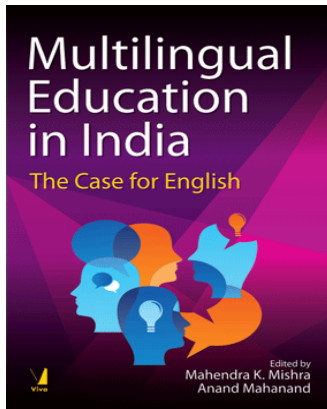


Review Article

Why English? a Review of *Multilingual Education in India: The Case for English*

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Multilingual Education in India: The Case for English

Eds. Mahendra K. Mishra & Anand Mahanand

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In any given context language is a resource. The book under review paves the way for using local languages for enhancing English language skills of the learners. In a certain way the book tries to integrate English language education to the plurality of language resources available in India. In its own style the book consists of research projects conducted in various parts of the globe to help millions of learners who struggle to have better language skills. As Professor Rajagopal puts it correctly “Bi/Multilingual education is a worldwide phenomena... this is a welcome movement” (as mentioned on the back cover page). Divided into three parts; part one is titled as “Problematization”, part two as “Practices” and part three as “Possibilities”. In toto the book comprises of twenty two research papers which highlight the problems, practices and possibilities of multilingual education in Indian context.

Part One: Problematization

Emphasizing on the need to have multilingual education Debi Prasanna Pattanaik highlights on the fact that “multilingual education is a social capital” (p,3) it is “such a curricular method and approach that bridges among languages” (p,4) He focuses on the advantages of having multilingual approach in classroom as it involves “cooperative learning” where “the students and teachers work together and seek the cooperation of the community”(p,5).

In the research paper titled “India, Tribal Education, and Participating in Crimes against Humanity” Tove Skutnabb-Kangas lays emphasis on how the languages of indigenous people are suppressed because of “the linguistic, pedagogical and psychological barriers” (p,9) created by the dominant language. The author concludes by mentioning “English opens some doors-yes. But a safer way towards good competence in English-or a regional dominant language-starts mainly with mother tongue-medium education”(p, 13).

In the next research paper David A. Hough emphasizes on how UN declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples in Nepal and worldwide can be beneficial for multilingual education. The author suggests ways in which consciousness can be raised about multilingual education and promotion of indigenous knowledge and practices can be done.

In the research paper titled “Responding to Student Diversity through the Curriculum: A Possible Lead Role for ELT” Jacob Tharu highlights the need for revising and upgrading the school and college curriculum depending on the relevance of curriculum with the change of time in order to improve the quality of education. ELT group in English departments need to contribute in these areas for the renewal of curriculum.

Anand Mahanand in his research paper titled “Contextualizing English Language Education for the Language Minority Learners” emphasizes how we can blend the local with the global. The central concern of his paper is to show how tasks and activities in language classes can be made by using tales, riddles, songs, proverbs and so on which was even recommended by National Curriculum Framework 2005. As he rightly mentions, “By doing this, we will not only help our local languages and culture grow side by side, but will also continue to make our learners multilingual. Such an approach will facilitate effective language learning” (p, 43).

Part Two: Practices

In the research paper titled “Multilingual Education in Orissa, India: Constructing Curriculum in the Context of Community and Culture” Mahendra K. Mishra highlights how multilingual education and community-based school programmes like Srujan have given priority to child-centred and mother tongue-based education. As he rightly puts it, “Srujan reflected on two major outcomes: building solidarity among the teachers, the community and the children for a common cause; and the learning potential embedded in the community knowledge (that has been historically ignored) in the school curriculum were recognised and shared among everybody” (p,77).

In the paper titled “Appropriating Education Strategies in Diverse Language Contexts” Dhir Jhingan suggests strategies in which children’s language issues can be addressed depending on the areas from which they belong. To be precise the context of child’s home language, culture, socio-economic and other factors need to be considered and a variety of approaches need to be developed for building language skills of the learners.

In the chapter titled “Living the Translanguaging Space: An Emic Perspective” Mohanraj Sathuvalli and Uma Maheswari Chimirala recommend “the need to examine more ways of tapping the pedagogic potentiality of translanguaging as a multilingual teaching and learning practice in our classrooms” (p,86).

In the paper titled “Intercultural Bilingual Education: Peru’s Indigenous Peoples’ Answer to Their Educational Needs” Susanne J. Perez emphasizes how intercultural bilingual education highlight on the fact that how “the maintenance and development of their (reference to indigenous peoples’) language are related to the maintenance and development of biodiversity. (p, 106).

In an exploratory experiment Suchismita Barik finds ways in which L1 can be used effectively to develop L2 writing as she mentions in her paper titled “Using Chain Story Writing in L1 to improve L2 Writing: An Experiment in a Multilingual Classroom”, “... scaffolding L2 can be very effective to teach coherence and cohesion in writing. Writing in L1 also helps learners in shaping the ideas, following an outline putting them together in an organized way” (p, 131)

In the next paper titled “What Do Our Teacher’s Say? A Study on ESL teacher’s Belief on L1 Use in Classroom” Subhasis Nanda highlights “on exploring teacher’s belief on the use of learners’ home language (L1) in L2 classroom communication and foster L2 learning in an ESL context given the fact that learners and the teacher share one home language (p,135).

In her paper titled “Integrating Content and Language Teaching to Teach Adjectives in a Tribal Context in Odisha” Arpita Panda suggests that “ in a class where learners come from a marginal community and they have their own language(s) in their linguistic repertoire, multilingual education may be a feasible alternative” (p, 155).

In the chapter titled “Cultural Diversity and the Classroom” Ruth Z. Hauzel highlights on how cultural diversity in classroom space needs to be explored for a better development of language skills. As Hauzel mentions “it is crucial to understand both the medium and the content of what we are teaching, and what the student brings to the classroom, so that our teaching becomes an aid not a hindrance to the student’s potential (p, 166).

Mahanand Pathak in his research paper titled “Reading the Role of L1 in the Indian English Classroom” emphasizes the merits of using L1 in classroom and suggests various ways in which L1 can be used for the development of L2 of the learners. As he rightly quotes Cook (2001), “Learning/teaching L2 is not just about teaching the student how to add a few rooms in a house by building an extension at the back; it is like the rebuilding of internal walls. It implies that in some ways the construction of the house will change. Trying to put languages in separate compartments in the mind is doomed to failure since the compartments are connected in many ways “(p 187).

In the next paper titled “Changing Perspectives of Education in North-East India with Special Reference to Tripura” Shymal Das suggests the need of education “to reorient itself according to the demands of the job market ... Education combined with skills promises to rescue the society from its present state of debility, helplessness and frustration (p, 204-205).

In the paper titled “Problems and Prospects of English Language Teaching and Learning in Lakshadweep: The Case of Minicoy Island” P. Abdul Hakeem finds grassroots level problems in the present scenario of English language teaching in Lakshadweep and suggests ways in which it can be improved be it teachers’ training, revision of instructional materials etc.

Part Three: Possibilities

This section highlights the ways in which possibilities for negotiation of English with local languages and cultures are viable. The papers included show different ways of teaching English in Multilingual settings.

In the paper titled “ELT in India: Need for a Cap That Fits the Head” Jayshree Mohanraj suggests the ways in which the learner’s needs can be addressed be it at the school level or at the higher education level. She recommends that we need to 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” (p, 223).

In the next paper titled “An Investigation of the Needs and Incorporation of Study Skills Components in a Multilingual Classroom in India” Amit Kumar suggests the need to incorporate study skills to enhance learners’ academic performance.

In the next paper titled “Teaching English in Multilingual India-Some Suggestions” Mohanraj Sathuvalli recommends ways in which textbooks can be produced keeping in mind the bi/multilingual classroom context for better learning output and teachers need to explore the resources the learners have for a better learning experience.

In the paper titled “Countering the ‘Two-Solitude’ Instructional Mode in ESL Writing” Lina Mukhopadhyay suggests various ways in which the diverse learning resources of the learners can be used to develop writing skill of the students.

In the paper titled “The Alien Context in Teaching English in Indian Classrooms: Some Issues and Practices: Sisirkana Bhattacharya suggests for approaches and methods of teaching English to be supportive to the learners so as to use the potential of the mother tongue to the fullest for better language output.

In the paper titled “Convivial Cross-lingual Evaluation in Multilingual Indian Classrooms: An Exploration of Possibilities” Geetha Durairajan recommends the ways for cross-lingual evaluation keeping in mind the context of multilingual Indian classrooms. She also highlights the need for a ‘multilingual, transformative, empowering pedagogy’ (p, 293).

Keeping in mind the multilingual setting of Indian classrooms this book provides various ways in which learner’s local and cultural resources can be used for better and effective learning output. In a certain sense L1 is an asset to develop L2 as suggested by researchers of bi/multilingual education. This book is a significant contribution to the field of bi/multilingual education which will help millions of learners and teachers to integrate and explore possibilities for developing language skills.

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