

The languages of education in multilingual India: exploring effects on reading and mathematics

1st dissemination event: 12–13 July 2018, New Delhi, India

Session summary:

How can policy initiatives and teaching practice be brought together at different levels of the education system?

Prof Amol Padwad, Centre for English Language Education, Ambedkar University Delhi



The discussion proceeded with a working notion of multilingual education (MLE), drawing on the event's plenary session by Prof Jhingran, as *the formal use of two or more languages in transacting curriculum, or including children's languages formally in the classroom proceedings and the teaching-learning process including assessment*. The topic of the discussion was seen to have three key phrases – *language policy, teaching practice* and *different levels of education*. The general view was that not all states in India had clearly spelt out language policies, let alone MLE policies, and policies often had to be deduced from the prevalent practices. However, there were some dissenting voices which argued that there were enough policies in place, though not necessarily well-formulated, and the problem was with their implementation. The examples of Odisha, Telangana and Chhattisgarh were mentioned as the few states which were trying to develop appropriate policies to consciously and systematically address the needs of MLE for their populations.

In terms of teaching practice, there were challenges raised including understanding and tackling teacher beliefs and assumptions about MLE, raising teacher awareness of and competence in MLE and re-thinking teacher education in response to the needs of MLE. Regarding the levels of education, there were questions such as whether or not MLE had relevance for only primary education, whether MLE was feasible and/or desirable at all levels of education and how one might visualise MLE in higher education. Several of the participants felt that MLE should continue in secondary and higher education, though the medium of instruction may get restricted to a few languages.

Many participants argued that the effective implementation of MLE required adequate and appropriate materials, informed teachers and a supportive environment, which are both issues of policy and practice. It was also felt that the promotion of MLE did not match parental and societal expectations. The example of Telangana shared by a participant showed that the experiment to provide primary education through several tribal languages by appointing tribal teachers and providing primers in those languages did not attract much support, while the move to start 800 English medium schools generated a huge response.

Some other observations and suggestions made during the discussion were:

- The MLE enterprise seems to promote only the use of multiple languages, but it also needs to be culturally responsive and responsible.
- There are a few scattered examples of schools or institutions which are effectively implementing MLE and bridging the gap between policies and practice. These models need to be studied more closely and disseminated widely.

The languages of education in multilingual India: exploring effects on reading and mathematics

1st dissemination event: 12–13 July 2018, New Delhi, India

- More commitment from governments of funds and resources is required to effectively implement MLE, especially to equip teachers and provide suitable materials.
- When policies are made and practices are planned, the teacher's voice is rarely heard. It is very important that teachers are involved at all levels of policy-making and action-planning in MLE.

