equality and justice, then multilinguality must become the foundation for all future education. Multilinguality as conceptualised here includes all the linguistic and

cultural practices that children and teachers bring to school.

LANGUAGE PEDAGOGY AND GLOBALISATION

We have noticed that the changing political conditions have raised important questions for language professionals. Since the early 1990s, the issues of linguistic imperialism have been largely debated, especially in relation to English language teaching. Deborah Cameron (2002) examines the discourse on communication skills. She argues that what is emerging is a global ideology of effective communication. On the surface, there are many different languages, but under the banner of effective communication, all become vehicles for the expression of similar values and the enactment of the similar subjectivity. Cyberspace and ICT are frequently invoked as a zone of contact where distant individuals may meet on equal terms and language teachers are increasingly exploiting the opportunities which cause real and meaningful interaction between learners and native speakers. The ICT is expected to function as a tool for promoting quality learning in India. For adaptability to the ICT, it is imperative to think of modernisation of the curriculum, development of suitable pedagogical strategies for the language classroom, and core competency development and mapping of the teachers participating in the endeavor. Technology is also a double-edged sword. For every

advantage to be derived from it, there is a corresponding disadvantage. Different technologies have different content biases.

Generally, we have ignored the participation and active involvement of the students in diverse classroom activities related to language learning and the acquisition of the four skills. That language teaching is not packaged for learners is a concept that involves focus on methodology and contextualisation. Learner-centeredness prompts responsive, collaborative, problem-oriented and democratic learning in which the student and the teacher ideally decide how and when learning occurs and with what objectives and outcomes. With methodology as the focal point and with a learner centric objective, David Nunan offers the Active Learning Method with the conceptual framework for understanding the language classrooms. There is a wide gap between student needs and what is taught at tertiary level. Teaching English without spelling out learners' needs is like prescribing a medicine without diagnosing the disease. Teachers are not transmitters and students not mere passive receivers. Margie Berns, an expert in the field of communicative language teaching writes explaining Firth's view that language is interaction, and that it is an interpersonal activity. It has a close connection with society. In this light, language study has to look at the use (function) of language in context, both in its linguistic context

and in its social or situational context of who is speaking, what the social roles of the speakers are, and why they have come together to speak.

Task-based Language Teaching is one of the generally discussed methods in language teaching and learning contexts. The second language acquisition revolves round the Interaction Hypothesis as proposed by M. Long in his essay *The Role of Linguistic Environment in Second Language Acquisition*. In this instructional cycle, tasks are strategically developed with a focus on conveying meaning, eliciting language that is used by the learner for communicative purposes, and facilitating interaction and collaboration. The Interaction Hypothesis attempts to expound the role of interactions in the language learning process. As opposed to internally-driven acquisition approaches, the interaction hypothesis in line with a socio-interactionist approach, which emphasises the influence of the environment in which a learner lives.

LANGUAGE IN COMMISSIONS AND NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICIES

India is a multilingual country. We follow the *Three Language Formula* (TLF) strongly recommended by the *Kothari Commission* (1964–66) and endorsed by the *National Policy on Education*, 1986 and *National Curriculum Framework*, 2005 and also emphasised by the *National Education Policy*, 2020. Accordingly,

we have mother tongue teachers, second language teachers and third language teachers in schools who are ‘educated’ or ‘trained’ under and through various programmes of teacher education which are recognised by the *National Council of Teacher Education* which recommends certain norms and standards for the said courses of teacher education. When we have a careful and critical look at the *National Education Policy 2020* it is evident that the document advocates a three-language scheme. There is a great deal of emphasis in the present policy on teaching the classical Indian languages, namely, Sanskrit, Prakrit, Pali and Persian in schools.

In this context, let us discuss the following issues—

- What are the theoretical and practical issues related to language education and its pedagogy?
- What are the existing anomalies, contradictions and violations of the prescribed norms and standards?
- What could be an effective model of language pedagogy in the country?

LANGUAGE EDUCATION

It is a well-known fact that primary education is essentially language education. Children learn about the world through observations, experiences and the oral language. They naturally and informally

acquire the mother tongue or home language and learn to understand and communicate through listening and speaking skills. In our country, the Upper Primary Education formally introduces the children to the mother tongues and/or second language in which case generally 'meta-language' is systematically used and the formal assessment in the language is also conducted in the similar fashion. Currently, English is introduced at the early Elementary Stage of education also. This paradigm shift in the language policy needs to be discussed in the light of the following concerns— (a) Why was the Three Language Formula introduced? (b) How has it been implemented so far? (c) English is generally not the mother tongue in India. Is the early introduction of English not a violation of the three-language formula endorsed by NPE, 1986, POA, 1992, NCF, 2005 and the NEP, 2020?

While discussing the issues of language education in India, we should touch upon the following cardinal points— What is meant by language education? What does it involve? How many languages have the children to learn at school? What are the basic aims of language education at the various stages of school education? What is taught in the language periods in schools? How is it (language) taught? Why is it taught? What TLM is used? How do multilingualism and pluralism contribute to language education?

Are they synonymous or opposite?
How is it assessed?

LANGUAGE PEDAGOGY

The term 'Language Pedagogy' should be understood in the right perspective. Some relevant issues and concerns deserve critical attention— Who are the language teachers? What are their academic and professional qualifications? How are they trained? Are the trainees taught the methodology of language teaching or the pedagogy of language? Do they learn the fundamental difference between these two distinct notions or concepts? What are the implications of the discernible differences between them: the content of language pedagogy, and, the process of language pedagogy? How do the trainees really teach languages? What is the language curriculum prescribed at the various stages of school education? What is the importance of LAC (Language Across the Curriculum)? Can 'Eclecticism' be a more effective and pragmatic remedy?

SOME REFLECTIONS

Why is the traditional methodology generally used? Is it more effective or more convenient in terms of the assessment of language learning? Are the pre-service teachers just taught the theory and not adequately trained in the new methodology of language education? Is the new methodology more demanding and challenging? Are the teacher training courses of

studies inadequate and deficient? Is there any relationship between the theory of teacher education and the practice of teacher education? How to bridge the gaps between its theory and practice? How are the language teachers trained? What do the language teachers learn about language education (LE) during teacher training?

DOES THE LANGUAGE TRAINING COURSE ORIENT THE TRAINEES TOWARDS THE FOLLOWING?

What is the basic difference between the mother tongue, second language, third language, foreign language, classical language, dead language, etc? How should MT, SL, TL/OT, FL, CL, DL, etc., be taught? What to assess in and through them and how? What kind of teaching practice or internship (TP) do the trainees have? What are the 'Content' and the 'Process' of language education generally prescribed in the syllabi of teacher education? How do the trainees learn about how to teach 'lexis', 'structures', LSRW skills and their integration, and 'prose', poetry, literature, grammar, communication skills, etc? What do the trainees learn to teach during TP? What are they supposed to learn? What, why and how to teach? Does internship take place under the supervision of subject experts? Who is the subject expert? Are they adequately qualified and trained for supervision? How are the trainees assessed during and for internship? Who are the internal

and external examiners? Are they qualified to act as examiners?

Since the NCTE has used the term Language Pedagogy in its Norms and Standards 2014 for courses of teacher education, we find this term being used in place of methodology in almost all the syllabi of D.El.Ed., B.Ed., EL.Ed., etc. Who should use Language Pedagogy? Why should we stress and emphasise Eclecticism?

D.Ed. is a pre-service teacher training course for the elementary school teachers who are supposed to teach the students studying from class 1 to the class VIII. It is to be mentioned here that 12th class pass students (of any stream— Arts/Com/ Science) who have studied MT/RL or SL as compulsory subjects are generally eligible to offer the D.El.Ed. Course. It is to be noted that usually the 12th class pass students of Arts and Commerce stream have studied Science and Maths up to 10th class only as compulsory subjects and the Science students have studied Social Sciences up to the 10th class only as a compulsory subject. But, generally, all the D.Ed. students and elementary school teachers have to teach all the prescribed school subjects including languages upto 8th class.

The teacher educators for elementary teacher education are generally those who have a Master's Degree in a subject which may be of Science, Arts or Commerce stream. For the secondary teacher education programme, B.Ed. students and trainees generally have to offer two

teaching subjects. Even trainees wishing to become only language teachers have to generally offer an Arts subject, and a few of them have to teach two languages also because of the subject combinations at the graduate level.

As per the NCTE norms 2014, the candidates for elementary teacher education course are generally selected on the basis of their qualifying exams or the entrance test. The same is the case with B.Ed. Course also. All these eligible candidates for elementary school teaching are taught the methodology of teaching MT or RL, Maths, Science, Social Science, etc and strangely enough, the secondary school teachers or trainees are taught at least two methodologies; one for teaching language and the other for teaching Social Science.

SOME QUESTIONS THAT PUZZLE

Is there no difference in trainees' or teachers' level of knowledge, understanding, skills, competence, etc in Science, Social Sciences, Maths and Languages? Are they academically equal? How are all the candidates eligible to teach all the subjects at the elementary stage? How are all the candidates qualified to teach languages at the elementary stage? How is a particular teacher educator eligible to teach the methodology of language teaching if the teacher does not have an M.A. in the language concerned? Does this deficiency not negatively affect teacher education/training? Is the

methodology of teaching MT, SL, TL, the same? Why can't we have subject specialist teachers at the school stage? The cardinal question is— *Why do we allow any Tom, Dick and Harry to become a language teacher?*

PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES

As a matter of policy, all elementary school teachers have to teach at least three languages; mother tongue, second language and third language. This policy requires to be modified. How to get the policy changed for the desirable reformation and improvement in language education? It is a big challenge. Generally during B. Ed training, the trainees of Arts Stream (who opt a language as a teaching subject) have to opt for Social Sciences or Drawing and Painting or a subject something like that. They have to unnecessarily study the methodology of non-language subjects. This is a colossal waste of resources. This questionable policy requires to be suitably modified. Generally, the syllabi of teacher education, especially for language education, are not only defective but also largely inadequate, unfortunately out-dated and poorly designed which consequently fail to prepare effective language teachers. TLM is either missing or not authentic. The transactional strategies too need to be suitably changed and properly up-dated. Teachers are not generally trained and motivated to conduct action research. Like other subject teachers, the language teachers

too miss a lot by not carrying out action research. Assessment in languages is generally done in terms of 'information' (product), and not of 'process'. Largely, the prescriptive grammar dominates and LSRW skills are ignored. Assessment is also done in terms of meta-language. Meta-linguistic competence and grammatical accuracy also unnecessarily occupy a lot of space in assessment in languages.

PROPOSITIONS AND MEDICATIONS

Only the language teachers should be entrusted with the task of teaching languages. Similarly, we should have subject teachers for Science, Maths, Social Sciences, Arts, Crafts and Drawing, etc at the Elementary stage of education. During B.Ed. training, the trainees of Arts stream (who opt for a language as a teaching subject) should be trained as language teachers only. They should not be forced to choose for Social Sciences or Drawing and Painting or a subject something like that. They should not unnecessarily study the methodology of non-language subjects. This would ultimately help in reducing a huge waste of resources. The syllabi of teacher education, especially for language education should be periodically up-dated and methodically designed which would accordingly help in preparing effective language teachers. Adequate and 'authentic' TLM should be developed and

'exploited' methodically. Eclecticism should be a common methodological input for language teachers for the transactional strategies especially in the context of the multilingual situation of the country. Action research should be a compulsory component of both pre-service and in-service training. Assessment in languages should be generally done in terms of 'what the children or students can do with the language'. Knowing about the language should not be the only goal. Largely, the descriptive grammar should find a respectable place in the area of assessment in languages. LSRW skills should not be ignored during school education. Communicative competence should be the ultimate goal. Assessment may also be done in terms of meta-language but, of course, at a higher stage of education.

In order to take care of all the elements and components of language mentioned above and to integrate and assimilate them meaningfully, an effective model of language education is suggested which may be designed through the following four steps—

Step 1

Identifying the basic components of language education (language content process: lexis structures, skills, competence, (lexical, structural, grammatical socio-

linguistic, communicative, strategic, pragmatic competence, etc).

Step 2

Redesigning the curriculum, syllabus, teaching-learning material for language education.

Step 3

Conducting teacher education courses in a more meaningful and pragmatic manner, rather than converting them into a ritual.

STEP 4

Conducting field surveys in order to check the efficacy of the teaching-learning material and to improve upon them periodically.

CONCLUSION

Education is practically not possible without language whether it is verbal or non-verbal. Education and language obviously go together and are evidently inseparable. Moreover, the quality of education also depends on the quality of exposure to the language in use. Language education is undoubtedly a very crucial issue especially in a multilingual country like India. Preparing effective language teachers in India is a mammoth task which needs to be performed with the desirable genuine concern, commitment and competence. We would do well to rethink the language education programme in the light of the desirable aims and objectives, pragmatic pedagogy, methodology, and evaluation framework. The earlier we do it, the better it is for the country.

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