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Research Article

Multilingual Pedagogy: An Emerging Area in English Language Teaching

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Abstract

Multilingual teaching is emerging as a major field of interest in English Language Teaching in the global scenario. It has grown to be a crucial component of language instruction in a nation with such a diverse population of languages as India. Multilingual pedagogy is an approach to teaching that facilitates the teaching -learning process with the help of students' diverse linguistic backgrounds to make learning an enlightening experience.

Multilingual Approach integrates the values, languages and cultural settings that students bring to the classroom. This approach aims to create an inclusive environment, improve comprehension and foster a deeper understanding of language for learning the English language which has a different structure from Indian languages.

Quite interestingly, instead of viewing the diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds that students bring to the classroom as barriers to learning, they facilitate English language learning where students acquire knowledge of language in a fun and learn way.

The current research paper will try to explore the fundamental principles of a multilingual approach for English Language Teaching, which include an inclusive perspective for learning language, integrity, cognitive benefits, etc. With the multilingual approach, pupils' native tongues are seen as learning tools rather than as shortcomings that must be filled. The multilingual approach also emphasises that instead of separating students' languages and cultures, they should be incorporated into the curriculum and teaching methods. The multilingual approach also acknowledges the beneficial effects on cognitive development, including reading, language acquisition, and general academic achievement.

The key strategies for analysing the application of a multilingual approach will include using multiple languages in the English language classroom, creating opportunities for multilingual interactions in the classroom, connecting learning to students' lives, developing metalinguistic awareness, etc. Case studies of students from diverse backgrounds with Marathi, Hindi, Gujarati and other regional languages as the First Language of Acquisition from different age-groups will be analysed through a survey for research findings and conclusions.

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1. INTRODUCTION

What is the Multilingual Approach?

The term "multilingual approach" refers to the acknowledgement and use of other languages as useful tools. It acknowledges and incorporates the linguistic diversity of people or groups, going beyond a monolingual (single language) orientation. This method frequently highlights how using students' native tongues can enhance learning and create a more welcoming and stimulating environment.

- Relevance in the classes that have linguistic diversity:** In a country like India, where we have linguistic diversity, a multilingual approach values and respects all of the languages that students speak, rather than giving preference to one "official" language.
- Use of Native Languages:** A multilingual approach for learning English promotes using students' mother tongues as learning aids strategically, either in addition to or even before teaching them a second or third language.
- Encourages an inclusive learning environment:** A multilingual approach can foster a more welcoming and inclusive learning environment for all students by recognising and supporting their linguistic backgrounds.
- Improving Cognitive Growth:** Speaking more than one language helps to improve cognitive abilities among learners, such as creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving.
- Promotes Cultural Understanding:** Because multilingualism exposes people to a variety of viewpoints and ways of thinking, it is frequently associated with increased cultural understanding and appreciation.
- Removes fear and hatred of English:** It is observed that students with a background of a regional language as the medium of instruction can experience fear of expression in the class where the medium of instruction is English. This fear can lead to a pessimistic approach towards oneself and hatred towards the English language. Such students can lose their confidence forever. Allowing them to express themselves in their regional language to some extent can give students a platform to express themselves.
- Enhances confidence of learners, which leads to interaction in the classroom:** Classrooms can become more interactive, engaging and lively with students' participation in the discussion. Allowing students to express themselves in the dominant regional language initially can boost students' confidence, and with this, we can give a platform to students for expression.

The multilingual approach in education, especially the "Three-Language Formula" in India, was initiated in 1968 as part of the National Education Policy. This formula aimed to promote Hindi, English, and regional languages. UNESCO has strongly reinforced multilingual education since 1953, highlighting the use of mother tongue, regional/national language, and an international language. UNESCO has been instrumental in promoting multilingual education as a means to improve learning and celebrate linguistic diversity.

Significance of Multilingual Approach for Teaching English in India

India is a land of several cultural settings where a variety of languages are spoken based on specific regional backgrounds. The monolingual method of teaching English may not be suitable in such a homogeneous background. Indian pupils must receive a thorough education with a multilingual approach to serve the purpose, and at the same time importance of global language, English, must not be denied.

In comparison to the Grammar-Translation, Direct Method, Audiolingual Method, Communicative Language Teaching, the Multilingual approach of learning English seems to be quite inclusive and innovative as it facilitates learning through creative methods, enhances possibilities of learner participation in the classroom interaction, is appropriate for diverse background groups, helps to strengthen student-teacher rapport, and increases the confidence of the learner.

Multilingualism in English classrooms has become the need of the hour. To help them become comfortable with the language, students from diverse cultural backgrounds and mother tongues should be taught English using their mother tongues. To make teaching and learning in a bilingual or multilingual English classroom engaging and productive, teachers should adopt innovative teaching strategies and keep an eye out for new opportunities. The current research paper makes an attempt to comprehend the significance and necessity of implementing multilingualism in order to teach English in a multilingual classroom, as well as the benefits of multilingualism and innovative approaches to integrate it to improve instruction.

India is a country with many different languages and cultures. Due to the large number of languages, multilingualism became essential. India is unable to adopt the phenomenon of monolingualism, as India's native languages have coexisted alongside English for a very long time before independence. Furthermore, bilingualism and multilingualism have become the new standard for learning in the current globalised world, and India cannot escape this new normal.

Being multilingual is a common human trait of students in India. In general, students in multilingual classes come from a variety of social and cultural backgrounds and speak a variety of mother tongues and regional languages. A class in a tribal institution or in a cosmopolitan city like Mumbai, for instance, may have students from a variety of social and cultural backgrounds; some speak the tribal languages or dialects that do not have a script, while others speak regional languages. Students in this kind of diverse class typically have a language barrier that prevents them from communicating with one another or answering questions in their mother tongue.

This can be a noteworthy observation that Cultural differences can be a good way to start a conversation. This cultural difference might serve as a springboard for discussing new subjects, such as various Indian holidays or cuisines, or it can give students fresh insights into a variety of subjects. Because all of the students understand one other very well—not because they speak correctly, but rather because they make common mistakes—monolingual classrooms are often boring.

2. OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the need and significance of a multilingual approach in teaching and learning English in India.
2. To explore the advantages of a multilingual approach in teaching and learning English.
3. To analyse the effectiveness of using a multilingual approach in teaching and learning English in Indian classrooms.

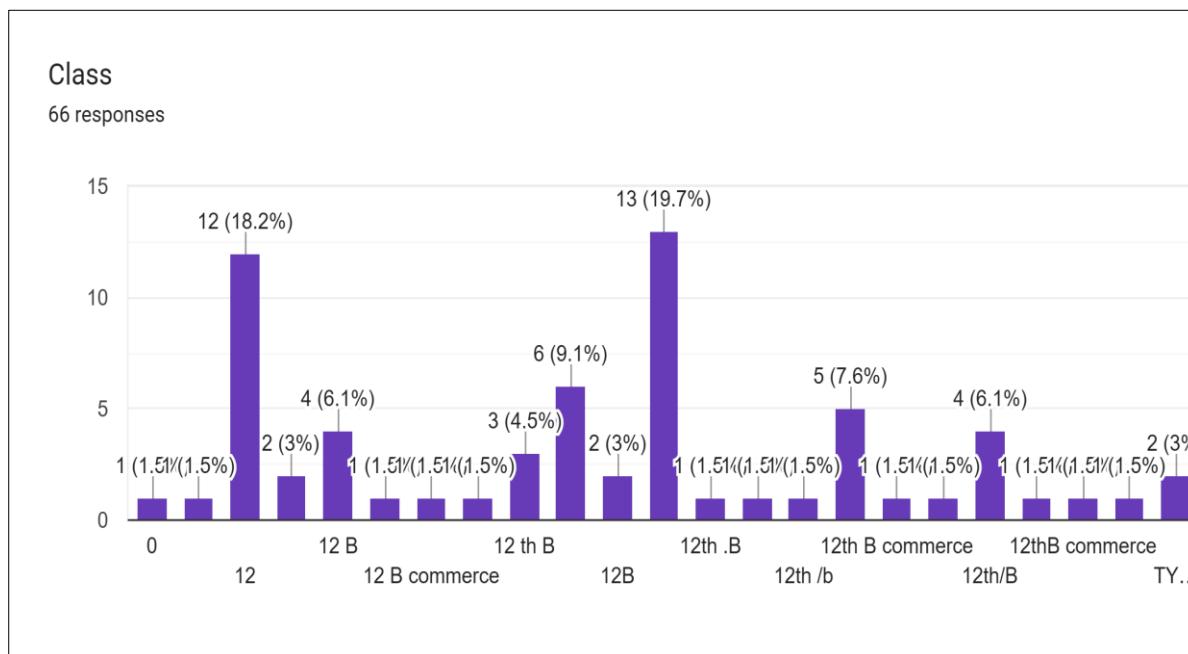
3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology for the current paper includes a survey and interviews. A survey through Google form was conducted in an English class of standard twelfth after teaching them 'Homonyms'. Students were from different linguistic background like Marathi, Hindi, and were from a multilingual background, having their mother tongue as Marathi, Hindi, Gujarati, etc. Responded to the survey. At the same time, some

middle-aged women from self-help groups who have their mother tongue as Marathi were interviewed. They were taught 'Simple Present Tense', which was explained in English as well as in Marathi. They too responded to the survey. A lecturer from Junior college, Ms Asha Soman, who has been teaching English for more than thirty years to std. XI and XII students in one of the colleges situated in Mumbai have given the following reply.

She was asked, "Why do you think the multilingual approach of teaching English is beneficial in India? Substantiate with examples, if needed." To which the lecturer replied, "Multilingual is the need of the hour right now. Students coming in from different regional backgrounds find it really difficult if we teach only in English. They do not feel inclusive... So, keeping the students' future in mind, it is best for the teachers if we have a multilingual approach."

4. RESULTS

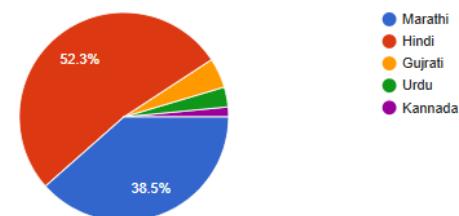


Explanation of response 1

A total of 66 responses were received, out of which 62 responses were from std. Twelve students from junior colleges from the Mumbai area, and 4 responses were received from middle-aged women from a self-help group who are learning English.

What is your mother tongue?

65 responses

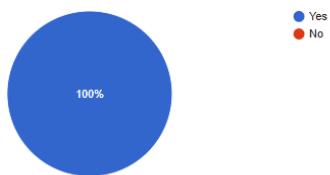


Response 2

A total of 65 responses were received to the question. To understand the regional background of students, data was collected about respondents' mother tongue. It was observed that 52.3 % respondents had their mother tongue as Hindi, fewer than those students who had their mother tongue as Marathi, i.e. 38.5 %. It was quite interesting that there were respondents having their mother tongue as Gujarati, Kannada and Urdu, which suggests that the class has a diverse background.

Have you understood the content?

66 responses

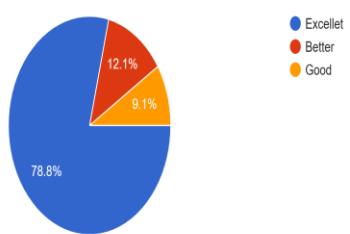


Response 3

A total of 66 responses were received to the question. It was a noteworthy fact that 100% respondents understood the content that was taught in mixed languages, which reflects the success of the multilingual approach of teaching. At the same time, students were allowed to express themselves in the regional languages, namely Hindi or Marathi. It resulted in an open discussion and better interaction in the classroom.

How was the level of understanding of the content because it was explained in Hindi/Marathi?

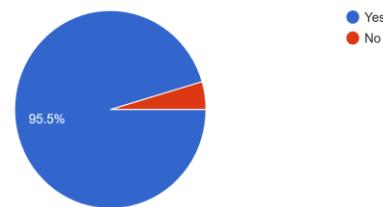
66 responses



Response 4

A total of 66 responses were received to the question. When the respondents were asked about the effectiveness of the content because it was explained in different regional languages, the maximum number of respondents, i.e. 78.8 % of respondents, found the content in mixed languages as excellent, followed by a smaller number of responses as better and good. It shows that respondents preferred the content to be explained in the regional language.

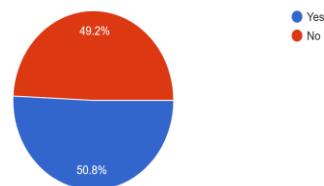
Do you prefer to understand the content in mixed languages?
66 responses



Response 5

A total of 66 responses were received to the question. Out of which 95.5% of students in the class of diverse backgrounds preferred the content to be explained in mixed languages, which is a clear validation of the multilingual approach of teaching English.

Do you think that If the topic is explained only in English will it be difficult to understand the content?
65 responses



Response 6

A total of 65 responses were received to the question. The maximum number of respondents expressed that if the content is explained only in English, then it will be difficult to understand, which emphasised the need of multilingual approach in learning English.

It can be analysed from the responses of the respondents from different age groups and regional as well as socio-cultural settings that the multilingual approach of teaching-learning is preferred for better understanding of the content and to retain the interest of learners.

Scope of research

Multilingualism can be encouraged in English classrooms. The current research paper offers scope to carry the research further for learning foreign languages, or the same approach can be adapted in different countries to learn new languages in multilingual settings.

5. LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

This study offers important insights into the role of multilingual pedagogy in English language teaching. However, several limitations must be acknowledged. Firstly, the research draws upon a relatively small and localised sample, consisting of twelfth-grade students and a select group of adult learners from self-help organisations, all situated within a specific urban area

of Mumbai. This geographic limitation may hinder the generalizability of the findings to more diverse or rural educational environments, where linguistic dynamics and resource accessibility could differ markedly.

Moreover, the study employs a cross-sectional design, capturing participants' responses at a singular moment in time. Consequently, it fails to consider the long-term impacts of multilingual teaching strategies on language acquisition, academic performance, or learner confidence. The lack of a comparative framework, such as a control group receiving monolingual instruction, further constrains the evaluation of the relative effectiveness of the multilingual approach.

Additionally, much of the data is derived from self-reported feedback via surveys and interviews. While these qualitative responses hold value, they are inherently susceptible to personal bias, selective memory, and social desirability, potentially affecting the objectivity of the findings. These limitations indicate the necessity for future research to encompass larger, more diverse samples, incorporate longitudinal tracking, and conduct comparative analyses to develop a more comprehensive understanding of multilingual pedagogy within English language education.

6. CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that the multilingual approach of language learning has brought substantial changes in the effectiveness of learning English in a country that has several dominant regional languages. Considering the socio-economic diversity of India, a multilingual approach is not only suitable for language learning, but innovative strategies can be adapted for teaching English. At the same time, creative methods and innovative strategies, including the playway method and experiential learning method, can be adapted through a multilingual approach to learning English. Use of native or regional language can facilitate learners to interact and contribute to the conversation during the class, resulting in an interactive and engaging classroom.

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