

Bridging Tongues: Challenges and Opportunities of Multilingualism in Haryana's Pre Primary Classrooms

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Abstract: *This research delves into the dynamics of multilingualism in Indian pre-primary classrooms, focusing on the region of Haryana. The study is aligned with the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) of India and the National Education Policy (NEP), both of which emphasize the promotion of multilingualism, cultural diversity, and linguistic inclusion. Utilizing questionnaires and interviews with teachers and administrators from selected Haryana-based schools, the research investigates the linguistic practices, educational policies, and pedagogical strategies to uncover the challenges and benefits of multilingualism in early childhood education. The aim is to provide context-specific insights for policymakers, educators, and researchers, drawing attention to the complexities of implementing multilingual education and the necessity for carefully constructed curriculum and well-trained teachers. In consonance with the principles of NCF and the objectives of NEP, the findings contribute to the national and regional discourse on multilingual education, underlining its importance in shaping an inclusive, cohesive, and culturally diverse educational landscape in India.*

Keywords: Cultural Diversity, Early Childhood Education, Multilingualism, NEP, Pedagogical Strategies

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background and Context

India, characterized by its intricate and diverse linguistic landscape, manifests a vibrant array of languages and dialects that permeate various aspects of daily life. This richness in linguistic diversity is acutely epitomized in the northern state of Haryana, where multiple languages such as Hindi, Punjabi, and Haryanvi not only coexist but also engage in dynamic interactions within communities. Within the realm of education, the complexity of multilingualism assumes particular importance, especially during the formative pre-primary stage, where the foundational skills in language are established.

In Haryana's diverse and culturally-rich environment, the promotion of multilingualism in pre-primary education aligns with broader educational goals and policy directions, such as the National Curriculum Framework and the National Education Policy. These frameworks emphasize the importance of respecting and nurturing linguistic diversity, recognizing the cognitive and socio-cultural benefits that can arise from a well-designed, multilingual educational experience.

However, the task of implementing multilingual education is not without challenges. Factors such as teacher training, curriculum alignment, resource availability, and community attitudes play critical roles in determining the success of multilingual practices in pre-primary classrooms. The exploration of multilingual practices in Haryana's pre-primary classrooms reveals interplay of linguistic, cultural, pedagogical, and policy elements that shape the learning experiences of young children. This multifaceted nature of multilingualism requires a nuanced understanding and an integrated approach that considers not only the theoretical underpinnings but also the practical realities and community dynamics.

Understanding and addressing this multifaceted nature of multilingualism, and aligning it with national educational frameworks, becomes a critical endeavor in the context of Haryana's pre-primary education. This holds potential to enrich both the theoretical perspectives and practical applications in early childhood language education. Furthermore, it resonates with wider trends in global education, where

multilingualism is increasingly seen as a valuable asset that fosters cognitive development, cultural awareness, and global citizenship. The study of multilingualism in Haryana, therefore, contributes to a broader discourse on language education and offers valuable insights that may inform both policy and practice, not only within the state but also in other linguistically diverse contexts.

1.2. Research Problem

The challenge of fostering multilingualism in preprimary classrooms is multifaceted. On one hand, it provides opportunities for children to engage with their linguistic heritage and develop cognitive flexibility. On the other hand, it raises questions about pedagogical approaches, curriculum design, teacher competencies, and societal attitudes. Understanding these dynamics is vital to cultivating an inclusive and effective educational environment.

1.3. Objectives and Research Questions

The primary objective of this research is to explore the implementation and impact of multilingual education in preprimary classrooms in Haryana. The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- How are multilingual practices implemented in preprimary classrooms in Haryana?
- What challenges and benefits are associated with multilingualism in early childhood education?
- How can educational policies and teacher training be optimized to support multilingual education?

1.4. Significance

The findings of this study will contribute to the growing body of research on multilingualism in education, with specific implications for the Indian context. By examining real world practices in Haryana, the study will offer valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and researchers engaged in enhancing the quality of early childhood education in a linguistically diverse environment.

1.5. Scope of Research

The scope of this research is meticulously defined to concentrate on the examination of multilingual practices within 5 selected schools in the state of Haryana. Utilizing a qualitative methodology that incorporates questionnaires and interviews, the study endeavors to delve into the specific socio-cultural and linguistic context of Haryana. This focus allows for an in-depth exploration of the unique challenges and opportunities that are present in implementing multilingual education within pre-primary classrooms of the region.

The research aligns with the broader objectives of the National Curriculum Framework and the National Education Policy, reflecting a commitment to understanding and nurturing linguistic diversity in education. By concentrating on the particular geographical and cultural milieu of Haryana, the study aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on multilingualism in early childhood education in India. It aspires to offer insights and strategies that could be valuable not only for educators and policymakers within Haryana but also for those engaged with the complexities of linguistic diversity in similar contexts.

2. Literature Review

Multilingualism, the capacity for communication in more than one language, has become a subject of intense study within the field of education. The exploration of multilingualism is particularly pertinent in diverse and linguistically rich contexts like India, where the intersection of multiple languages is a common phenomenon.

In the realm of preprimary education, multilingualism takes on particular significance. Bialystok (2001) argues that early exposure to multiple languages can offer cognitive advantages, such as enhanced problem solving abilities and creative thinking. However, the implementation of multilingual education is fraught with complexities. Baker (2011) discusses how curriculum design, pedagogical practices, and teacher competencies need to be meticulously planned to effectively foster a multilingual environment.

India's linguistic diversity is unprecedented, with the Constitution recognizing 22 official languages and over 1600 dialects reported in the 2001 Census (Meganathan, 2011). The adoption of the Three Language Formula in the Indian education system has been a landmark initiative to promote multilingualism, but its success varies across states and regions (Mohanty, 2006).

Within the Indian context, the state of Haryana represents an intriguing case. While Hindi is the official language, the region's linguistic fabric is enriched by languages like Punjabi and Haryanvi (Yadav, 2009). This poses both opportunities and challenges for preprimary education in the state. The benefits of multilingual education, such as fostering cultural awareness and identity formation (García, 2009), must be balanced with potential obstacles in curriculum alignment, teacher training, and community attitudes (Ball, 2010).

Case studies focusing on other Indian states like Andhra Pradesh (Ramanathan, 2005) and Assam (Gogoi, 2012) have further highlighted the intricate dynamics of multilingual education. These studies reveal how local languages, state policies, and educational outcomes are interwoven in a complex relationship that requires nuanced understanding and action.

Theoretical frameworks, such as Cummins' Interdependence Hypothesis (1979) and Baker's model of bilingual education (2011), provide valuable insights into the cognitive and socio-cultural dimensions of multilingual learning. These theories help delineate the pathways through which multilingual education can be implemented and the potential barriers that may arise.

Haryana's specific context emphasizes the importance of recognizing local linguistic diversity within the education system. However, research also indicates challenges in implementation and potential conflicts with societal values and expectations (Sharma, 2014).

The existing literature on multilingualism in preprimary education particularly in the Indian context and the specific case of Haryana present a complex but enriching landscape. The multifaceted nature of multilingualism demands an integrated approach that considers policy, pedagogy, community engagement, and continuous research. The literature underscores the need for context specific understanding and the development of tailored strategies to fully harness the opportunities and address the challenges of multilingual education.

3. Overview of Multilingual Practices in Selected Schools

This section provides an overview of the selected schools across Haryana, focusing on their implementation of multilingual instructions in preprimary classrooms. The insights gathered from the schools are connected to the research questions, exploring the practices, challenges, benefits, and recommendations for multilingual education. The research study engaged a purposive sample of 5 schools and 20 teachers from various regions of Haryana, encompassing both urban and rural areas. The schools were strategically chosen to represent a diverse cross section of educational contexts and approaches to multilingual education in early childhood.

3.1. Selection of Schools and Teachers

The schools were selected based on specific criteria that considered their commitment to multilingual practices, geographic location, and student demographics. Within these schools, 20 teachers were chosen

for participation, ensuring a mix of educators with different levels of experience, qualifications, and backgrounds in multilingual teaching.

3.2. Demographics

The participating schools and teachers represented a balanced mix of urban and rural locales, reflecting the diverse educational landscape of Haryana. This geographical diversity provided a rich array of insights into how multilingual practices are adapted and implemented across different socio-economic and cultural contexts.

School Name	Geographical Location	Availability of Teachers	Ever received teacher training? Yes/No	% of Teachers trained
School A	Haryana Urban	8 Teachers	Yes	15%
School B	Haryana Rural	8 Teachers	No	0%
School C	Haryana Rural	12 Teachers	No	0%
School D	Haryana Urban	9 Teachers	Yes	30%
School E	Haryana Rural	5 Teachers	No	0%

Overview of Selected Schools

4. Research Methodology

The data collection process was twofold:

Interviews: Individual interviews were conducted with the selected teachers to gain an in depth understanding of their perspectives, experiences, and challenges in implementing multilingual education in preprimary classrooms. The interview sessions were structured to allow for open ended responses, enabling teachers to articulate their thoughts and experiences candidly.

Questionnaires: Following the interviews, a structured questionnaire was shared with the participants. Utilizing a Likert Scale, the questionnaire focused on specific aspects of multilingual practices, such as integration into the curriculum, availability of resources, pedagogical strategies, community involvement, challenges, benefits, and success evaluation. The questionnaire's design allowed for quantifiable insights, complementing the qualitative data gathered through interviews.

5. Data Analysis and Results

5.1. Demographics and Background Information

The diversity among participants offered a rich perspective into early childhood education across Haryana. The range of languages taught in the classroom was reflective of the linguistic landscape, providing a robust context for examining multilingual practices. The experience levels of teachers varied, highlighting the importance of exploring how seasoned professionals and newcomers alike approach multilingual education.

5.2. Multilingual Practices in Pre-Primary Education

Overall, the responses from Section B underscored a strong commitment to multilingual practices. However, certain discrepancies were noted, revealing nuanced challenges and opportunities within the multilingual education framework.

6. Discussion and Findings

The empirical aspect of this study was designed to provide a profound understanding of the dynamics of multilingualism in pre-primary education in the state of Haryana. To achieve this, a comprehensive research methodology was employed, featuring two primary tools: a structured questionnaire and one-on-one interviews with the participating teachers.

The questionnaire consisted of 8 carefully crafted questions, employing a Likert scale to gauge the participants' responses. These questions were meticulously constructed to illuminate specific aspects of multilingual practices, including the integration of languages into the daily curriculum, availability of materials and resources, implementation challenges, and observed benefits. The use of a Likert scale facilitated a nuanced quantitative understanding of the attitudes and experiences of the teachers towards multilingualism in their classrooms.

In addition to the questionnaire, one-on-one interviews were conducted with all the participating teachers. These interviews featured 5 relevant open-ended questions, designed to provide a more qualitative and individualized perspective. The nature of the open-ended questions allowed for a deeper exploration of the intricacies of implementing multilingual instruction. The teachers' personal insights, experiences, and challenges were captured through these interviews, enriching the data and providing a holistic view of multilingual education within the specific context of Haryana.

The combination of these two research tools provided a robust and multifaceted approach to understanding the subject of study. Through the careful alignment of the questionnaire and interview methods, the study achieved a balance between quantitative data and qualitative insights. Together, these methods enabled a detailed analysis, discussion, and interpretation of the results, highlighting key findings, implications, and recommendations for the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). The forthcoming sections will delve into the specific results, drawing connections to existing literature, policy frameworks, and practical applications in the diverse and dynamic field of early childhood multilingual education in India.

The findings of the study are carefully bucketed and listed below:

6.1. Integration of Multilingual Practices

In the study, a compelling majority of respondents validated the integration of multilingual approaches, thus aligning with burgeoning global trends that emphasize the necessity for linguistic pluralism. This unanimous affirmation not only concretizes the academic value of a multilingual curriculum but also its broader social implications. All respondents were in agreement that implementing a multilingual approach serves as a vehicle for fostering a more culturally inclusive educational environment. Such an approach tacitly recognizes and valorizes the diverse linguistic capital that students bring into the classroom, thereby mitigating the marginalization of non-dominant language speakers.

Respondents also unanimously asserted that multilingual education provides an invaluable conduit for children to engage with their linguistic heritage. This is particularly critical in an age of increasing globalization and diaspora, where linguistic roots can easily be effaced in the face of dominant languages. Beyond heritage retention, multilingual pedagogies present children with the cognitive and social opportunity to explore and acquire new languages, thereby broadening their linguistic repertoire and facilitating a more comprehensive understanding of the world.

Moreover, the multilingual approach was also viewed as an asset in promoting critical thinking skills. Multilingual education can introduce learners to various modes of thought, offering them a broader cognitive framework within which to interpret and interact with their surroundings. This, in turn, cultivates a mindset that is more empathetic and adaptable to cultural and linguistic diversity, qualities that are increasingly indispensable in a globalized world.

The unanimous endorsement by the respondents underscores a collective realization of the multi-faceted benefits—both cognitive and socio-cultural—that a multilingual approach can confer. Not only does it serve as a mechanism for heritage retention and cultural inclusivity, but it also engenders cognitive flexibility and adaptability, equipping students with the skills necessary for navigating an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

6.2. Availability of Materials and Resources

While respondents generally expressed satisfaction with the overall availability of teaching resources, a subset of educators emphasized the existing lacuna for materials that are specifically tailored to the unique linguistic and cultural milieu of Haryana. It points to a discernible gap between generic resources and the localized needs of the educational community. These observations indicate a salient opportunity for the development and dissemination of region-specific educational materials that are congruent with the particular linguistic and cultural norms prevalent in Haryana.

The call for such specialized resources can be interpreted as a manifestation of educators' awareness of the intricate relationship between language and culture, particularly in a linguistically diverse region. Teachers' demand for context-specific resources echoes the broader scholarly discussion in applied linguistics and TESOL that advocates for culturally relevant pedagogy. It underscores the pedagogical necessity to integrate local culture and language nuances into the curriculum, thereby enriching the educational experience and increasing student engagement.

By acknowledging the specific linguistic landscape of Haryana, educators are implicitly advocating for a form of linguistic inclusivity that goes beyond mere tokenism. They are recognizing the need for a curricular framework that does more than just pay lip service to linguistic diversity; it actively incorporates it. Such a framework would not only facilitate more effective language acquisition but would also serve to validate the identities of students who are part of the region's linguistic fabric.

Additionally, the desire for regionally tailored resources may also reflect a deeper concern about the potential for linguistic erosion and cultural assimilation. By developing resources that are more attuned to the local context, educational stakeholders can contribute to the preservation and promotion of regional languages and cultures, thereby fostering a more pluralistic and inclusive society.

The specific feedback from teachers regarding the need for regionally nuanced resources illuminates a dual opportunity: First, to enhance pedagogical effectiveness through increased cultural and linguistic resonance; and second, to contribute to broader socio-cultural objectives, including the preservation of linguistic diversity and the promotion of cultural inclusivity. This nuanced understanding could serve as a catalyst for future research and educational policy planning that aims to bridge the gap between generic resources and the unique needs of localized educational contexts.

6.3. Lack of Specific Pedagogical Strategies and Teacher Training

The findings reveal a unanimous concern among respondents about the conspicuous absence of pedagogical strategies specifically designed for multilingual instruction, a deficiency amplified by a significant gap in teacher training. Excluding a small minority of three educators, the majority confirmed that they had not received specialized training on incorporating multilingual approaches into classroom practice. This dual issue—lack of specific instructional strategies coupled with insufficient training—signifies an urgent call for systemic interventions in the form of professional development.

Insights gleaned from interview data further amplify this urgency, as educators overtly articulated a strong aspiration for comprehensive guidance, pedagogical support, and access to evidence-based multilingual teaching methodologies. Such sentiment indicates not merely a desire but an articulated professional need for instructional scaffolding tailored to multilingual educational contexts. This confirms the exigency of implementing a targeted professional development curriculum that marries theory and practice, thereby enabling teachers to negotiate the complexities of a linguistically diverse educational environment more effectively. The data portrays a critical pedagogical gap that warrants immediate attention in the form of specialized professional development initiatives. Addressing this gap is not merely an educational obligation but a prerequisite for enhancing the efficacy and inclusivity of multilingual teaching strategies.

6.4. Summary of the Key Insights of this study

The study illuminates three interrelated dimensions critical to the advancement of multilingual education. Firstly, there is a robust consensus favoring the integration of multilingual approaches as a means to foster cultural inclusivity and maintain linguistic heritage. Secondly, despite general satisfaction with existing resources, a significant demand exists for pedagogical materials tailored to the unique linguistic and cultural contexts, as exemplified by the needs articulated for the region of Haryana. Lastly, a glaring gap is evident in the provision of specialized teacher training for multilingual instruction, underscored by the near-unanimous call for targeted professional development programs. Collectively, these findings underscore an overarching narrative: while there is an appreciable acknowledgment of the importance of linguistic diversity in educational settings, concrete steps in the form of context-specific resources and specialized training are urgently needed to operationalize these beliefs into effective pedagogical practices.

7. Conclusion

The study conducted on multilingual practices in Haryana's pre-primary classrooms provides insights that are both enlightening and cautionary. It is clear from the research that the teachers in the region are making strides towards embracing multilingualism by integrating languages such as Hindi, Haryanvi, and Punjabi into their daily curriculum. This not only recognizes the rich linguistic tapestry of the region but also underscores the international educational shift towards appreciating the cognitive and cultural advantages of multilingualism. However, the study uncovers a vital disconnect in the availability of specific pedagogical strategies and adequate training for teachers in this area. This gap, expressed consistently across respondents, serves as an urgent call to bridge the divergence between theoretical aspirations and practical applications within the classroom.

7.1. Limitations

While the research offers significant insights, it does have notable limitations. The geographical reach of the study, confined to the region of Haryana, restricts the generalizability of the findings to other linguistic and cultural contexts within India or other countries. The sample size, involving only 20 teachers from 5 schools, might also limit the representativeness of the diverse educational experiences within the state. There may also be methodological constraints related to the reliance on self-reported questionnaires, as this might introduce bias with participants responding in ways perceived as socially acceptable rather than entirely accurate. Lastly, the study's cross-sectional nature fails to capture the long-term impacts and trends of multilingual practices, thereby limiting the understanding of their evolution over time.

7.2. Scope for Further Research

The present research has uncovered a complex landscape and identified key areas that require further exploration. A broader geographical exploration encompassing other regions within India would offer comparative insights and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of multilingual practices across the diverse cultural spectrum of the country. More in-depth case studies focusing on individual schools or teachers could provide a granular view of the specific challenges and successes encountered in implementing multilingual education. Longitudinal analysis, tracing the changes in multilingual practices and their outcomes over time, would enrich the understanding of these phenomena's sustainability and development. Furthermore, there is a pressing need for research into existing and potential new training programs, directly addressing the key gap identified in this study. The inclusion of parents' and students' voices in future research would contribute to a more comprehensive perspective, and an exploration of technology's role in supporting multilingual education would be a timely and valuable addition. In sum, this study lays the groundwork for extensive further research, opening up myriad possibilities for in-depth

exploration, innovation, and action in the vital field of multilingual education within the context of ELT and TESOL.

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