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Improvising Education: Empowering Education through Multilingualism

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Abstract

India is a land of cultural and linguistic diversity. Over the past few years the world has witnessed many changes in the field of education. Amongst them is the increasing trend of learning a third or fourth language preferably a foreign language. The number of multilinguals is more than monolinguals in the world. Today many schools in India have started teaching a foreign language. Today's youth wants to have an edge over others. Multilingualism opens up a plethora of opportunities. In an increasingly global society the ability to speak and write in multiple languages is now becoming necessary to effectively compete in the job market. The trend of speaking more languages is becoming frequent. This paper attempts to showcase the importance and role of multilingualism in a globalized society along with the present challenges and prospects. When and how a new language can be introduced is also a big question. Multilingualism is the need of the hour and will strengthen the cultural diversity between nations and will help in preserving the cultural heritage of the world.

Keywords: Multilingualism, language, globalization, multilingual education, culture.

Introduction

Language is a means of communication. In order to communicate with someone either both the persons should speak a common language or one of them should be able to speak the other person's language. A person is called multilingual when he is proficient in more than two languages. By multilingualism we understand that a person has the ability to speak in more than two languages. The number of multilingual speakers in the world is more than monolingual speakers (speaking one language).

In an increasingly global society, the ability to speak and write in multiple languages is becoming necessary to effectively compete in the job market. It is believed that over half of the entire world's population is bilingual.

Multilingualism is becoming a social phenomenon because of the increasing globalization and cultural openness. The leisure of accessing the information on the Internet has augmented the exposure of an individual to multiple languages. The trend of speaking more languages is becoming increasingly frequent thereby promoting a need to acquire additional languages. The complex role of Language has led to the discussion whether it is better to provide education in a minority language (a language spoken by the lesser number of people) or simply educating students in the language spoken by a majority people of a given region.

Most of the children enter school with basic language skills, in English or other languages. It depends on the qualified teachers to develop their language skills to help them in developing the competence they need to succeed in life. Acquiring a first language is fairly easy. A native speaker has a certain level of skill which is difficult for a second language learner to achieve. The factors of environment and surrounding contribute in acquiring a language. Children can learn more effectively if they learn English through the use of their native language, which provides a contextual information and material for learning and acknowledge them to match with their peer group while acquiring the language they will need to study and learn in order to interact effectively for all practical purposes in today's society.

It has been proved that multilinguals who are extremely proficient and skilled in two or more languages have enhanced executive functions and have great ability of learning a language as compared to the monolinguals. "The advantages that multilinguals exhibit over monolinguals are not restricted to linguistic knowledge only, but extend outside the area of language" (Cook 1999, 2002b)

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Researchers have indicated that people who are multilingual have a brain that is quicker, is better at dealing with ambiguities, resolving conflicts, and resisting Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia longer.

The learners who learn by living in the country where the target language is exclusively spoken learn better than those who learn a language in a class environment. The comparison between languages is reduced in the absence of the opportunity to actively translate if there is lack of any first language communication opportunity. The new language is almost learned independently – like the native language of a child – with direct concept-to-language translation that is more natural than word structures learned as a subject. In accumulation, exclusive and uninterrupted practice of the new language reinforces, fortifies the attained knowledge and makes it more poignant.

Students should receive bilingual education in the elementary school, in which humanities and social studies are taught in one of the minority languages of the country and math and sciences are taught in the dominant language. After developing the fluency of the students in both the languages, from middle school onwards, students can be taught in the dominant language, depending on their intended career choice and one literature class can be continued to be taught in a minority language. This would ensure that students are more skilled and they maintain a competitive edge over others when applying to colleges or for jobs.

The teaching of maths and sciences in English is beneficial to both students and the global scientific community as English is *lingua franca*. It equips students with a universal language spoken in a major part of the world with which they can contribute to future scientific research.

Even if a child is grown up in a bilingual environment he can still enjoy the advantages of a multilingual education while at college. If one has studied the subjects in English and has no background of a third language other than the regional or the native language still they have the opportunity to learn a third language preferably a foreign language in the university or college apart from the curriculum. In fact learning a new language develops job prospects, job competence as well as a newfound appreciation of a culture that was one foreign to them. Initial inhibitions to the new language will soon overcome if it is taught to the students in an interesting way where they do not feel the burden of learning a new language along with other subjects. A major challenge that is commonly faced by teachers of third language is that in India, it is a must to be well versed in English. When a student comes to the university who has little or no background of English learning another language will be a difficult task. For such student extra classes can be conducted or options of different languages can be given to them.

However promotion of multilingual education in India faces some challenges. There is unavailability of teachers who are themselves multilingual to be able to teach and manage students having lesser linguistic skills. Lack of proper classrooms with the proper equipments and teaching aids also create the difficulties for the teachers to teach the students and convey proper subject knowledge and concepts. Foreign language learning is an expensive affair. Less students make an effort to learn more than two language one being their native or regional language and the other English which is considered a global language.

In today's globalized world, it is important to be communicative in the common dominant language across global communities. It is equally important to learn one's mother tongue in order to preserve our own cultural identity. A multilingual education would help in preparing students for future professions, helping them in preserving their cultural heritage and enhancing their social experience.

Multilingualism and interculturalism can help in the growth of jobs and can contribute to mobility in the world and the construction of a better and more empathetic society.

Thus, the commitment to promote multilingualism is the need of the hour. Multilingual education will strengthen the scientific community. Now, people have become aware that languages play an important role in development of cultural diversity and promoting the dialogue between nations but also in achieving quality education for all and strengthening and preserving cultural heritage of the world.

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