Multilingualism is the ‘identity of India’ because India is a country of diverse languages with two official languages, 22 languages ‘scheduled’ in the Indian Constitution, and a further 780 languages estimated to be in everyday use. In India, where multilingualism is basic to individuals and society at the grassroots level, all language functions will never be fulfilled through one language. In this context, English becomes very important. It is a global language in multilingual India. “National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 also described English as “a global language in a multilingual country” It recognized English as a symbol of the people’s aspirations for quality in education and participation in national and international life. The visible impact of its presence was in its demand in the initial stages of schooling. Given this context, the NCF 2005 defined the goals for a second language curriculum as “attainment of a basic proficiency, such as is acquired in natural language learning, and the development of language into an instrument for abstract thought and knowledge acquisition through (for example) literacy” This role envisaged an across-the-curriculum approach, particularly in primary education, that would break down the barriers between English and other subjects, and English and other Indian languages.” Thus, English in multilingual India has emerged as a tool of empowerment and a driver of social and economic mobility. Linguistic diversity is one of the greatest strengths of a nation and we have to keep alive not only this diversity but also the concept of unity in diversity. Multilingual and multicultural education requires an understanding of the dialectical relationship between language, education and society. This understanding of multilingualism and multiculturalism can be revived by integrating them into English language education.

Key Words: ESL, National Curriculum Framework, Multilingualism

INTRODUCTION

“If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his own language, that goes to his heart.” Nelson Mandela
Multilingualism is the ‘identity of India’ because India is a country of diverse languages. Although many languages are spoken in the country, but their use is not similar. Some languages are used as medium of instruction while some remain as minority languages only. English, in this context, has occupied an important place in India. According to Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru English is ours by historic necessity. It is not considered a foreign language but considered a second language in India and is also designated as the associate official language in 1950 by the constitution of India. English got a serious challenge soon after the independence from some of our people. They were of the opinion that English should quit India with Britishers. But C. Rajagopalacharya said that English should be retained in the country. He said, “We in our anger and hatred against the British people shouldn’t throw away the baby (English) with the bath water (English people).”

Till three decades ago, English was regarded as language of literature. But in the present global context, English has become a window to the modern world. It has become the language of trade, commerce, industry and social mobility. It does not imply that it is the only language used in our country. In India, where multilingualism is basic to individuals and society at the grassroots level, all language functions will never be fulfilled through one language. According to Mohanty (1994), “In India, bilingual persons or communities need to be accepted as those who can effectively meet the communicative demands of the self and the society in their normal functioning and in their interaction with speakers of any or all of these languages.”

In the present context of Indian Multilinguality, Pattanayak said that Indian diversity consist of 3000 mother tongues, 4600 castes and communities, 4000 faiths and beliefs, 45000 plants and biological species, 65000 animal varieties.

Linguistic diversity is one of the greatest strengths of a nation and we Indians need to keep alive not only this diversity but also the concept of unity in diversity. India is a country in which the Indo European family of languages is spoken mostly in north and central India. Of this group, 54 languages constitute 3/4 of the Indian population. About 1/4 of languages i.e. 20 belong to South India of Dravidian family. In Assam 20 languages are spoken. In northeast India 98 languages are spoken, even though its population density is much less than that of other states of the country. In total therefore, in the NE India 118 languages are spoken. In this context, English becomes very important. It is a global language in multilingual India. “National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 also described English as “a global language in a multilingual country” (p. 38). It recognized English as a symbol of the
people’s aspirations for quality in education and participation in national and international life. The visible impact of its presence was in its demand in the initial stages of schooling. Given this context, the NCF 2005 defined the goals for a second language curriculum as “attainment of a basic proficiency, such as is acquired in natural language learning, and the development of language into an instrument for abstract thought and knowledge acquisition through (for example) literacy” (p. 39). This role envisaged an across-the-curriculum approach, particularly in primary education, that would break down the barriers between English and other subjects, and English and other Indian languages.” Therefore, new techniques and practices must be introduced to integrate ESL with multilingualism. According to the NCF 2005 Position Paper of the National Focus Group on English Language Teaching, the aim of English language teaching in India is to create multilinguals who can enrich other Indian languages. English language is often perceived as a hindrance to the development of Indian languages and a reason of social divide. But, English in multilingual India has emerged as a tool of empowerment and a driver of social and economic mobility. English as a ‘global’ language facilitating cross-border communication has an undeniable role in multilingual education. The multilingualism and multiculturalism can be revived by integrating them into English language education.

The NCF 2005 also envisages the provision of multilingual education in the schools in the primary stage as well as provides education in first language/home language to the children. In constitution of India, Article 29 (1) and Article 350 (A) also safeguard the linguistic right of minority children in schools. Article 29 (1) states that any section of the citizens residing in the territory of India or any part thereof having a distinct language, script or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve the same. Article 350 (A) states that it shall be the endeavor of every State and of every local authority within the State to provide adequate facilities for instruction in the mother-tongue at the primary stage of education to children belonging to linguistic minority groups; and the President may issue such directions to any State as he considers necessary or proper for securing the provision of such facilities. The National Policy of Education 1986 has the provision of mother tongue education to the tribal children. By providing multilingual education to children we provide a broader world view before them of linguistic minority groups and pave the way of their high cognitive development. Multilingualism” can be defined as an occurrence regarding an individual speaker who uses two or more languages, a community of speakers where two or more
languages are used, or between speakers of two languages. As multilingual children can understand and analyze concepts using more than one language systems, thus multilingualism is viewed as an impediment to the teaching and learning of second language. This exposure to literary text and style in first language facilitates analysis of the learning of same text written in second language. Multilingualism should be adopted due to other reasons also namely migration or labor mobility, cultural contact, annexation and colonialism, commercial, scientific and technological. Multilingualism facilitates the accessibility to knowledge of other cultures. It makes communication between different linguistic and cultural groups easy and opens the avenues of job opportunities. Different languages have different roles to play; they are complementary to each other and promote 'national cohesion', 'cultural integration' and 'social area mobility'. Multilingualism is the need of the hour to create awareness of and appreciation for the linguistic and cultural differences and similarities. Thus, multilingualism is an inevitable strategy across the world to bridge wider cultural communication gap.

The NCF 2005 has laid emphasis that multilingual education is not a problem but is a resource. Child centered learning cannot be possible without the use of language of the child as a medium of instruction. The NCF 2005 emphasized that multilingualism, which is constitutive of the identity of a child and a typical feature of the Indian linguistic landscape, must be used as a resource, classroom strategy and a goal by a creative language teacher. This is a way to ensure that every child feels secure and accepted, and that no one is left behind on account of his/her linguistic background.

National Curriculum Framework (2005) has strongly emphasized for implementation of true multilingualism in Indian schools. It states, “It is a strategy that should really serve as a launching pad for learning more languages. It should be followed in letter and spirit. Its primary aim is to promote multilingualism and national harmony.” It advocates that language teaching needs to be multilingual in terms of the number of languages offered to children but also in terms of evolving strategies that would use multilingual classroom as a resource. Further it recommends that home language(s) of children should be the medium of learning in schools. If a school does not have provision for teaching in the children’s home language(s) at the higher level, primary school education must still be covered through the home language(s). It recommends that a renewed attempt should be made to implement the three
language formula. NCF advocates that child’s mother tongues; including tribal languages should be considered as the best medium of instruction. Further, it emphasizes that proficiency in multiple languages including English should be encouraged in children and reading should be emphasized throughout the primary classes. In this way children will receive multilingual education from the outset. The three-language formula is an attempt to address the challenges and opportunities of multilingualism as a resource to ESL. The primary aim of the formula is to promote multilingualism and national harmony considering the linguistic situation in India. As it is evident that linguistic features transcend genetic boundaries thus change in linguistic codes or their mixing in communication does not create problems of identity, conflict and crisis. So to ensure centrality of language, and achieving it would be a great milestone in true spirit, promoting multilingual communicative abilities for multilingual India. Indian multilingualism is bifocal, existing both at mass and elite levels. Indian multilingualism is naturally evolved and is coupled with the multilingualism evolving through schooling and therefore unique in many respects. Indian linguistic landscape demands use of multilingualism as a classroom strategy and a goal from a creative language teacher. The teacher can promote inclusive learning by accepting every child with his/her linguistic background. The teacher has the opportunity to explore the role of language in education because language gives life to content. The teacher can use multilingualism as a resource as the medium of education instead of medium of instruction. Multilingualism can be understood from two contexts: one in the context of real life and the other in the context of pedagogy. In both these contexts, although the construct of multilingualism is the same, it is applied to different spaces—the individual and the classroom respectively. In a multilingual classroom context, students belonging to different language backgrounds sit together under one roof, but they may or may not be able to communicate among themselves. The construct appears to be that multilingualism implies the presence of more than one distinct language in a given space.

Multilingual education fosters the creativity and cognitive flexibility of the students. It supports student’s ability to transfer the literacy skills acquired in one language to subsequent languages. Multilingualism has appreciation and respect for all languages. Every language is an asset; it carries the wisdom of elders, history, and memories. It recognizes that children learn better in early years if taught in mother tongue or home language. Therefore, multilingualism offers a lot of autonomy to an individual, and is an asset in terms of

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acceptance into a different language culture. If an immigrant can speak the language of the natives, he or she is easily welcomed by the native community. This acceptance offers a sense of security to the individual which is crucial for his / her wellbeing. A man who knows two languages is considered as equivalent to two men. This is because a person who can speak many languages can communicate with people from diverse linguistic backgrounds easily and hence have a wider social life and effortlessly fit in a new place. According to Li Wei (Wei, 2000), “Language is a human faculty: it coevolves with us” and monolingualism, which even in normal circumstances is a rare phenomenon, is beyond imagination in Indian context where English has coexisted with indigenous languages over a long period. The multilingual, multiethnic and multicultural character of India necessitates the inclusion of several languages in the curriculum for school education. Studies reveal that for the stakeholders in school education, the inclusion of several languages in the school curriculum is not considered to be an additional load. However, in the fulfillment of their objectives, students come across several difficulties from the pedagogic, curricular and environmental areas. The most prevailing problem areas are pedagogy of language teaching, lack of language learning and practicing environment and curricular burden of other subjects. Teachers mostly emphasize the environmental and curricular difficulties, and give least priority to the problems related to the pedagogy of language teaching. Moreover, pedagogy also includes spaces beyond classroom interaction such as writing textbooks for a multilingual audience and incorporating sensitivity to different language speakers. It therefore becomes the responsibility of the teacher, through pedagogy, to cultivate the right kind of milieu because second language acquisition also depends on the formal language acquisition contexts (Agnihotri, Khanna, and Sachdev, 1998). However, the students can learn several languages in early years of their education without taking any extra burden. Multilingual education supports students’ ability to transfer the literacy skills acquired in one language to subsequent languages. The multilingual children look at words in a very different way and have increased ability to apply more reading strategies effectively due to their greater experience in language learning and reading in more than two languages. When the idea of ‘one pure language’ or monolingual is absent, multilingual children acquire a new vocabulary without language categorization. Language is the key to understand the mutually reinforcing relationship between language use, elite formation and vertical growth of education, unequal opportunities, and greater social and economic inequality. Accepting the
fact that the linguistic landscape of India is extremely complex, we could not solve many of the language problems in education in proportion to their primacy and functional importance in the entire framework. It is necessary to adopt a pragmatic approach to linguistic usage in education, and take into account the mechanisms of standardization of language in plural societies. Multilingual and multicultural education apart from positive attitudes to speech variation, a degree of planning, proficiency in the language of the classroom, a high level of skill in teaching requires an understanding of the socio-cultural process of learners. Because, understanding of the socio-cultural process is based on understanding of the dialectical relationship between language, education and society which in order requires multilingual education. Thus, multilingual education is used as a resource to cater diverse needs of the learners related to their language/class/caste/culture in the classroom situation.

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