

Role of Multilingualism in Global Citizenship Education

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Abstract: *The vision of National Education Policy 2020 is in sync with the Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the United Nations in 2015. Whereas the latter aims to groom the coming generations as global citizens on lines of Agenda 2030, the former aspires for Sustainable Development Goal 4 which seeks to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all. NEP 2020 envisions to instil among the learners a deep-rooted pride in being Indian, not only in thought, but also in spirit, intellect, and deeds, as well as to develop knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions that support responsible commitment to human rights, sustainable development and living, and global well-being, thereby reflecting a truly global citizen. The underlying current in this vision is very clear- a balance has to be maintained between cultural rootedness and global citizenship. The skills and competencies to be developed in a twenty first century learner is manifold. As a concerned citizen, it is imperative that he/she inculcates civic, global and cross-cultural literacy. A cosmopolitan approach coupled with social awareness and respect for multiculturalism is the need of the hour. Integrating multilingualism in the school curriculum can transform the way young minds perceive things. This paper studies the impact of integrating multilingualism, along with multiculturalism, in schools and how it can bring a tectonic shift in the academic performance and overall mindset of students. Schools which respect pluralism and multiculturalism have classrooms which are visibly happier, because they are inclusive and less prone to conflicts. A mixed research methodology has been used in this study, to arrive at this conclusion, a method that is both quantitative and qualitative.*

Keywords: Multilingualism, Sustainable Development, Global Citizenship, plurilingual, diversity, inclusion.

1. Introduction

Looking up at the dark clouds in the sky from the window of my school staffroom, I sighed in contentment as the gentle pitter-patter of the now slow rain formed a melody. As the rain gradually slowed down to a halt, I watched, mesmerized, as a rainbow took form. Nostalgia hit hard as I started humming my favourite childhood song, “*Mile sur mera tumhara toh sur bane hamaara.*” Each of the seven colours of the rainbow were different, unique- but they all blended together so beautifully! Truly the perfect example set in nature that unity in diversity can be very fascinating.

My thoughts drifted to my Class of thirty-five students. Comprising of students from divergent backgrounds and regions, they were indeed like this very rainbow- each with some particular attribute but together one amiable team. Gurpreet’s parents were from Punjab, but she had been born and brought up in Delhi. Arav was from Manipur, Sachin from Maharashtra, while Malini from Gujarat. Dhamini’s parents had recently been transferred from Coimbatore and she was still struggling to feel at home in Delhi. She had found a friend in Indrani, a Bengali, as their interest for Classical music had touched a common chord. Quite a few students were from the neighbouring states of Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. My face suddenly lit up as I was reminded of Abhijeet and his oft repeated statement- ‘Ma’am, I am a Polyglot!’ His father had shifted to India, from UAE, two years back. Well versed in Bengali, Arabic, German, Sanskrit, besides English and Hindi, he was quite popular among his batchmates. Though my Class stood out, most of the other classes were similarly diverse. Delhi being the capital city of India, this was a common phenomenon in most schools here.

A diverse classroom can both be a challenge and an opportunity in grooming global citizens who are at the same time rooted in their own culture. Challenge or opportunity- depends on the perspective. Cultural identities like language, religion, ethnicity, do pose significant threat to cohesion and

teambuilding, but if handled with care, can be a team’s biggest strength. The rich cultural heritage of our country embraces a confluence of diverse languages, cuisine, attires, traditions, customs and beliefs. The plural Indian society with people speaking multifarious languages has harmoniously co-existed since centuries. A commitment to multilingualism and multiculturalism can promote, both socio-emotional and cognitive capacities at the individual level as well as cultural unity at the local, regional and national levels. This paper highlights the socio-emotional quotient more than the cognitive aspect.

The NEP 2020 acknowledges the intrinsic value of language as a powerful tool that enhances communication, cognition, and cultural understanding among students, paving the way for a more inclusive and enriched educational experience by advocating multilingualism. Language lies at the centre of human cognitive, social, and cultural experiences. Proficiency in languages gives individuals the capacity to comprehend, analyse, and relate to their locality, nation, and the world. It enables effective communication, which is integral to the formation and functioning of societies and cultures.

Multiple studies show that individuals proficient in many languages not only gain the ability to communicate with a wider range of people, but also develop expanded cognitive abilities. In addition, they demonstrate improved capacities of cultural awareness and expression, which is among the major competencies considered important to socially aware global citizens. This provides them with a sense of their own identity and belonging, as well as an appreciation of other cultural identities.

Learning multiple languages enriches children intellectually and culturally, enabling them to think in more than one way by being equipped with the structures of expression, vocabulary, idioms, and literature of more than one language. A multilingual India is thereby better educated, better

nationally integrated and more equipped to take on leadership on the global stage. A society which respects and appreciates one's own as well as others' cultures is truly the most evolved.

Global citizenship education has been integrated with the curriculum of several schools across the country. Several organisations, affiliated to UNESCO, offer free online courses for educators and students to equip them to become socially aware, informed and engaged global citizens. Empathy, mindfulness, compassion and critical inquiry- the four essential Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) competencies- are the cornerstone of global citizenship education. Respect for diversity, tolerance for differences, and an urge for critical, adaptive and assimilative thinking help build SEL competencies. It is here where integrating multilingualism, along with multiculturalism, has given optimum results.

Objectives

This paper aims to study the role of Multilingual Education (MLE) program in developing competencies essential for a global citizen. It also highlights the advantages of being aware of multiple languages and cultures and how it helps build an inclusive, happy and less conflict prone classrooms.

2. Research Methodology

The research methodology used is mixed, both quantitative and qualitative. For quantitative research, a structured questionnaire was used to collect data and for qualitative research, the opinion of important stakeholders in education were studied. Case study of students' academic performance and behavioural attributes of students at a reputed school in Delhi, over a period of five years, has also been studied. The questionnaire served as a primary source of information whereas for secondary data, several articles relating to multilingualism and global citizenship education were referred to.

Area of Study-

The study was limited to one particular reputed school in Delhi due to time constraints. And also, going by the fact that most of the public schools tend to follow similar pedagogy and trends, this method seemed reliable. The students of this school also served as the subject for case study. The sample size of the respondents for the structured questionnaire that was framed comprised of 65 students of classes XI and XII, 25 educators and 40 parents.

3. Review of Literature

This paper primarily focuses on the development of socio emotional learning for global citizenship education among students and how introducing multilingualism can have a desired result in this direction. The articles that served as the secondary source of information ranged from that on definition of multilingualism, its advantages and disadvantages and its impact on global citizenship education. Articles on multilingualism in India were also reviewed. Here I shall primarily be referring to four articles- '*Defining Multilingualism*' by Jasone Cenoz; '*The Impact of Multilingualism on Global Education and Language*

Learning' by Dr. Lid King;

'*Multilingualism and Global Citizenship*' by Gugulethu Jemane Nyathi; and '*Multilingualism in India*' by Jessica Chandras.

Research on multilingualism has increased manifold in the last few years. Jasone Cenoz, in his article looks at the definitions and scope of multilingualism and the different perspectives. Several dimensions of multilingualism have been studied, and different types of multilingualism have been discussed. The article summarizes, in a very crisp and lucid manner, the themes researched in various areas of the study of multilingualism such as neurolinguistics, psycholinguistics, linguistics, education, sociolinguistics, and language policy. It compares monolingual and holistic perspectives in the study of multilingualism, paying special attention to new approaches developed in the past few years that argue for establishing more fluid boundaries between languages. This article sets the right note for any study on impact of language on an individual and the society. However, it focuses more on the scientific and cognitive aspect, by drawing comparison between a monolingual speaker and a multilingual society. It clearly describes multilingualism as a resource.

Dr. Lid King, while studying the impact of Multilingualism on Global Education, begins by differentiating between multilingualism and plurilingualism. Integral to any study on multilingualism, this point was highlighted by Jasone Cenoz also. It is important to understand this difference. Even though plurilingualism and multilingualism are often used interchangeably, they do not mean the same thing. Plurilingualism has been defined as the "repertoire of varieties of language which many individuals use" so that "some individuals are monolingual and some are plurilingual." In contrast, multilingualism is understood as "the presence in a geographical area, large or small, of more than one 'variety of language'. . .; in such an area individual may be monolingual, speaking only their own variety." With reference to India, in words of Yogendra Yadav, renowned social activist, 'India is not just plurilingual—where people speak different languages—but truly multilingual, where individuals and communities use more than one language.' The difference is between society and an individual's competence to flawlessly communicate in different languages. This distinction is also important in view of the recent debate on the implementation of the Three Language Policy.

Dr. Lid King further delves into the multilingual landscape, the role of English as the *lingua franca* for education, trade and employment, Trends and issues in multilingual education and Recommendations for national systemic change. His paper is a stimulating overview of the policy and practice of multilingualism. The concept of 'linguistic hegemony' as an obstacle to promoting learning of multiple languages is very interesting. Talking about knowledge of spoken English as a basic skill and an aspirational language, its importance has been clearly underlined. He talks about the 2009 poll in India which showed that 87% of those surveyed felt that 'knowledge of English is important to succeed in life.' If such a large population of our country aspires to learn English, a

foreign language for them, they clearly are at least bilingual. This makes it easier to turn individuals into plurilingual, and the society multilingual. Though his study on language study is primarily about Europe, it can be very helpful in the Indian context as well.

Gugulethu Jemaine Nyathi's article on '*Multilingualism and Global Citizenship*', in the UN Chronicle, details the significance of global citizenship in today's interconnected world. She correctly summarises effective communication in different languages, and therefore an understanding of varied cultures, as an essential ingredient of peace. She shares her personal experience of how learning different languages has helped broadened her mindset and been an enriching journey. She reiterates that with every language you learn your world view becomes broader. This short and crisp article has such immense depth regarding broadening one's mindset and developing respect for another culture and language, that it is the perfect starting point on readings for a conflict-ridden society.

Jessica Chandras' article on '*Multilingualism in India*' studies the linguistic diversity in India. This paper gives some interesting information about the 22 scheduled languages, six classical languages (2020 publication) and Hindi and English as the official languages of the country. It gives a detailed analysis of three main language families in India (Dravidian, Indo-Aryan and Sino-Tibetan) and clearly depicts the overlap between the 121 languages spoken as mother tongue (2011 census). It highlights the use of English as an Indian language and multilingualism in daily life. The author describes an interesting terminology called 'Code-switching', that is, mixing two or more languages or language varieties together when speaking. She also differentiates code-switching as practice from the use of 'loan words'. The article clearly underscores the need of learning English language for a globalized workforce.

4. Backdrop of the Case Study

To study the impact of introducing knowledge of multiple languages and culture, with an objective of developing Socio Emotional Learning among students- a key ingredient of global citizenship education- certain measures were introduced in a reputed school in New Delhi. Aligned with the vision of NEP 2020, this school promotes Multilingual Education program by incorporating the Three Language formula. This includes a choice between English, Hindi, Sanskrit (Classical Language) and French/German (Foreign Languages). In addition to these, regular workshops were also conducted in the Indian Sign Language, to develop empathy and enhance inclusivity. Before we move on to the discussion on the questionnaire and its analysis, let us first have a look at the myriad aspects and benefits of the integration of multilingual education program in the curriculum of this particular school.

As the research methodology is mixed- a structured questionnaire to prove/negate the hypothesis and open-ended interviews with the concerned school administration- were used to understand the measures taken and the difference evident in the last five years.

Though the attempts at multilingual education program in this school began more than a decade back, the most visible and documented endeavours are from the end of year 2015, when the '*Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat*' (EBSB) initiative was launched on 31st October 2015 by our hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi. This was primarily to mark the birth anniversary of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel who played a consequential role in ensuring unity and integrity of Indian nation. The EBSB had a ground-breaking impact on the school curricula. The year 2015 was also the time when the 17 Sustainable Development Goals were adopted by the United Nations. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) gained momentum soon after. Both these initiatives, EBSB and ESD, were set to have a long-lasting impact on this school.

Under the EBSB initiative, project-based learning and role plays were initiated to have a greater understanding of other states of India. This was done from the foundational level as the school administration clearly believed in starting early, since several researches shows human brain's learning capacity is maximum in the early years. With innovative pedagogy like play based learning, role plays, experiential learning, gamification, blended learning, among others, the concept of diversity was introduced from the primary level. As the school was equipped with state-of-the-art infrastructure, they made optimum use of technology for this purpose. Audio-visual learning methods always had a long-lasting impact on students' mind. Since language learning takes place mostly through listening to different music and songs, besides watching cartoons, films and documentaries- smart boards in each classroom proved to be very helpful. A well-equipped Language Lab played a crucial role in this program. Class appropriate methodology was devised to instil effective communication skills among students.

The onset of COVID Pandemic proved to be another turning point. Even though students were restricted to their devices to bridge the learning gap, the demanding situation also urged them to explore the internet for more information. Guided by the school authorities, students prepared several presentations on different culture, language, literature and architecture. In fact, learning during COVID knew no bounds. It was also during this time that the #AajKaVakya initiative and the reading of the Preamble of the Indian Constitution in all the scheduled languages on #SamvidhanDiwas under *Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat* was launched. This initiative of 'Bhasha Sangam' in the month of November 2021 remained deeply etched in the memories of several students. This was very evident during the analysis of questionnaire which was distributed to senior students.

The Pandemic also brought to the forefront the need for Education for Sustainable Development. The challenges of the now highly interconnected world were way too apparent. Challenges were no longer confined to national boundaries. The issue of climate change had been highlighted earlier during the COP 21 Summit in France. This gave a further push to go for global citizenship education and a greater awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals. Several educators of this school upskilled themselves about Sustainable Development Goals and by the beginning of 2022, it was integrated in the school vision and mission and hence in the

school curriculum also. The lesson plans reflected teaching aligned with different SDGs. The activity roster was now the 'SDG activity roster' ensuring that each activity was aligned with one or more of the 17 SDGs. The school's vision aimed to balance cultural rootedness, tolerance and respect for diversity with global citizenship education.

There were sincere endeavours to promote passion for multiculturalism and multilingualism. While the Languages and the Social Science departments took the lead, other faculty members followed suit. The most actively involved were the Music and the Dance departments. Several cultural performances on folk song and folk dance were organised. The Debate club organised competitions in different languages- English, Hindi, Sanskrit, French and German. The school launched an 'Open Mic' initiative where students and teachers had open access to display their linguistic skills. Soon, Storytelling sessions, especially Folk Loos in different languages, became very common. This was primarily because students were given the freedom of expression in their mother tongue. The Social Science department, through various activities, enriched the students about the tangible and intangible heritage, both Indian and global. There were role plays on the change makers- famous personalities and the unsung heroes of different era. The Fashion Studies department focused on increased information about the traditional attire of different regions. A ramp walk on sustainable fashion of different geographical regions was also

conducted. Vocabulary games and calligraphy competition were common place. While the Quiz Club organised competition on knowledge about GI tags, the Creative Cuisine Club dished out savoury delicacies from regions across India and the World. Not to be left behind, the Science and the Mathematics faculty members included a study of the science behind ancient art and architecture. The ICT department encouraged students to learn more languages by gamification. The increasing popularity of apps like Duolingo, Memrise, Babbel, among others, made it very feasible. Students enjoyed developing communication skills in different languages like never before. These Apps had succeeded in making students more receptive to learning new languages.

The school curriculum was designed in a manner that the medium of instruction remained primarily English with the educators trained in incorporating bilingual and multilingual teaching learning materials. The native Indian languages and the Classical languages, were integrated in a structured manner by highlighting particular states and languages during a particular time of the year. The table below is a sample of the month wise activity roster prepared for different languages. This table shows only six languages. The school activity calendar covered all twenty-two scheduled languages, eleven Classical languages and four foreign languages.

S. No.	Language	Month	Important events	Activities
1.	Sanskrit	31 st August	World Sanskrit Day	Shloka Recitation Dance drama in Sanskrit language
2.	Hindi	14 th September	Hindi Diwas	Debate in Hindi language Spelling competition Translation activity
3.	Bengali	May October	Rabindranath Jayanti Durga Poojo	Rabindra Sangeet Celebrating Navadurga Cuisine, Culture
4.	Oriya	July April	Rath Yatra Utkal Diwas	Dance performance on <i>Bande Utkal Janani</i> Why Odisha is called 'Soul of India & India's Best Kept Secret'- photography exhibition Odia Cuisine
5.	Gujarati	October	Navratri	Dandiya and Garba Raas
6.	Malayalam	April	Onam Thirussur Pooram	Cuisines like Sadya Onam Pookalam (floral rangolis) Folk stories and dance (Thiruvathirakali)
7.	Marathi	May	Maharashtra foundation Day	Basic communication words in Marathi language, Cuisine, Folksongs, etc.

5. Data Analysis and Interpretation

The questionnaire on multilingual education program was structured as per the requirement of various stakeholders- students, teachers and parents. Some of the questions which were common to all three were-

- You would identify yourself as – (a) Monolingual (b) Bilingual (c) Plurilingual
- Would you want to have proficiency only in your native language- (a) Yes (b) No (c) Not sure
- How keen are you to learn languages other than your native language- (a) Very interested (b) Interested (c) Neutral (d) Not interested at all
- Select your desired medium of instruction- (a) Mother tongue (b) Hindi (c) English (d) Any Other
- Do you believe that using multiple languages in the classroom enhances student learning- (a) Strongly agree (b) Agree (c) Disagree (d) Can't say
- Do you believe that using multiple languages in the classroom enhances communication skills- (a) Strongly agree (b) Agree (c) Disagree (d) Can't say
- Do you believe that using multiple languages in the classroom enhances socio-emotional skills- (a) Strongly agree (b) Agree (c) Disagree (d) Can't say
- Do you think multilingualism will have an impact on global citizenship education- (a) Yes (b) No (c) Maybe
- Do you think multilingualism is essential for the global job market- (a) Yes (b) No (c) Maybe
- Do you think learning about a variety of languages and culture will help us understand others better, develop respect and tolerance- (a) Yes (b) No (c) Can't say

The above questionnaire comprised of total 20 questions and the sample size of the respondents comprised of 65 students of classes XI and XII, 25 educators and 40 parents. The first question clearly showed that among a total of 130

respondents, percentage of monolingual was only 3.8% (five parents), whereas 30 respondents identified themselves as bilingual (23%). A large number said they were plurilingual (73%) - all the 65 students, 20 teachers and 10 parents. For the second question mentioned above, a very small percent of respondents (2.3%) was content with having proficiency in their native language only. Mostly, respondents were keen on learning other languages. Of those interested, 59% were very interested, 27.6% were interested and rest had a neutral take on it. The most interesting response was that to the question on the desired medium of instruction. A whopping 94.6% answered it as English – all the parents and teachers. Only 7 students (5.38%) wanted it to be the native language. With reference to the use of multiple languages in the classroom to enhance learning, only teachers strongly agreed to this (19.2%). Students and parents either simply ticked on agree or can't say. Response to the next two questions on the need for use of multiple languages to enhance socio emotional skills and communication skills saw similar response. The question to gauge an understanding of the equation between global citizenship and multilingualism also saw a positive response from teachers mainly and only 30% of the parents. Very few students could understand the connection between the two. The question on impact of multilingualism and job market again saw a positive response from all, barring 4 students. The last question listed above had mostly positive response. Only 24.6% (32 respondents) were not sure if it will develop mutual respect and understanding.

An analysis of the above ten questions, along with the rest 10 questions, clearly proved that the teachers were in favour of multilingual education program. The students were also comfortable in learning more than one language. The bias in favour of the English language was very evident. An awareness of the plethora opportunities available in the job market with a command over the English language was visible in all the responses. Seven students who had preferred medium of instruction to be the native language belonged to the economically weaker section, four of which were first generation learners. They clearly struggled with comprehending the content delivered in English language. One drawback of this questionnaire proved to be that few questions about cognition, socio emotional competencies and communication skills were not very clear to the respondents. These questions should have been further broken down for more clarity.

The open-ended interviews were done to primarily gauge the difference in student's academic performance, socio-emotional competencies and willingness to accommodate and tolerate diversity. With 2020 as the base year, the school counsellor, coordinators and class teachers were asked to share their views on difference in behaviour and academic performance of students in the five-year span. Interestingly, this time period also covered the Pandemic crisis. The respondents stated that there was a remarkable 55% decline in the number of reported conflicts relating to name calling, racist remarks, and personal jokes. The number of cases on mental health issues however did increase. Clearly, students were now struggling with loneliness and depression. Increased screen time and infinite exposure to internet had brought other challenges. The urge to mock at others language and culture was now much less. This was also due to the

multilingual education program which taught greater acceptance of differences and celebrating diversity. The global citizenship program and the integration of SDGs had inculcated empathy and sensitivity among all. Students were actively participating in Community Outreach Program, Awareness Drive, and Donation Campaign. The Coordinators also shared data to show a marked improvement in the academic performance of the students.

6. Conclusion

The recently released UNESCO's report on 21st February, 2025, titled 'Languages matter: Global guidance on Multilingual Education', lists not only the key benefits and challenges in Multilingual Education but also gives certain recommendations. It clearly mentions that MLE program improves learning outcomes, enhances access and inclusion and supports Sustainable Development. The above study, coincidentally, had come to the same conclusion as the above survey. The MLE program that had been followed in this school for the last five years, with special emphasis on Education for Sustainable Development and the EBSB program were giving results in the same direction.

As per school records, students' academic performance definitely showed an upward graph. Their improved cognitive skills were undoubtedly the result of stretching themselves to learn more about other languages and cultures. The school curriculum had integrated the same in such a participative manner that each student could unleash their creativity to present a new dimension of some new language, cuisine, traditional attire, architecture, folk or classical song and music. Increasing popularity of language apps like Duolingo and Babbel had made learning fun based and competitive. Socio emotional competencies, essential for a global citizen, were now demonstrated by the students of this school. All the students surveyed had completed certified courses in Global Citizenship Education and were quite aware, informed and concerned about both local and global issues. They seemed to be problem solvers and real changemakers. The various SDG based activities conducted by the school from the foundational level had been instrumental in successfully grooming its learners as environmentally conscious ethical citizens who strive to give back to the community. During the survey, they showed empathy and compassion for the lesser privileged and discussed what they can do in their capacity to bring real change. Most importantly, the respect for diversity had inculcated social inclusion and led to more peaceful classrooms.

This paper clearly establishes a positive relation between Multilingualism and Global Citizenship Education. Though there are several challenges to MLE, especially resource constraints and rigid mindset of certain stakeholders, it is clearly outweighed by the multiple advantages of proper implementation of this policy. If we want our students to develop 21st century skills and want our schools to be future ready, then this approach is imperative- whatever the hurdles. If Indian policy makers and academicians proudly boast of their belief in *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (World is one Family), its time to prove it!

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