Multilingualism In English-Medium Schools and Learning with Understanding

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ABSTRACT

The present paper attempts to discuss the causes and difficulties in 'Learning with understanding' in a multilingual classroom. With a case study of an industrial township school in Uttar Kannada district of Karnataka where a typical classroom occupying 40 students has linguistic diversities. The present paper aims to check the ability of students to use a non-native language as a communication language and to understand the teachers' and students' views towards multi-lingual classrooms with their own opinions and teachers' observations. The study discusses the factors that are significantly responsible for creating barriers in communicating in the English language. The study evidences that classrooms are failing to prepare a similar kind of atmosphere for language acquisition, which students make for themselves in an informal setting. English, being the language of instruction, need not be used for the sole purpose of undermining the hegemony of other languages. The paper suggests providing a suitable platform for the learning of the mother tongue. And also suggests the need to find its place along with other Indian languages. It is highly important to focus on the curriculum of the third language in the 3-language formula. The Teaching in Pre-Primary grades needs many reforms. Early childhood education has become an important platform for further education these days. The methodologies used in teaching need improvement.

INTRODUCTION

Acquiring a basic proficiency to read and write has remained the ultimate objective of English Medium classrooms, especially at the Primary Grades. As a matter of fact, learning to read and write is undoubtedly a very narrow vision of language learning. A motivated learner, at any stage of schooling, can fill this gap if unable to read and write. The problem of learning comes when learning with understanding becomes the barrier. Language, i.e., the known language, plays a vital role in understanding the instruction.

The composite nature of Indian classrooms has been widely discussed by policymakers. NCF 2005 emphasizes language diversity and provides a space for the knowledge of other languages in the curriculum of English, but has it been given the similar justice in actual classrooms is a fascinating question. The present paper attempts to discuss the causes and difficulties in 'Learning with understanding' in a multilingual classroom.

Key Words & Definitions: Multilingual, Mother Tongue, non-native language, Learning with Understanding.

Multilingual: The word multilingual in the present paper has been used for a learner and the classroom environment with diverse language speakers. Referring to the learner or an individual, it means a person with the knowledge of more than one language. Referring to the classroom it means a classroom which comprises students with multiple mother tongues. They may or may not converse with each other.

Mother Tongue: Mother tongue specifies to the language which a child naturally adopts and it is the language the child speaks at home.

Non-Native Language: The term nonnative language specifies the language which the child does not speak at home and doesn't converse into. It may be the language of society he/she lives in or the language of instruction or second language in the curriculum.

Learning with Understanding: Learning with understanding is a comprehensive term. Knowing something is an initial step of learning however understanding involves the construction of knowledge by individuals through their own activity, so that they develop a personal investment in building knowledge. They cannot perceive their knowledge simply as something that someone else has told them or explained to them. Language plays a vital role in learning with understanding.

In Understanding, Wiggins and McTighe describe the nature of understanding and also propose that understanding is revealed through six facets that offer different types of evidence of understanding. Here is a brief summary of each of the six facets: When someone truly understands, they:

- Can explain concepts, principles and processes by putting it their own words, teaching it to others, justifying their answers and showing their reasoning.
- Can interpret by making sense of data, text and experience through images, analogies, stories and models.
- Can apply by effectively using and adapting what they know in new and complex contexts.
- Can demonstrate perspective by seeing the big picture and recognizing different points of view.
- Display empathy by perceiving sensitively and walking in someone else's shoes.
- Have self-knowledge by showing metacognitive awareness and reflecting on the meaning of the learning and experience.

From knowing to experiencing the entire process thus needs understanding.

Multilingualism in Curriculum and Classroom – Review of Related Studies:
Achieving higher competencies in several languages provides cognitive benefits to the learners such as ability to learn and comprehend; it also helps in higher level of self-motivation and attainment on other subjects.

Linguistic diversity as evidenced has been an object of academic Excellence. In India, multilingualism has always been part of our cultural and social ethos. The richness and complexity of the Indian multilingual situation characterized by both individual and societal bilingualism may be ascertained from the fact that over 1652 mother-tongues belonging to four different language families are spoken in India; the print media uses 87 languages, the radio 71, and the schools 47 as media of instruction (Agnihotri, 2007, pp. 79-88).

The linguistic diversity of India is not limited to the use of languages and dialects in oral communication; it can also be seen in the use of different scripts and writing systems used across India. Books, newspapers, pamphlets, brochures, etc. are printed in a large number of languages and scripts including those that are not part of the official scheduled languages (Ahemad R. – p6)

The magnitude of multilingualism in Indian classroom is always an astonishing factor. Hundreds of languages are spoken here. A common language spoken varies in its vocabulary and forms in the same locality. The written language holds the official identity but the language commonly used by students in the classroom enables them to interact and thus strengthens their social nature. For a classroom, it is no wonder to have students with different mother tongues and hence language of instruction and language of textbook is a perplexing issue to handle.

Every language in itself is multilingual, it receives many changes over the period of time takes many new words and ideas from other languages and vice versa and thus evolves (Ramakant Agnihotri, Shiksha-Vimarsh-2016). Multilingualism if we talk about the outside school world shows versatility of personality and opens more ways of opportunities for an individual however, for a student-centered classroom language of instruction makes the difference. Whether using other languages in an English classroom is useful to learn English or will it reduce the importance of learning English itself is a dilemma for many of us. Multilingualism as a matter of fact is widely accepted as a favorable aspect of Classroom process.

Multilingualism and Learning with Understanding:
Language to communicate with each other doesn't remain a problem among the children with different mother tongues. It is evident that Hindi due to its glamorized impact acquires the space of communication language outside the classroom settings and among different language speakers. Example can be given of an industrial township school in Uttar Kannada district of Karnataka where a typical classroom occupying 40 students has linguistic diversities as mentioned in the table below.

Linguistic Diversities: Mother Tongue Vs Hindi

Mother Tongue	Students %	Speaking Hindi %
Kannada	40%	41%
Konkani	25%	26%
Hindi	14%	15%
Tamil	3%	1%
Malayalam	5%	4%
Marathi	4%	4%
Telugu	7%	7%
Others	2%	2%

The meaning of Linguistic Diversities: Mother Tongue Vs Hindi (above table) is given in as following graph (Graph no.01).

LINGUISTIC DIVERSITIES: MOTHER TONGUE Vs HINDI
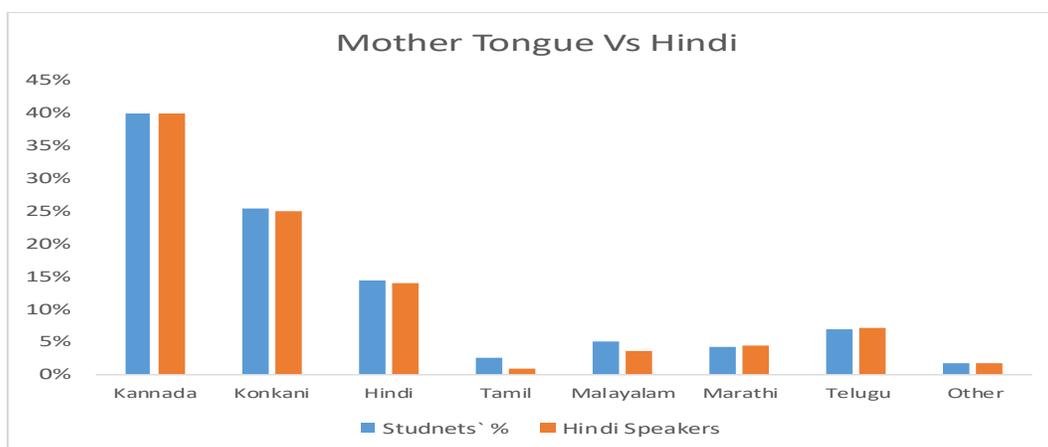
Graph 1

Neither the number of students who can speak Hindi beside Hindi neither being the mother tongue nor the language of instruction in curriculum is surprising. The above data is collected to check the ability of students to use a non-native language as a communication language.

On the contrary English being the language of instruction and most commonly used language in classroom transaction does not give satisfactory results in terms of its usage other than the textual matters. The data provided below shows the picture.

LINGUISTIC DIVERSITIES: MOTHER TONGUE VS ENGLISH

Mother Tongue	Students %	English Speaking Ability
Kannada	40%	15%
Konkani	25%	18%
Hindi	14%	5%
Tamil	3%	3%
Malayalam	5%	5%
Marathi	4%	3%
Telugu	7%	6%
Other	2%	2%

Table 2

The meaning of Linguistic Diversities: Mother Tongue Vs English (above table) is given in as following graph (Graph no.02).

LINGUISTIC DIVERSITIES: MOTHER TONGUE VS ENGLISH
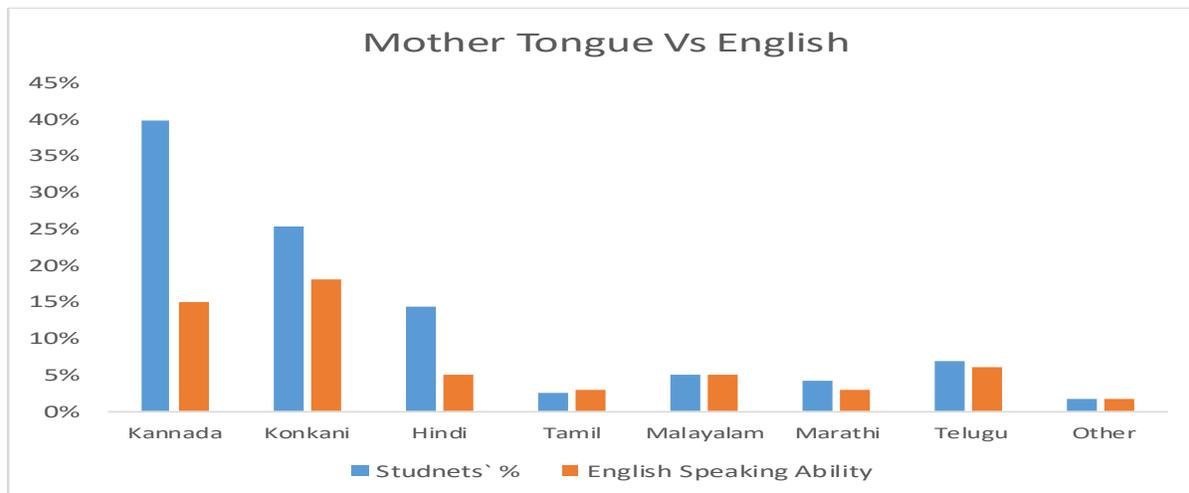
Graph 2

It is evident that classrooms fail to prepare the similar kind of atmosphere for language acquisition which students make for themselves in an informal setting. English being the language of instruction need not used for the sole purpose of undermining the hegemony of other languages. In the preprimary grades and classes where children are mostly dependent on their mother tongue for knowing things English needs to be used along with the other languages which children enjoy listening.

The factors those are significantly responsible for this can be many including teachers' competency in English to the socio-economic status of parents. But to discuss the issue pertaining to the classroom processes few of them can be discussed here.

Teaching of English in Pre- Primary Grades

Language acquisition is a lifelong process. Its way differs based on which language it is. For mother tongue, it is sequential and for other languages it is in a simultaneous way. (Harding & Riley, 1986). In the Early child hood stage of education a vernacular classroom must follow a sequential way however for an English classroom it will be beneficial to follow simultaneous acquisition. The knowledge of mother tongue at very early stage of schooling must help a child to gain concepts of other language. The English medium preparatory schools in every corner of the country need introspection for many reasons.

1) Are they providing opportunities to the learners to learn using what they know?
2) Are they helping the child learn English using the language the learners know?
3) Are they following sequential way of learning language?
4) Will the child be well verse in English if begins his Lesson by writing A or 1?

It is commonly observed that emphasis is mostly given on making the students to write the alphabets and Number tables.

Students come to know about an unknown word by writing the spelling of it first and then by oral drills which comprise nothing other than rote memorization. Classroom fails to prepare a meaningful situation for learning.

The complex nature of preparatory schools itself serves as a barrier beside teaching methodologies and language approach. Types of schools and Types of learners therein vary everywhere adding to these perplexities. English Medium preparatory schools most of the times do not possess a clear vision and idea about the learning outcomes they have about language teaching.

Communicative approach of curriculum:

Textbooks of English emphasize Communicative approach which does not provide justice to appreciation of literature and expressive way of language learning.

Textbook and the content therein emphasize on enabling the learner speak fluently the language required for a professional speaker. The other aspects of language learning are either not cared about in the teaching or the content fall short to that.

The Language of Instruction:

Yet another perplexing aspect of a multilingual classroom is the complexity between English to be the language of instruction or the language as output.

It has been proven as the bridge between knowledge of the world and students however its rigid use in the classroom as a language of instruction may not give justice to all the learners.

Responses received from teachers and students about use of English or other languages as language of instruction vary and mostly contradict each other.

The following table (Table No.03) shows what teacher's opinions about Language of Instructions.
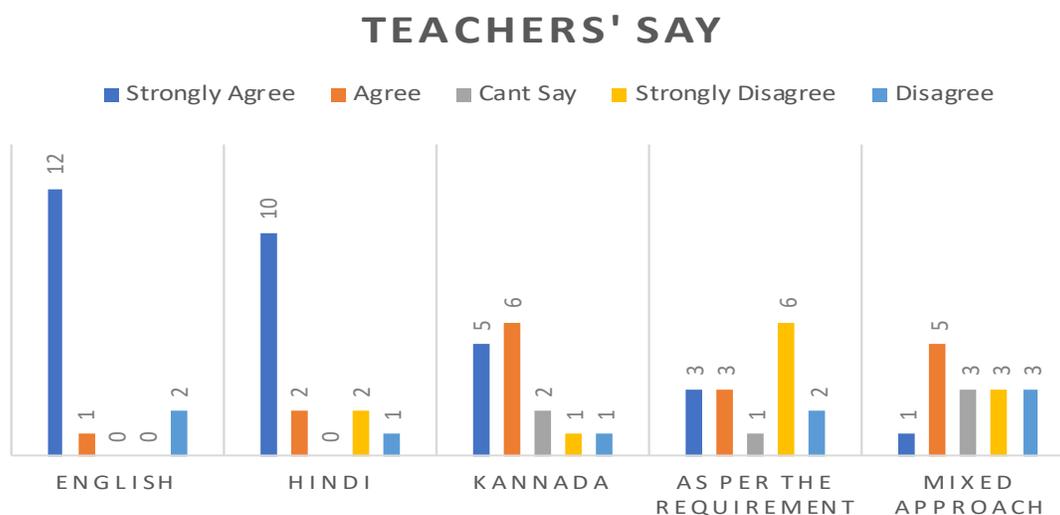
TEACHERS OPINION ABOUT LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTIONS

Language of Instruction	No. of Respondents	Strongly Agree	Agree	Can't Say	Strongly Disagree	Disagree
English	15	12	1	0	0	2
Hindi	15	10	2	0	2	1
Kannada	15	5	6	2	1	1
As per the requirement	15	3	3	1	6	2
Mixed Approach	15	1	5	3	3	3

Table 3

The following graph (Graph No.03) shows what teachers' opinions about Language of Instructions.

TEACHERS OPINION ABOUT LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTIONS

TEACHERS' SAY

Graph 3

Students of Classes 6,7 & 8 have different opinions about the use of the language of Instruction. For all the subjects except Hindi and third language, they prefer a Mixed or Bilingual approach to follow. The following table (Table No.04) shows what students' opinions are about the Language of Instructions.

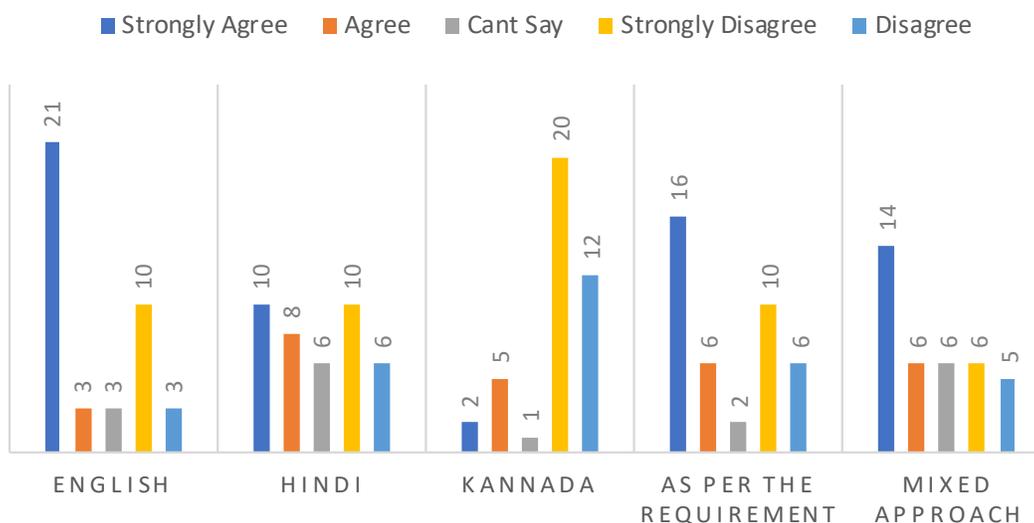## STUDENTS' OPINION ABOUT THE LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTIONS

Language of Instruction	No. of Respondents	Strongly Agree	Agree	Can't Say	Strongly Disagree	Disagree
English	40	21	3	3	10	3
Hindi	40	10	8	6	10	6
Kannada	40	2	5	1	20	12
As per the requirement	40	16	6	2	10	6
Mixed Approach	40	14	6	6	6	5

Table 4

The following graph (Graph No.04) shows what students' opinions about the Language of Instructions.

STUDENTS OPINION ABOUT LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTIONS

STUDENTS' SAY

■ Strongly Agree   ■ Agree   ■ Cant Say   ■ Strongly Disagree   ■ Disagree

[Bar chart with the following values by category:]

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Cant Say	Strongly Disagree	Disagree
ENGLISH	21	3	3	10	3
HINDI	10	8	6	10	6
KANNADA	2	5	1	20	12
AS PER THE REQUIREMENT	16	6	2	10	6
MIXED APPROACH	14	6	6	6	5

Graph 4

The curriculum of third language in 3 language formula
The curriculum of third language in Three Language Formula is a serious concern in Std. 6, 7 & 8. Most of the CBSE schools use regional language as one of the second language for Std. 1 to 5. Here the state board language books are used as third language text books. However, if a child opts the same language as third language in Std. 6, state boards 2nd Std. syllabus for that particular language is taught. The problem here is Textbooks of third language for Std. 6 to 8 provide no justice to the language ability of children. The shifting of second language to third language from std 5 to 6 in CBSE school needs reforms.

CONCLUSION
English can be best learned providing suitable platform for the learning of mother tongue, it does not stand alone. It needs to find its place along with other Indian languages. It is highly important to focus on the curriculum of third language in 3 language formula. The Teaching in Pre-Primary grades needs many reforms. Early childhood education has become an important platform for further education these days. The methodologies used in teaching need betterment.

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