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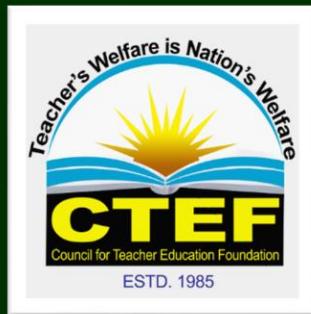
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Teachers' Views on Multilingual Classrooms: Issues and Effective Strategies

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Abstract

Teachers face the challenging task of meeting the linguistic demands of children from diverse language origins as classroom diversity increases. Diverse and heterogeneous societies are increasingly promoting multilingual education in the classroom as an essential component of high-quality education. For the teacher, the multilingual classroom presents special opportunities and problems. Multilingualism facilitates cognitive growth, cultural sensitivity, and enhanced communication in the lingua franca of globalization. This study explores the important role teachers have in bringing multilingualism. It illustrates how educators can create an inclusive atmosphere where a variety of languages are respected and encouraged through a review of the research and case studies.

The paper starts with the introduction of multilingualism and multilingual education along with their importance in the present scenario. Using secondary sources, the paper discussed further the perspective of the teacher regarding multilingualism, challenges faced by the teacher in a multilingual classroom, and benefits of the multilingual classroom. Notwithstanding these difficulties, the study nevertheless identifies a few successful teaching tactics, such as the use of cooperative learning approaches, differentiated education, reciprocal communication method, creating a conducive classroom environment and the integration of native languages into the classroom. On the basis of the previous researches, the paper concluded that these approaches not only improve student performance but also fosters a welcoming and inclusive learning environment in a multilingual classroom.

Keywords: Multilingualism, Teachers, Classroom, Multilingual Education, Cooperative Learning.

Introduction

“When you learn a language, you don’t just learn to speak and write a new language. You also learn to be open-minded, liberal, tolerant, kind and considerate towards all mankind.”

- Mouloud Benzadi

It was Ruiz who first applied the phrase “language as a resource” in the classroom in 1984, and he advocated using and valuing students’ native languages in an attempt to optimize learning (Ruiz, 1984). Migration, movement, and increased cross-border interaction have never before made it so crucial to take into account how teachers view and take into account the diverse linguistic resources their students have at their disposal. Many benefits are derived from speaking and making use of more than one language (Dixon et al., 2012), such as enhanced mathematical learning (Dahm & De Angelis, 2018), enhanced creativity (Furlong, 2009), and activation of brain-linked processing and language acquisition (Festman, 2021).

Two Latin terms, “multi” which means many and “lingua” which means language, form the basis for the term multilingualism (Bussmann, 1996), which is very well captured in this paper. It generally refers to an individual’s ability of knowing more than one language so that she/he can communicate effectively with minimal hindrance even like the natives do (Bussmann, 1996). Furthermore, multilingualism can also be characterized as the co-existence and use of more than one language in a given society (Lyons, 1981). These languages may come in a variety of statuses: official or unofficial, native or foreign, national or international.

India is linguistically one of the most diversified countries in the world. India stands fourth in the world with at least 300-400 languages and is said to have 3,592 mother tongues (MT) according to the Census of India 2001. The 2011 Census of India revealed immense linguistic diversity, recording over 19,500 mother tongues, which were grouped into 121 major languages (spoken by 10,000+ people) and 270 mother tongues, with Hindi being the most spoken (43.6%), followed by Bengali, Marathi, Telugu, and Tamil. The linguistic diversity is a ‘hallmark of India’ (Bhatia & Ritchie, 2004: 794).

With NEP 2020, Indian education acquires a transformative vision with the aspect of linguistic diversity and preservation of regional language being taken into consideration. In NEP 2020, the emphasis is on the multilingual approach towards education, where students would learn not only in their mother tongue or regional language but in other languages as well. In order to ensure inclusion, while preserving the child’s first language and cultivating empathy for youngsters learning a second language, multilingualism is viewed as a pedagogical concept.

Multilingual Education (MLE)

As interconnectivity increases in an ever-shrinking world, multilingual education has emerged prominently as a vital constituent in education systems all over the world. It is simply defined as an educational approach that encompasses instruction in multiple languages, thus effectively supporting cognitive and social benefits to the students. Preparations of the learner to global citizenship can be seen within this approach as linguistic diversity enhances cognitive abilities and promotes cultural understanding.

MLE refers to the use of two or more languages as media of instruction in formal educational settings. It encompasses various models that include mother tongue-based multilingual education, bilingual education, and translanguaging-oriented pedagogy among others (see García & Wei, 2014). In multilingual societies, education systems increasingly recognize linguistic diversity not as a challenge but as a pedagogical resource (UNESCO, 2019). Research underlines that multilingual education advances both academic achievement and linguistic equity, especially for learners from linguistically marginalized communities (Mohanty, 2018).

A topic that has come to the forefront in research studies on education over the last years is multilingual education because of increased linguistic diversity in educational institutions because of globalization, migration, and the pressure to make educational institutions more inclusive. The years 2020–2024 have witnessed a challenge to traditional views on monolingual education in educational studies because they seem not to fit into linguistic realities in educational institutions. Current literature defines multilingual education not just in terms of remedies to linguistic diversity but in terms of inclusive education methodologies that see linguistic diversity in students not as a problem but a resource in education (García & Wei, 2014; García et al., 2021).

Multilingual Education fosters cultural awareness, educational and academic worth, and increases creativity, in addition to altering society and the love for mother tongues. Multilingualism encourages mental flexibility and creativity. Recent research indicates that children raised in supportive sociocultural environments and exposed to multiple languages from an early age demonstrate greater cognitive flexibility, metalinguistic awareness, and attentional control than their monolingual peers (Bialystok, 2001; Cummins, 2000; King, 2007; Marian & Shook, 2012).

Multilingual Education and Academic Achievement

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There has been a strong focus on empirical research that evidences the positive impact multilingual education has on academic performance. Researchers have convincingly been able to prove that young children who are schooled first in their mother tongue exhibit exceptionally higher literacy skills, better conceptual understanding of concepts, and especially heightened classroom participation (Benson, 2017). These benefits cross over into second-language learning, as the good first-language foundation supports transfer of cognitive and academic language acquisition (Cummins, 2000).

Longitudinal research shows that students in multilingual education programs achieve equally well or better compared to students in monolingual programs in later educational levels in global languages such as English when they reach, for example, junior and senior high school (Thomas & Collier, 2012). Such findings disprove research assumptions saying that instruction in mother tongues holds back second language acquisition.

Social, Cultural, and Equity Dimensions

Multilingual education is generally considered an approach used in achieving social justice and equity in education. Some authors suggest that when majority languages are given prominence in education, it leads to the marginalization of students from these languages, which results in a gap in education and early school dropout (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). On the other hand, multilingual education acknowledges students' identities and their bodies of knowledge, which gives them a sense of belonging and esteem (Mohanty, 2018).

UNESCO (2019) highlights the importance of mother tongue education, especially in indigenous and minority communities, as this approach can help in both education access and language preservation. Studies have shown that multilingual education promotes inclusive education and democratic participation (Heugh, 2015).

According to Mohanty (2021), privileging learners' home languages in education challenges the historical exclusion of tribal, rural, and minority language communities. This is supported by evidence that NEP 2020 opens up possibilities for the revitalization of endangered languages through their integration into formal schooling (UNESCO, 2021).

Research articles published after 2020 highlight especially how multilingual education can help in nation-building in an inclusive manner through linguistic diversity and democratic participation (Sah & Li, 2022)

Research Questions

Q1. What practices do teachers use for promoting multilingual inclusion?

Q2. What are the common challenges faced by the teachers in multilingual classroom?

Methodology

This is an analysis of secondary data, which has used existing literature on exploring teachers' perception of multilingualism in the classroom. Some peer-reviewed journal articles, education reports, and case studies are reviewed regarding challenges and best practices for multilingual education, so that the key themes and trends may be identified.

Teachers' Perspectives on Multilingualism

A rapidly globalizing world means classrooms are increasingly multilingual by nature, alongside all the linguistic diversity of these societies. To such an end, benefits come with this shift, and teachers working in the trenches of multilingualism indeed need inclusive learning environments. The views of multilingualism on the part of teachers play a role in understanding how this diversity can be translated into and used within educational contexts. Teachers' views of multilingualism are inextricably bound up with the issues they experience in multilingually diverse classrooms. While a consideration of more recent literature shows an increasing acceptance of multilingualism in education, this remains a factor in educational practice in class because of differential levels of attainment and participation (Cummins, 2001; García & Wei, 2014; Burner & Carlsen, 2023).

One such perennial problem is under-preparation of teachers in managing multilingualism because teacher education programs have continued to focus on monolingual language norms with less attention to pedagogies such as translanguaging in a multilingual setting (Lucas & Villegas, 2013; Makalela, 2021; Cenoz & Gorter, 2022). Pressures from institutions with fixed monolingual language policies, curriculum, and high-stakes tests limit teachers' flexibility in their teaching practices despite their positive beliefs towards linguistic diversity in education (Shohamy, 2006; Le Pichon-Vorstman et al., 2022).

"Assessment" is an area where challenges persist, because teachers find it very difficult to separate understanding from language ability, which can negatively affect multilingual students' performance in many cases (Hornberger & Link, 2012; Massler et al., 2022). Moreover, "classroom management issues and time considerations" can sometimes contribute to "limiting language practices, which negatively impact students' participation and sense of membership in educational settings" (Bonacina-Pugh & van der Walt, 2022). Taking everything into consideration, a gap in "teachers' commitment to inclusive views of multilingualism and their capacity to carry out sustained multilingual education practices"

continues to be evident in existing literature and thus warrants attention to align with educational policies at different levels (García et al., 2021; Zheng & Mei, 2024).

A large amount of literature finds teachers' attitudes towards multilingualism classified into 'asset-based,' 'deficit-based,' and 'pragmatic.' Teachers with asset-based attitudes see multilingualism from a cognitive, cultural, and learning perspective. They see this asset as increasing cognitive powers as well as providing increased opportunities for learning and developing their learners' identities. They focus their teaching on translanguaging, collaborative learning, and educational language learning strategies in their learners' native languages. Research studies undertaken in multilingual settings in Asia and Europe have indicated teachers with asset-based attitudes towards multilingualism see linguistic diversity in learning contexts leading to enhanced conceptual learning and participation (Busch, 2012; Gorter et al., 2020).

On the other side, a deficit approach views multilingualism as an obstacle to good teaching. Teachers with this ideology associate using multiple languages in classrooms with lacking fluency in the language of instruction, classroom control, and poor academic performance (Piller, 2016; Zheng, 2023). Studies conducted among preschool and secondary school learning environments have indicated an association of this ideology with pressure from institutions and a lack of teacher training rather than an ideological opposition to diversity (De Angelis, 2011).

A third, pragmatic orientation reflects teachers' conditional acceptance of multilingualism. In this orientation, the teacher acknowledges the real existence of a multilingual classroom and may use students' first languages selectively for clarification or peer support but still chooses the dominant instructional language as the primary mode. This often arises from contexts wherein, although teachers value inclusion, they are constrained by curriculum demands, time limitation, and assessment frameworks (Hornberger & Link, 2012).

Teachers' Approaches promote learning among Multilingual Students

Despite the numerous complications, teachers have developed many novel strategies which facilitate an inclusive learning environment for the multilingual students. Cooperative learning is considered to be one of the best models for ensuring peer support and cross-cultural communication (Johnson & Johnson, 2014). Teachers suggest that group activities in which knowledge of language is shared display students having improved language skills along with cultural awareness (Slavin, 2015).

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The other most acknowledged strategy is culturally responsive teaching, which seeks to focus instruction based on students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds as according to Paris (2012). A teacher could develop a welcoming environment and encourage inclusivity by acknowledging and celebrating the home languages of students (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Furthermore, language-supportive methods of instruction that include giving sentence starters and pictorial resources allow weaker performers of the classroom language learners to take part in the lesson to a better extent (Walqui & Van Lier, 2010).

The teachers have various methods to ensure that their classes are inclusive yet cover the needs of the multilingual learners. One such method is code-switching whereby one uses two languages within the same conversation or lesson.

Encouraging peer cooperation may prove effective, especially when learners have a home language in common. Teachers who assist in developing peer-assisted learning groups can help learners teach each other, get over language difficulties, and gain closer social ties.

Some teachers use project-based learning and translanguaging as a method of language development. Project-based learning involves tasks, students will take part in, that integrate different types of skills so they can enact their language skills meaningfully. Translanguaging, however, is when all of the language resource of the student can be permitted to know and express concepts without limiting them to one particular language. Switching happens when people move between two languages spoken at residences and the other outside their residences. This is what happens in nations such as India where switching exists with the usage of English, Hindu/Urdu, Bengali, and Tamil (Lyons, 1981). Teachers who embrace translanguaging can aid students utilize their rich linguistic repertoire that actually provokes deeper comprehension and more involvement in content.

Best Classroom Practices for Encouraging Multilingual Students

Cooperative Learning in Promoting Multilingualism

The importance of developing instructional strategies that support multilingualism was emphasized, in addition to growing linguistic diversity in school contexts. Practice of multiple languages in a school context is supported through cooperative learning-a framework for students. Here, students work in small, mixed-ability groups that foster multilingualism (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Cooperative learning settings also develop the use of linguistic skills among language learners by facilitating the use of natural languages and bringing about mutual respect among diverse peers with varying backgrounds (Slavin, 2014).

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Experiments have revealed that cooperative learning conditions encourage language acquisition since it creates low-anxiety contexts where learners are comfortable making linguistic risks (Bialystok, 2011). Experiments in bilingual education support this claim through the phenomenon of students within cooperative groups having a greater opportunity to use informal and formal language practices, which is a crucial prerequisite to foreign language learning (Swain & Lapkin, 2000; Johnson & Johnson, 2017). In addition, "think-pair-share" or "jigsaw," to name a few structured interactions, require students to collaborate with others, whereby their linguistic and cognitive ability expands at the same time (Slavin, 2014).

Differentiated Education

Multilingualism, therefore, stands out as a key area of attention for teachers since classrooms become more culturally and linguistically diverse. Multilingual students in diverse classrooms require differentiated education, which effectively refers to tailoring instruction to meet the unique learning needs, as it has been shown to be effective in supporting the learning of multilingual students (Tomlinson, 2014). It tailors lesson to take into account linguistic skills, thus allowing educators to provide students with equal access to learning and support multilingualism alongside academic achievement (García & Lin, 2017).

Difference can be expressed as content, process, product, or learning environment changes. In a multilingual classroom, content differences might be illustrated through texts and resources supporting student language abilities. For instance, through the use of multilingual tools, visual implements and a simple vocabulary for freshmen, every student can meaningfully participate. Process differentiation, such as setting up specific groups by level of language proficiency with the children so that they can also discuss concepts in their native language, can make understanding easier while reinforcing multilingualism (Creese & Blackledge, 2010).

Reciprocal Communication Method (RCM)

Increased globalisation has made classrooms even more linguistically rich than ever. In such situations, innovative teaching methods need to be adopted in such a way that the process of handling multilingualism in a class becomes efficient. The reverse communication method- RCM- is two-way communication involving interactive dialogue and, therefore, very promising in involving multilingual children. The positive benefit here is that shared understanding, cooperative meaning-making, and linguistic flexibility can be achieved

(Garcia & Wei, 2014). Utilization of the native languages of the students, in generalizing a concept about the RCM approach, makes the process of learning even more inclusive.

In practice, RCM engages the students through disciplined process activities with alternating patterns of speaking and listening. For example, in peer-to-peer dialogues in multilingual classrooms, the students may practice their target languages while using their first languages to clarify. Teachers are facilitators who enable code-switching and translanguaging to ensure comprehension and participation in class (García et al., 2021).

Welcoming Linguistic and Cultural Diversity

In order to establish culturally and linguistically rich classroom environments, minority language learners can contribute rich experiences and cultural and linguistic information that do not impede their continued cognitive and linguistic growth in the target language.

Several strategies for welcoming and integrating minority language learners into the classroom community are provided by Coelho (2004), including class photos, language surveys and questionnaires, inclusive displays, and peer tutors and partners. Because both majority and minority students participate in these activities, all students in the classroom have a greater understanding of language and culture.

In the classroom, teachers might also ask students to share translations of various simple texts with one another. Simple words and phrases from other students are a great approach to bridge the gap between the many linguistic backgrounds in the classroom, and pupils appreciate hearing what other languages sound like. A straightforward question like "How do you say this in _____?" allows teachers to easily incorporate their students' linguistic backgrounds with little effort. Similar to this, teachers and students can welcome one another in a variety of languages used in the classroom, such as English as the lingua franca and the school's primary language (López-Gopar et al., 2014).

When it comes to any fundamental English word group, like "articles of clothing," on the BINGO card, the kids use all of their mother languages. Additionally, by using local language words for other categories, such as kitchen goods, bedroom items, household items, and other common phrases and words, students can build easy card games for use in the classroom, such as GO FISH.

According to González et al. (2005), p. 72, funds of knowledge are "historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and wellbeing." Minority students' cultural experiences and knowledge in subjects like farming, religion, household economics, childcare, and geography and religion

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of the home country can enrich the entire classroom community, including the instructors and domestic students. Activities include playing games in class that represent each student's cultural background and using cooperative learning in small groups to share texts and ideas from students' diverse backgrounds.

Students can also use English to write messages to each other about their native cultures. There should be books available for students to take home and read in both English and their native tongues. Teachers can assign the same book to the class as a whole, but they can allow students to read it in their native tongue if they feel unqualified to do so in English. Nonetheless, English should be used for class discussions. Activities that highlight each student's nation of origin are also beneficial. Regardless of background, every student has something to contribute to the class. Additionally, students might be paired with a "classwork buddy" to receive help from their peers.

By providing more Opportunities for Interaction

The instructor, who acts as a knowledge-dispersion figure, dominates many classrooms. Nonetheless, researchers studying language acquisition contend that student-to-student discussion of the lesson's ideas encourages language acquisition. The interaction hypothesis articulates this viewpoint (Long, 1996). Echevarria et al. (2008) enumerate the benefits of classroom interaction as follows: brain stimulation, higher motivation, more processing time, and increased attention. This is in contrast to a teacher-centred classroom where pupils are expected to answer immediately when called upon. It can be challenging for teachers to foster interaction in diverse classrooms because not all cultures appreciate this teaching approach and some students may be reluctant to work in groups. However, if grouping configurations are carefully varied (i.e., individual work, pair work, small groups, large groups, and whole class), and students are given some options, with enough time, both minority and majority students should gradually gain confidence in working cooperatively with their peers.

Challenges Faced by Teachers in Multilingual Classrooms

The benefits notwithstanding, however, many teachers face challenges in the management of multilingual classrooms. There are reported lacks of resources and training to support students' language needs. Some teachers may feel unprepared to address language diversity effectively, not least because perhaps they are themselves monolingual. There is little hope for well-trained teachers to assess students' abilities accurately or to appropriately adjust their teaching methodology to keep up with the demands of the multilingual learners. Furthermore,

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teachers may experience institutional pressures that prioritize monolingual instruction, which can create tension for those who wish to incorporate multilingual practices but lack the support from their schools or districts.

Teachers' perspectives on multilingualism are inextricably linked to their challenges in multilingual classrooms, and thus these preservice teachers form their ideas of how linguistic diversity is valued and practiced. While the majority of teachers understood multilingualism as a cognitive, cultural, and pedagogical resource in conceptual terms, their actual classroom practices are often beset by constraints related to linguistic heterogeneity, partial proficiency in the language of instruction at school entry, and complexities in promoting equal communication and participation (Cummins, 2001; García & Wei, 2014). This is further exacerbated by a lack of preparation and training both at pre-service and in-service levels in multilingual pedagogy, which causes a sense of unease and low confidence among teachers to pursue more inclusive strategies, such as translanguaging or cooperative language scaffolding (Lucas & Villegas, 2013; Gorter & Arocena, 2020).

Institutional pressures through monolingual language policies, standardized curricula, and high-stakes assessments often inhibit the use of students' home languages, even by those teachers who may personally consider linguistic inclusion to be very important (Shohamy, 2006; Piller, 2016). Due to this, teachers are often in a dilemma with regard to their beliefs and practices that are enacted, especially in assessment, since separating language proficiency from subject knowledge still remains very problematic (Hornberger & Link, 2012).

Other classroom management issues, time considerations, and tracking peer interaction in non-native languages can cause some educators to enforce restrictive language behavior policies, which can have a negative marginalizing impact on multilingual children despite good intentions in behaviour management support for these children (Bonacina-Pugh, 2020). Such challenges are further exacerbated by sociolinguistic-language hierarchies, which promote majority languages and disadvantage minority languages, thus influencing teacher expectations in these classrooms (Bourdieu, 1991; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000).

As a multilingual country, in Indian educational settings, code-switching by teachers is a common practice to facilitate learning, but exam-oriented and English-dominated educational settings are hampered by a limited role for multilingualism in education (Vaish, 2012; Mohanty, 2019). Taken together, these studies appear to have come to a consensus on a critical implication: While teachers' views of multilingualism are becoming more positive, they face a challenge in translating their views into a reality of inclusive education practise.

The results of this study have also portrayed a number of challenges that teachers have to face in a multilingual setting, including a lack of resources and a need for staff professionalization with regards to multilingual education. Teachers can overcome these impediments in education using strategies such as cooperative learning, culturally responsive teaching, and other educational methods which support a language.

Conclusion

The growing cultural and linguistic diversity in schools undoubtedly presents challenges for educators in the twenty-first century. Especially in context of Indian society multilingualism is one of crucial issues for education and school system. NEP-2020 also advocates for encouraging multilingualism in modern classroom. The innovative teaching practices like cooperative learning, Reciprocal Communication Method (RCM) and Differentiated Education has potential to promote multilingualism in the classroom. It can be concluded that challenges that teachers have to face includes lack of resources and a need for staff professionalization with regards to multilingual education. So, it is need of the hour that teachers must use effective pedagogies that integrate students' multicultural and multilingual identities while creating a secure and encouraging learning environment. Therefore, there is a growing need for research-based support in multilingual education to assist teachers in addressing increasing classroom diversity and the expanding demands placed on schools.

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