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UNDERSTANDING MULTILINGUALISM IN INDIA'S CLASSROOMS

MACMILLAN

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Macmillan Education India is committed to contributing to an inclusive and equitable education system in India through innovative resources and teaching methods resting on a foundation of Indian culture and heritage.

This report stems from the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020's thrust on promoting multilingualism and the power of language in teaching and learning. It has been popularly accepted that young children learn and grasp concepts more quickly in their home language/ mother tongue. NEP recommends that teachers use a bilingual approach to teaching students whose home language may be different from the medium of instruction. It is believed that multilingualism has great cognitive benefits to young students and children.

This study was self-initiated by Macmillan Education India to understand the perceptions of teachers on multilingualism and its significance in Indian classrooms in the coming times.

Through this study, we wanted to find out more about this linguistic phenomenon in relation to English classrooms. The study analysed the potential advantages and challenges of linguistic diversity which can impact the everyday lives of Indian learners in educational institutions. The report documents the multilingual reality and various teaching practices in classes of English language as well as other subjects all over India. Macmillan Education is grateful to the participating teachers who helped shape this study to be able to see how integrating multilingual approach into education can have an everlasting impact on the young learners.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We live in a multilingual world where English serves as the lingua franca for education, trade and employment. It is also seen as an essential skill for someone wanting to succeed professionally or academically in the 21st century. Existing language policies focus on giving more equitable access to high levels of English language proficiency to make opportunities inclusive and open to all socio-economic groups. However, it has been felt that knowledge of English alone is not enough and hence the need for a language policy that helps to position the role of multiple languages in a more positive and protected context.

India is known globally for its colossal cultural and linguistic diversity which plays a critical role in shaping its democratic polity. Languages overlap and collide in a multilingual and multicultural society. The need for translanguaging and code-switching demonstrates complex practices in our multilingual families, schools and cities. This lived experience helps us learn how to prepare people with the language skills they need to live in a multilingual society. People need to develop necessary sensitivity towards the cultural and linguistic needs of their fellow citizens.

Multilingualism in India is a product of its history and a reflection of its diverse cultures. The multilingual, multiethnic and multicultural character of India necessitates the inclusion of several languages in the curriculum for school education. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has formulated a language policy which addresses all levels of education and integrates it in a national plan of education. The three-language formula is a consensus which highlights the need to blend the local, the national and the international and seeks to promote a culturally integrative policy.

Learning is an outcome of various cultural and social factors. Young learners develop it through communication with their surroundings. NEP 2020 reflects the global education development agenda reflected in Goal 4 (SDG4) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which seeks to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" by 2030.

According to NEP 2020, young learners have a much better chance to comprehend ideas in their native languages and as such the medium of teaching till Grade 5, and if possible, Grade 8 should be in local languages. It also states that the promotion of Indian languages can only be made possible if they are used regularly for teaching and learning. (Sec 22:20). Efforts, both by the Central and the State governments, are being made to invest in large numbers of language teachers in all regional languages around the country, and, in particular, for all languages mentioned in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India.

This study, a self-initiative by Macmillan Education India, aims to understand the complex dynamics of social, economic and geographical contexts in the delivery of multilingual education in India. It allows us to examine the attitudes of teachers towards home language based multilingual education. The study also analyses the potential advantages and challenges of such linguistic diversity which can impact the everyday lives of Indian learners in educational institutions across India.

This study is meant to be a useful reference for the wider community of scholarship to understand the hybrid use of language in a multilingual classroom and the different ways in which it can be used to promote learning. This will be beneficial for institutions and individuals who are involved in measuring or seeking measurable outcomes from educational interventions.

Data for the study was gathered from an online self-report questionnaire comprising both close-ended (n. 10) and open-ended questions (n. 5). The survey was based on ESL teachers' perspectives and understanding of multilingualism based on their personal experience through the process of teaching English language across India. The research design makes use of both quantitative and qualitative strategies. The participants of the study were asked to fill out an online survey and those who agreed to be part of the follow-up interview were contacted through the telephone. The respondents were either in-service teachers of government/private schools and institutes or those who gave home and online tutoring between the age of 18 and 50.

The findings from the study showed that teachers perceived multilingualism in varied ways. More than half of the participating teachers (57.2%) thought of multilingualism as encouraging the use of multiple languages in the classroom while 27.4% of them thought that it meant including regional languages along with English in the curriculum. For ≈10% of them, it meant using home languages in the English classroom. While the participants, by and large, perceive multilingualism differently, they all welcome the use of more than one language besides English in their classes. This helps build an equitable, accessible and inclusive educational system.

BACKGROUND

Multilingualism Scenario

India is a land of diversity. The heterogeneity of language, culture, ethnicity, religion, caste and creed beautifully weaves the Indian social fabric. The idea of 'Indianness' has rallied around weaving diversity through a thread of unity. Linguistic richness or diversity is one remarkable example of this diversity. A wealth of educational research across the Indian subcontinent has showed that multilingual classrooms are the norm. Home language/mother tongue/ local language/regional language are all different terms which can be used to describe the multilingual setting in India.
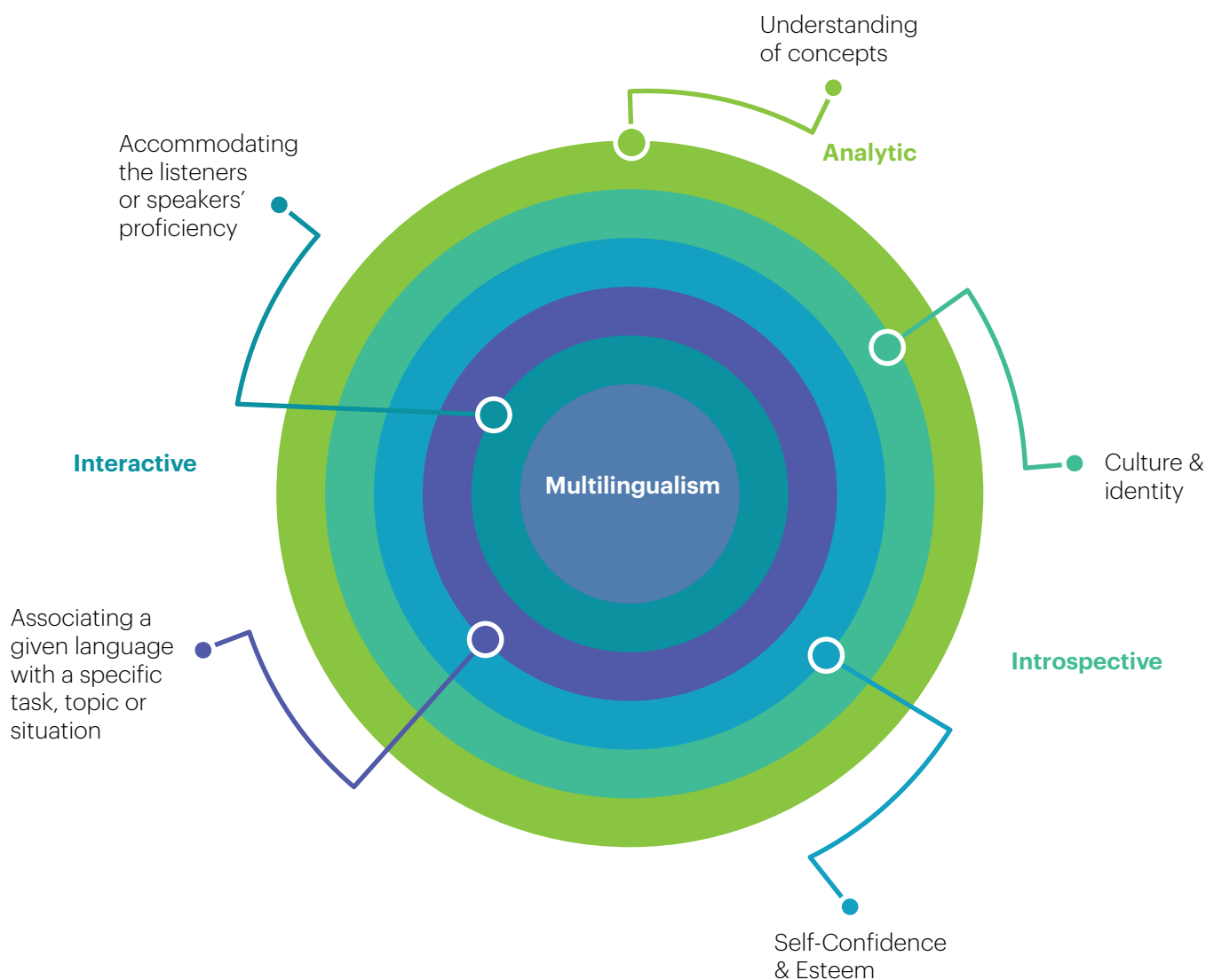
Education in India cannot be discussed without referring to the sociolinguistic context. In reality, multiple languages are used to mediate teaching and learning in state and/or private schools. Teachers work with groups of learners who speak many different languages at home. Multilingualism, referred to by researchers as language mixing, code-switching or translanguaging, is when the teachers use or allow the use of multiple languages as an informal strategy to support learning. Multilingualism is the way of life in India as people in different parts of the country speak more than one language from their birth and learn additional languages during their lifetime. The language policy of India has been pluralistic, giving priority to the use of mother tongue in administration, education and other fields of mass communication.

Research suggested a number of reasons for multilingualism depending on the actual speech, context or task. "It occurs because individuals associate a given language with a specific task, topic or situation, or because some concepts (such as 'the Internet') tend to be more commonly expressed in a given language, or because it can be playful and witty"[1].

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[1] Reshmi P Bhaskaran. (2019). "Translanguaging: Multilingual Teaching Terminologies" in CLIC@India.

Other reasons may involve "improving understanding of concepts due to the absence of equivalent terms, developing or retaining identity or for sociocultural expression, accommodating the listener or speakers' proficiency in one of the languages used, or simply for the pragmatic reason that it might be quicker to explain something in one language than another"[2]. More often than not, ELT teachers are likely to switch between languages for all of these reasons. However, in this country-wide survey we wanted to find out more about this linguistic phenomenon in relation to classrooms where English is the medium of instruction.

Understanding of concepts

Analytic

Accommodating the listeners or speakers' proficiency

Culture & identity

Interactive

Multilingualism

Associating a given language with a specific task, topic or situation

Introspective

Self-Confidence & Esteem

2   Ianthi Maria Tsimpli and Amy Lightfoot. (2020). "India: Investigating Multilingual Classrooms". https://learningportal.iiep.unesco.org/.

Research encouraged multilingualism for the empowerment of learning in general and language learning in particular. Some of its significant findings and guidelines which have been successfully entertained are:

- It is widely-accepted that learners, especially at a young age, grasp concepts more quickly and effectively in their home language/mother tongue.

- Practically, this means that the medium of instruction in both state and private schools till Grade 5 or more favourably till Grade 8 needs to be based on the home language/mother tongue/local language/regional language.

- Whenever possible and applicable, for the next/higher educational grades/levels, the home/local language may as well be taught as a language.

- High-quality textbooks, including science textbooks, need to be made available in home language(s)/mother tongue.

- In cases where home language/mother-tongue textbook material is not available, the language of interaction between teachers and students may still be the home language/mother tongue, wherever possible.

- Teachers are always encouraged to use a bilingual approach, including bilingual teaching-learning materials, with those students whose home language may be different from the medium of instruction.

- All languages should always be taught in an enjoyable and interactive style, with plenty of interactive conversations, and with reading and writing in the mother tongue in the early years, and with skills developed for reading and writing in other languages in Grade 3 and above.

- A language does not have to be the medium of instruction for it to be taught and learnt well.

- Children acquire languages really quickly between the ages of 2 and 8, and that multilingualism has multiple cognitive advantages to our young learners.

- Children need to be exposed to different languages early on but with a specific emphasis on the mother tongue, starting from the Foundational Stage onwards.

- All languages require high quality of teaching.

- Extensive use of smart technologies needs to be made for teaching and learning of different languages and to popularise multilingualism.

Thankfully, huge efforts have been made so far by the Central and State governments in India, and of course more is still needed to prepare high-quality bilingual textbooks and teaching-learning materials (TLM) for Science, Technology, Engineering, Maths (STEM) education, so that students are better able to think and speak about subjects/topics in both their home or mother tongue and in English. Both the Central and State Government need to make a major (conjoined) effort in investing in large numbers of language teachers in all regional languages across the country and, in particular, for all languages mentioned in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India. 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 around the country.

Aims & Objectives

There have been a number of reports from academic institutions which concern the multilingual scenario in the English language classrooms. Nevertheless, relatively few attempts were made to quantify and report this kind of hybrid use of regional/home languages next to English or explored some of the most asked questions – when, how often and why – and the different ways how this knowledge can best be employed to promote the learning and use of English in ELT settings.

The main objective behind conducting this survey was to get to know more and broaden our knowledge and get new insights into the reality of using more than one language in an English language classroom. In other words, we wanted to find out when, how often and why both teachers and learners in English classrooms tend to code-switch back and forth on many occasions from one language to another, to harness the power of language in teaching and learning in the Indian educational system. This report incorporated theoretical foundations, practical pedagogical implications and recommendations from in-service teachers and other practitioners in order to be able to understand the present methodological trends and patterns in ELT domain and make informed, data-supported conclusions and suggestions.

Wherever possible and applicable, we recommend the implementation of the interesting findings in this report, which support, add value to previous research and bring in new insights on multilingualism, for the empowerment of learning at large and language learning in particular. Indeed, we hope that the fundamental principles highlighted and implicated in the findings of this report will aid and guide parents and the education system as well as the individual institutions within it.

DESIGN OVERVIEW

Methodology

This survey was self-initiated by Macmillan Education India. It was done prior to developing a self-learning online course on Multilingualism in Language Education for The British Council. The survey was run to understand perceptions of teachers on multilingualism in relation to ELT teaching, and the significance of multilingualism in Indian classrooms in coming times. Different outcomes were set by the questionnaire items which involved both closed-ended questions (n.10) and open-ended questions (n.5).

This survey research design makes use of both quantitative and qualitative strategies. The participants in this study (n. 923) were requested to fill out the survey, and those who would like to be part of a follow-up interview were requested to provide their email address.

Elicited data for this study was gathered from an online self-report questionnaire. This survey was based on the ESL teachers' own perspectives and understanding about multilingualism according to their personal experience through the process of teaching English language across India. There were two main advantages of conducting the self-report online survey: (i) First, it was a relatively simple way to collect data from many people across many parts of the country, quickly (ii) Second, self-report data could be collected in various ways to suit the objectives and goals of this research.

Representative Population Sample

There were 923 respondents from the target territories of different parts of India. They are in-service teachers whose age ranged between 18 to 50. Some of them teach in governmental/private schools and institutes and some give home and online tutoring. (Fig. 1)


54.50%

42.70%

3.80%

1.90%

0.60%

1.30%

■ Private ■ Government ■ Institutes ■ Online classes at the moment ■ Home and Online Tutor
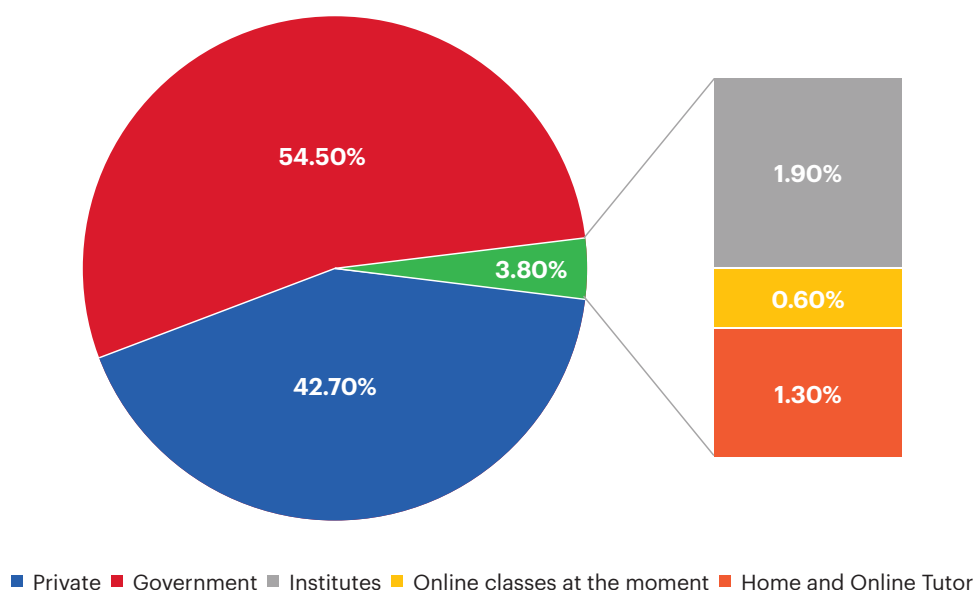
Fig. 1: Participants' work sector

More than of 75% of these participants were female teachers and 25% were male teachers. They were from different educational backgrounds, i.e., Mathematics, Social Science, Science, Hindi and English. Participants taught different grades at multi-levels as the following: Foundational level (age group 3-6, pre-primary) & (age group 6-8, 1st and 2nd graders) = 2.04%; Preparatory level (age group 8-11, 3rd-5th graders) = 2.40%; Middle School level (age group 11-14, 6th- 8th graders) = 52.76%; Secondary school level (age group 14-18, 9th–12th graders) = 85.26% (Fig. 2).

Foundational level ■ **Preparation level** ■ **Middle school** ■ **Secondary school**
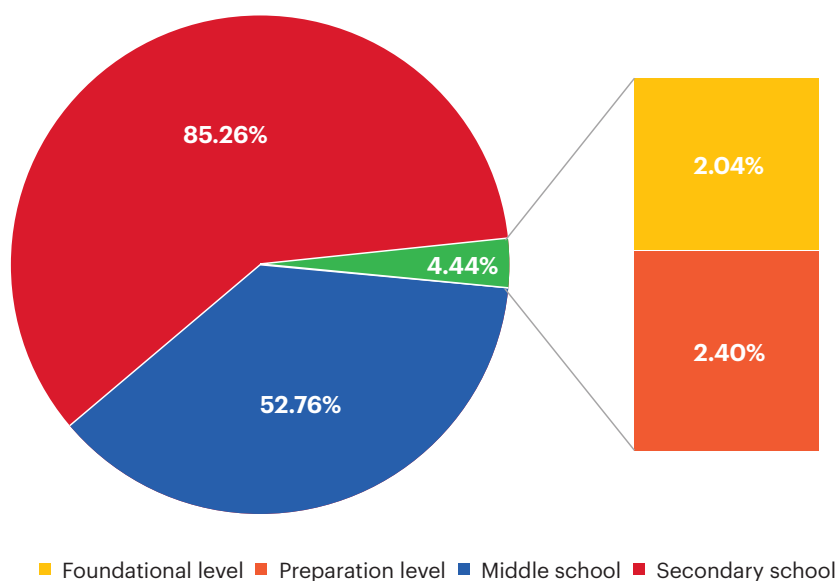
Fig. 2: Grades taught

The majority of the participating teachers in this survey were from North India 770 (83%). The rest were from South India–31 (3%); Middle India–72 (7%); East & Northeast India–44 (4%); and West India–6 (3%).

The schools, where the participating teachers are based, are in urban, semi-urban, rural and semi-rural areas (Fig. 3).

■ Urban ■ Semi urban ■ Semi rural ■ Rural
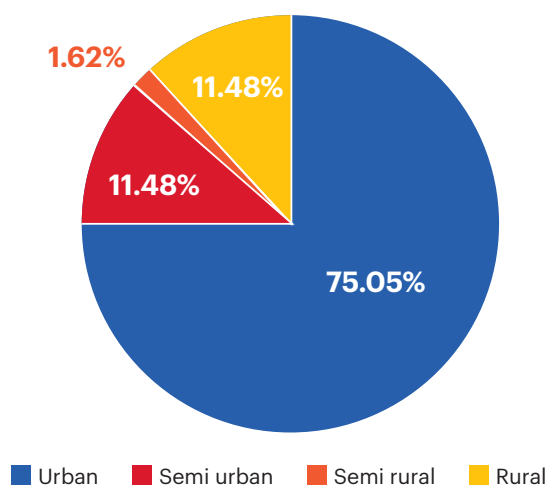
Fig. 3: Demographic distribution of the schools in which participants teach

These report findings from teacher samples have been processed by independent consultants from the fields of assessments, psychometrics and data analytics, and by experts from Macmillan Education India.

FINDINGS

Different understandings of multilingualism

Findings concerning the participating teachers' understanding and support of the actual concept of multilingualism, its impact and effectiveness varied.

It can be seen in Figure 4 that more than half of the participating teachers (57.2%) thought of multilingualism as encouraging the use of multiple languages in the classroom. However, for 27.4% of them, multilingualism meant including regional languages along with English in the curriculum. For ~10% of them, it meant using home languages in an English classroom. Whilst the participants, by and large, perceive multilingualism differently, they all seem to welcome the use of more than one language besides English in their classes. It could be the special multilingual nature of India. As expressed by one of the teachers, "this multilingual nature of the Indian classroom must be used as a resource so that every child could feel secure and accepted".

Legend:
- Using English to teach other subjects
- Including regional languages along with English in the curriculum
- Using home languages in an English Classroom
- Encouraging the use of multiple languages in the classroom

Pie chart values: 5.6%, 27.4%, 9.9%, 57.1%
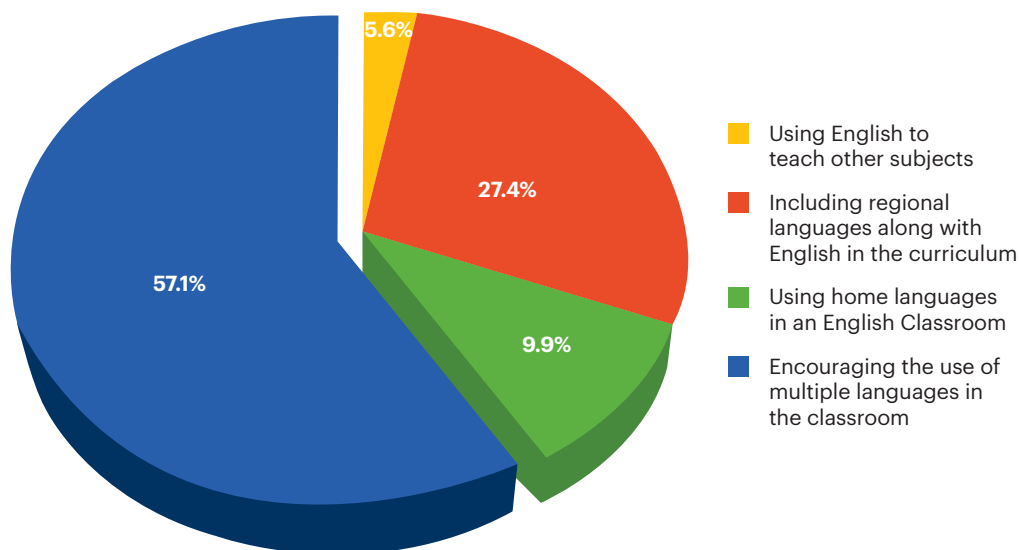
Fig. 4: Participants' understanding of multilingualism in ELT classes

Theme 2

Does student learning improve when you switch between languages during classroom instruction?

For the majority of teachers in this survey, the answer was a big "Yes" in the context of teaching English.

Multilingualism Highlights by ELT Teachers

- Some of the participants suggested that, "Yes, when students are unable to explain any word in English for a long time, they use their own mother tongue".

- In the initial stages of learning English, "switching between English and native language has helped to instil confidence in learners. Once they are confident, they listen and understand better, and there is no need to use native language".

- "Although I use minimal translations in my class, but still some words require mandatory translations like *elaichi* will be understood better than cardamom."

- "Their vocabulary is enhanced".

- "Students learn well and easily when they are explained the meanings of the words and phrases in their home languages."

- "Being an English teacher, my experience is that student's learning improves as mostly the students are more comfortable and fluent in their own mother tongue or local language. Hence, they express themselves with clarity and expression. Sometimes the concept or the theme is not understood by the students, but if explained in their mother tongue, then they benefit a lot."

- "When I used to teach English lessons in senior classes, I explained the storyline and characters in regional language first and then switched to English language."

- "Since the first language of our students is not English, they tend to think in their own language, then translate and communicate in English. This sometimes leaves out some of the thoughts. If they are encouraged to be bilingual or multilingual, sharing experience improves."

"I teach Sanskrit, and students can relate some of the grammatical sections with English, e.g., Person (First, Second and Third) and Purush (Pratham, Madhyam, Uttam)'."

"Certain difficult idioms & phrases, vocabulary and sentence structures, if explained in vernacular, leads to effective learning."

"Those students who are not able to understand English thoroughly could understand the content better if I used their mother tongue in between the lecture."

"Whenever I use another language while teaching English, students show more interest and are able to relate more."

"Student learning improves when switching languages during classroom interaction as students are not familiar with many English words and their usage."

"Language switching helps English learners better understand concepts, especially cultural ideas. The phrase 'Child's play' was used in a poem which they understood clearly when a learner shouted 'bacho ka Khel'."

"All in all, many of the participants believe that using learners' home language simplifies the process of learning English language."

"An Urdu or Sanskrit teacher often uses English and Hindi words for better understanding of students."

For Teaching Other Subjects

Poetry Classes

Participants reported that "Yes. While teaching poetic devices, a reference of parallel Hindi terms helps the learners."

"Yes, I need to explain in Hindi, especially poems, as students cannot connect with the poet's version."

"I am into explaining idioms and other figurative expressions using multiple languages. It saves a lot of time and energy as the meaning becomes clear to students."

Mathematics

"Yes, while teaching maths, the students came across a word which they were unable to understand. Then I showed them a picture of it and asked them what they to call it in their home language (i.e., Hindi). In this way, they all now know what tarpaulin is."

"Yes, I teach maths in both the medium (Hindi and English). It helps them in solving the question paper."

Science

"Yes, I used science terms bilingually during my teaching. Students were free to choose the term in the language they found easy. It raised interest of students in science language and ultimately increased qualitative and quantitative result of the whole class."

Social Science

"Yes, in teaching social science, there are many terms easy to learn in English and other terms that are easy to learn and understand in Hindi or regional language."

Storytelling

"Yes! We have to be bilingual to make them understand a story."

General tendency towards multilingualism

Based on broad-spectrum observations, given the multilingual nature of countries as rich linguistically as India, there is always a general tendency among teachers in both ELT and other classes to code-switch for some reason or another.

- "Teachers switch over languages during conversations as students become alert and attentive."

- "If we teach English, students would understand and feel comfortable to answer in Hindi as it is their native language."

- "Yes, in my classroom I have observed it many times. Sometimes, giving examples in local languages helps students to grasp information better."

- "Yes, in certain cases, it does increase and in others, it doesn't. Actually, in classes which have first generation learners, only usage of English doesn't work. In such classes, one has to take help of Hindi or local languages."

- "There are students in our classes who are first generation learners. For them, using English only as the language of instruction can serve as a hindrance in their learning process and also lead to limiting the opportunities of growth. So, the use of mother tongue to make meanings and concepts clear to the students would be an interesting idea."

- "It works wonders, especially in the case of slow learners and students with learning difficulties. Also, sometimes the use of words from other languages helps in building connections and familiarity with the students and making the classroom atmosphere pleasant and light for our learners. This process makes the process of learning long lasting and concrete."

- "Yes, because when we give to students a chance to speak in their own language, then they explain things very interestingly."

- "One day, I asked a student to answer a question. He failed to do so. However, when I gave him a clue in his home language, he answered correctly."

- "Of a course, yes. Students have a clear understanding of concepts when taught in bilingual mode. Student's pay more attention to study and show their concern about the content. Yes, students learn better and the learning becomes interesting."

"Yes, while explaining something important, I switch to some other regional language to grab the students' attention and to make the information clearer."

"Yes, in junior classes, students feel comfortable and more connected if they are taught and things are explained in their mother tongue. It also helps elicit a response from them."

"Yes, as a Hindi speaking native and specifically in the Delhi region, students better understand new words when in they are explained in their mother tongue as they can connect more."

"The student is likely to trust her teacher more, show more engagement in learning, behave better in class and achieve higher levels academically."

"Yes, for deeper understanding of words in different ways and situations, for quoting real life examples, we need to make a switch between languages."

"Yes, student's learning will improve when we switch between languages (English and mother tongue) in classroom because students come in school from various backgrounds. They come from slums and villages so their English may be weak. This will affect their learning, so I prefer language switch during classroom."

"Yes, many-a-times, students face a little bit of language barrier and thus switching from English to Hindi is better for easier understanding."

"Yes, many-a-times, it becomes difficult for children to relate to a specific situation or word, but when you mention it in the local dialect, they get it easily."

"If I give instructions only in English, many students do not understand. But, when I switch between languages, they understand better."
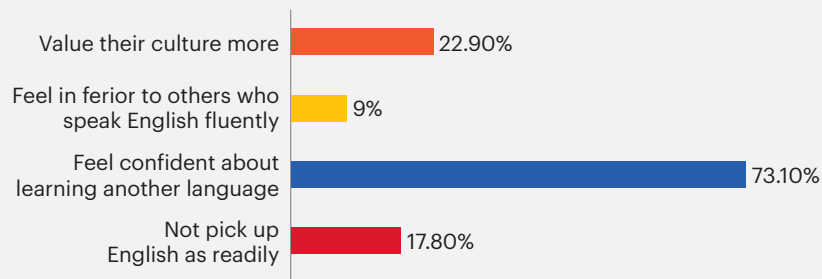
Theme 3

Possible outcomes of allowing students to use their home language while learning English in the classroom

Some of the interesting results (Fig 5) revealed a mixed feeling or attitude towards the use of learners' home language in English as Second Language (ESL) classes. Participants demonstrated that there are some possible valuable outcomes besides other undesirable disadvantages if learners use their home language in ELT classes. While learners will value their culture much more and may feel confident about learning another language, they may not pick up English as readily and may feel inferior to others who speak English fluently.

For many of the participating teachers, the situation of multilingualism in ELT classes is not always a win-win one.

What are the possible outcomes of allowing students to use their home language while learning English in the classroom?

Value their culture more — 22.90%

Feel in ferior to others who speak English fluently — 9%

Feel confident about learning another language — 73.10%

Not pick up English as readily — 17.80%

Fig. 5: Possible outcomes of allowing learners to use their home language while learning English in the classroom

Theme 4

Does the use of students' home language support their understanding of academic concepts?

This is a question which is frequently asked and debated among practitioners and academicians. The majority of participants were found to be in favour of multilingualism. They believe that multilingualism helps students get more involved in the learning process and relate to a given concept easily in the home or vernacular language as they have a good command over it. It is especially true for young learners when they learn math and science concepts. Concepts are better understood in home language because they are more relatable when supported with local examples.

"Yes, while trying to make the students understand the meaning of 'fetch', I used laiba kari in Bhojpuri or Maithili languages. This made them understand the meaning of the word very clearly because they could connect it with their vocabulary of daily use."

If the concept is taught first in English and then scaffolding is done using student's home language, then the understanding is cemented. Sometimes, they learn new words, such as 'dissemination' to build their vocabulary. While some students do understand if the meaning is explained properly, but few need the explanation in Hindi to understand its meaning. Much of it also depends on the learning level and previous knowledge of students. Some students from better educated family backgrounds do better if English is used in English classes. Whereas in other cases, everything goes over the head of students.

The language they are comfortable with will helps them acquire the target language and understand academic concepts easily. "The use of home language makes learning more lasting, concrete and meaningful. Even difficult portions of vocabulary and concepts are understood very easily by the learners." Especially, with regard to students from vernacular medium of instruction, it has been an effective way to teach. Students learn better if concepts are explained thoroughly in their mother tongue/vernacular medium.

Middle Ground Stance Quotes "..."

"I am not sure if I am woke enough for this! I am an old school teacher and prefer that the English class sounds like an English class. Occasional explanation in the vernacular wouldn't harm, but it's not a practice I celebrate. Having said that, the Hindi "varnamala", or the primer is a very effective tool to teach speech/pronunciation. So, I do bring Hindi in my classes for that matter."

"The use of the language spoken at home does simplify concepts (specifically, difficult terms), but that is only because English isn't used as frequently as it should be. Teachers 'choose' Hindi because it is more convenient. If they choose English instead, learners would get used to that just as well, even though it might take a little longer and come with a little more patience."

"For other subjects yes, using home language will support understanding of academic concepts. Even in English classes, L1 will help understand L2. But, students must be given the chance to interact more in L2 so that they are able to speak and be fluent."

Better Understanding
Confidence Scaffolding
First language
Classroom Instruction
Bilingual Code-switching
Socio-cultural knowledge
Vernacular Multilingualism
Language Mixing
Equitable Home language
Translanguaging
Acceptance Native language
Functional Language
L2 Education Scaffolding
Diversity

English as Second Language
Education
L1 First generation learners
Language Preference
Regional language
Mother tongue
Linguistic Diversity
Inclusive
Sociolinguistics
Accessible
Language Barrier
Translation
Multicultural
Vocabulary

Theme 5

Does the use of multiple languages in the classroom encourage diversity and inclusion?

Languages are part of society and culture. Multilingual vocabulary helps build socio-cultural knowledge. Whenever multiple languages are given place in a classroom, multiple cultures are represented by the speakers which helps in inclusion of these cultures and languages.

Learners come to know each other's languages, customs, which creates more interest and positive feeling linked with the curriculum and enhances their general knowledge.

When a teacher shows respect for multiple languages in her/his classroom, students automatically accept their peers from diverse groups. Also, children feel more connected with each other and will be able to learn about different cultures.

It would help develop a sense of respect for all languages. Students could be better inclined to learn more than their own language.

Use of multiple languages demonstrates diversity, exploration and incorporation of the different languages in order to enrich the learning atmosphere.

This also helps students of different learning levels feel more comfortable. They do not feel inferior or excluded.

Students may feel proud to learn in their home languages, and it will protect their identity and save them from feeling embarrassed.

They learn to accept and value variation and diverse cultures. They learn inclusion and respect others. Usage of multiple languages ensures more learning of diverse languages and cultures.

It makes students confident about their language and keep a positive attitude in learning new languages.

Speaking multiple languages encourages diversity and acceptance of other languages.

Students belong to different cultures. If they all spoke in their mother tongue, we would get an insight into things related to their cultures.

All the students, from different social backgrounds feel free to learn a new language by using the knowledge of the language they already know as a foundation. They interact and learn more about each other, other languages and cultures. Such a classroom is the real depiction of India as a land of unity and diversity. The learners strive collectively and collaboratively to acquire a new language without feeling alienated from a foreign language that might not be used in their immediate social environment. Even the learners with learning difficulties, feel included in the process of learning as they are able to express themselves and also learn in a language they are comfortable with.

Also, without a doubt, multiple use of languages attracts more examples from student's experiences.

They value and respect their own as well as other classmates' identity, individuality and culture.

Middle Ground Stance Quotes "..."

Students feel more comfortable and understand the cultural diversity while also respecting it but the use of other languages in an English classroom could also hamper their efforts to learn it or readily accept it."

"They become confident to speak up without hesitation. However, the use of too many languages should be avoided.

Theme 6

Ideas on how to organise an effective multilingual classroom

Interestingly, teachers were aware of how to use other languages in a supportive manner. They suggested many interesting, practical and helpful ideas, guidelines and activities in this regard.

Guidelines

- Let them speak their regional language once, but make sure they understand English language while you teach.
- Ask learners to introduce and greet everyone in their home language.
- Value all languages but set clear and realistic learning goals and ensure learners understand them by using all resources available, i.e., virtual or physical.
- Use culture specific phrases/sentences in drama activity.
- Learners should have the liberty to ask questions or share opinions in their native language instead of telling them to "speak in English or be quiet".
- Interact in English as much as possible because it is English which they need to have exposure to.
- Give students time and opportunity to share their ideas and express them and then to effectively communicate them to others in a language which everyone understands, i.e., English.
- Students can be motivated to learn more through role play. They can try to speak the same sentence in multiple languages.
- While teaching some social science topic related to "freedom struggle", we may teach the same using some slogans and poems that were written in Hindi.
- Videos of various languages can be used as teaching/learning materials.
- Instructions could be given in the target language, but before that they need to be given in their home language.

- TV/advertisement/ movies/serials/books belonging to other languages (national and international) can also be discussed which relate to concepts in question.

- There could be group discussions and students can be asked to talk about their home languages and cultures in class discussions.

- To avoid confusion, instead of using many languages while instructing students, multi-lingual books should be designed.

- If teachers are well versed, then use of other languages should be encouraged and adopted in the classrooms.

- First, topic should be explained in home language followed by English language.

- The students should be encouraged to share their understanding in the language they are comfortable with.

- Students should be encouraged to use multiple languages while sharing their thoughts first and then should move to English.

- Students could be asked to share ideas derived from readings in other languages.

- Teaching faculty from multilingual backgrounds can be incorporated for proper delivery of content.

- Lessons can be first taught in English followed by further explanation using words from their native language.

- Classrooms should always be interesting and interactive.

- Discussion can be encouraged in English and home language as it puts the students at ease. Ideas from minority communities should be welcomed in an effective multilingual classroom.

- Value (and use) the languages of each learner in the classroom equally. No language should be ruled out.

- Propose clear and realistic learning goals and ensure that learners understand them. To that effect, use the language resources available (virtual or physical).

Activities for multilingual classroom

- Story telling: In a multilingual class, "I encourage students to read folktales or stories that they may have heard in their home language. Following this, they share stories in English using some words of their home language so that the meaning and expression are intact".

- Narration: Teacher should conduct talk sessions for students about multi-culturalism and learning.

- Holding role-play games or activities where the child has to help their grandparents use a smart phone which usually requires English. This way they attempt to translate and express themselves in both English and their mother tongue.

- Another good activity can be translating a poem into English or from English to other languages. This allows children to explore new jargon and be creative.

- Include the home language of students while conversing with them. For example, while reading a story from a text book, I relate it to their personal life experiences.

- Create an evolving word wall in your classroom, and post useful words and expressions in your students' home languages.

- Ask students to teach their classmates a greeting in their home language.

- Preparing PPTs, texts or giving some fun learning exercises of multilingual works.

- Digital learning content should be given in multiple languages, if possible, along with subtitles based on learners' language preference.

- Hold conversations between two learners in their mutually understandable languages.

- In a poem ball, encourage the children to share their childhood experiences in their language.

- If the chapter is "Glimpses of India", one's own experiences and childhood stories can be shared as a part of two cultures.

- Ask learners to search for the names of a regional item in other languages. For example, "Goan bread or poee" is known as Chapati, Tandoori Roti or Naan. These are different names for bread in different states.

- Give them a piece of literature like poetry in a foreign language, and the student of that particular language will recite and explain the poem to the rest of the students.

- Use visuals of different holidays, cultural celebrations. These can be presented by students of that particular language.

- Organise language contests in classroom and give each student the chance to speak in different languages for a minute.

- For primary grades, use pictures and label the words in English/Hindi/vernacular languages and stick it in classrooms. Play games on the basis of these pictures.

- Use 'show and tell' – let students bring one item to class and talk about it in one language. Another child can interpret or guess what the first student spoke.

- 'Recipe of the day': Children can be asked to make/describe simple recipes with 3-4 common ingredients using their home language.

- The students can be asked to write down a word each day in four languages. These four language could be the home language of learners in the classroom.

- Maintain a reading corner with story books written in different languages.

- Greet students in their home language. Develop a routine in the classroom to adopt multilingualism by playing videos in multiple languages.

- Use of projectors in classroom can be made so that students can learn the language by audios, videos and PPT.

- All things in class can be labelled in English as well as in the home language of students.

- Vocabulary competitions in multiple languages can be organised in the classrooms. It would be quite interesting, i.e., idioms or phrases of different languages.

- In a multilingual classroom, it is important not to be biased even while using a word in a particular language. Example: Topic - Festivals, while delivering a lesson on the same, we should encourage students to write about their favourite function/regional function. When students talk about regional festivals, it encourages them to speak more confidently because they already know about the festival, and they learn English well with the help of functional language.

Challenge

- It may become a bit challenging to manage a classroom where people from various regional backgrounds aim at learning the same language. However, in India, where the most commonly spoken language, Hindi, is understood and spoken by a wide range of people, it may not be as challenging as when people don't understand one common language. In linguistic backgrounds where people have understanding of one common language like Hindi, it becomes easy to organize activities and discussions. Even concept explanation becomes easy!

- Also, it is impossible for any teacher to know all the languages, even with A1-A2 level of learners. Sometimes, it becomes difficult to translate even a single word to L1 in a multilingual classroom. In such cases, use demonstration, miming and pictures. These methods of eliciting information work well. We can also ask them if they know the equivalent term in their language and teach them how to generate ideas on the same in English.

TAKE-HOME MESSAGES

Message 1

Home/regional languages (i.e., this hybrid mode of English besides other language(s) like Hindi) need to be welcomed by ELT teachers in English language classrooms as long as there is a good reason or need for using them.

Message 2

In multilingual contexts, language mixing in classrooms should be accepted developed, and adopted, especially across the primary school years and initial stages of language learning to ensure that learners can build on multiple language resources in order to develop good reading and aural comprehension as essential skills for more integrated learning across school subjects and for conceptual understanding.

Message 3

Provision for and focusing on training teachers are essential to successfully integrate multilingual methods when preparing, organising, and structuring lessons so that languages are switched at particular points of lesson delivery and classroom activities. This can lead to more supported learning for the students in general, scaffolded-language learning, and better comprehension of key concepts.

Message 4

In a multilingual country like India, typically students come to schools having been exposed to one or two languages already. In order to make them feel confident and included in a better way and to respect the linguistic diversity of our country, we need to include their home/regional language(s) in the classroom instruction and learning goals.

CONCLUSION

In this survey, the participating teachers demonstrated that they welcome the use of languages other than English in the English language classroom for a number of reasons which, in their opinions, are worth considering. In India, many students come from socio-economic backgrounds where there is no literacy. Therefore, they need to be allowed to speak the language they are comfortable with in order to explore and communicate with others.

When they discuss some concepts in their home language, they are able to relate to it, and are also able to respect their own culture as it is recognized. Also, learners should be given the freedom to use their own home/regional language but with some control. Learners need to be aware of multilingualism by allowing/practicing it occasionally, but it should be kept to a minimal level.

A final word – let's all celebrate and embrace a positive attitude towards multi-culturalism and multilingualism in a rich lingua land like India!

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