
UNIT 30 GROWING IN MULTILINGUAL ENVIRONMENT

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30.1 INTRODUCTION

Of all the languages spoken by people around the child, which language, do you think, the child acquires first? Do children acquire all the languages spoken by people around them? How many languages can a child learn simultaneously? When a child is exposed to two/three languages at the same time, is the language development of the child slow or fast as compared to when a child is exposed to one language only during early childhood years? Is it correct to expose a child to more than one language during infancy and early childhood years from the point of view of her cognitive development? Is this likely to make her confused? Are there any benefits of being exposed to more than one language and learning these?

In this Unit, we will discuss all these issues in detail.

Objectives

After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- understand that multilingualism is embedded in children's environment – i.e. children are generally exposed to more than one language in their environment;
- describe the positive influences of bilingual/multilingual environment on children's development;
- explain how multilingual education can be based on the 'Mother Tongue' and the benefits of the same;
- describe the consequences of ignoring mother tongue as the medium of instruction; and
- describe how the teacher can teach in a multilingual classroom.

30.2 CHILDREN LEARNING MORE THAN ONE LANGUAGE AT A TIME

It would have become clear to you by now that children pick up the language spoken by the people around them. If the child hears more than one language being spoken around her regularly, she will learn all these languages as her first languages or her mother tongues. In many families parents speak two languages to the child and the child learns these easily. When the child goes out to play she is likely to meet children in her neighbourhood who are from different language communities and the child naturally picks up some of their language as well. If the people who come to work in the house are from a different language background and they interact with the child, the child will get some exposure to these languages as well. Even if children do not get exposed to a second language at home, they certainly are introduced to it when they join school. For some children the language in which teaching is carried out in the school is also their mother tongue; for most children however, the language of the school is different from the language spoken at home.

If you think about it, you will realize that we are surrounded by people who speak different languages. **We all live in a multilingual environment and most children grow up in a multilingual environment – in an environment where they are exposed to more than two languages. In other words, multilingualism is embedded (an integral part of) in the child’s environment.** Many children come to school knowing more than one language.

Consider the following situations:

Situation 1: *Sonu is 1½ years old. All family members speak to her in Hindi. However, they name many things in English only and not in Hindi. For example, they use English words like “book”, “fork”, “plate”, “page”, “kettle”, “train”, “cricket”, “tube-light”, “thank you”, “sorry”, “Good night”, “Good morning” etc. in every day conversation and do not say the Hindi words for these. On the other hand, they name many things both in English and Hindi. For example, they may name cat, dog, lion, bed, bed sheet, spoon, table, chair, fan, knife etc. both in English and Hindi.*

Comment upon what Sonu’s language development would be like.

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Yes, you are right. Sonu will be speaking in Hindi fluently within the next 2 years. However, her speech would be a mixture of English and Hindi words. Interestingly, she will be able to name many things in both English and

Hindi, many things in English only and many things in Hindi only depending upon the language used by the people around her. In general, Sonu's syntax will be that of Hindi with a high mixture of Hindi and English words. But she may also speak some English sentences such as 'I want chocolate'. The important thing is that she does not say 'I chocolate want.' (Mujhe chocolate chahiye) which would be the structure of Hindi. As you know the word order in English is 'subject-verb-object', whereas in Hindi it is 'subject-object-verb'. The child does not confuse the structure.

***Situation 2:** Ranu is 2½ years old. Since her birth, her grandmother and the house help at home speak to her consistently in Garhwali language which is their mother tongue. However, her father and mother, though their mother tongue is Garhwali, speak to her mostly in English and not Garhwali as they want her to learn English. The children in her neighbourhood (with whom Ranu plays frequently) and also her peers in the playschool frequently speak to her in Hindi. Her teacher uses both English and Hindi in the class. Ranu is able to speak all three languages i.e. Garhwali, English and Hindi fluently. She also does a lot of code mixing and switching.*

***Situation 3:** Jaya is 8 years old. Her father has a transferable job. Once in every two years he gets transferred to a new state. Hence, the family has shifted its base thrice after the birth of Priya. When Priya was born, they were in Orissa. Then after two years, the family moved to Tamil Nadu and thereafter, it moved to Gujarat. The family's native language is Hindi. Her teachers and many times her parents as well speak to her in English.*

Can you comment upon Jaya's language development?

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Yes, Jaya would be fluent in speaking Hindi and would know English also to an extent. She might also know Oriya, Tamil and Gujarati somewhat, depending upon her exposure to these languages in the three states (Orissa, Tamil Nadu and Gujarat).

The above mentioned situations show that:

- 1) **Children can learn more than one language provided people around them speak in those languages consistently** (regularly). This is a very important point. People around the child have to speak in those languages every time if they want the child to learn those languages. The child picks up that/those language/s first which is/are spoken most frequently by the people around her. This is generally the child's native language(s)/mother tongue(s).
- 2) Another very important point which is brought out by the above situations is that when a child is consistently exposed to two (or more

than two) languages together **she may acquire both/all languages simultaneously or may master one language first and then acquire the second language** and so on, depending on the level of exposure of those languages.

- 3) **Children do not face any problem in their language development if they are brought up in a multilingual environment.** There is absolutely no problem in exposing the child to multilingual environment from infancy or early childhood years.

In the light of what we have said till now, let us examine some common assumptions, which we make about language learning, but which are not correct.

Myth 1: *The child should be exposed consistently to one language only during infancy and early childhood years so that she may have proper language development.*

All the situations which you have read above bring out that this is not true. **In fact it would be interesting for you to know that a child can learn up to 8 languages simultaneously!** However, generally children do not get such a rich linguistic environment. Most commonly, across the world, children get exposed to two languages in their environment, i.e., they get bilingual environment or at the most three languages. One of the languages in the bilingual environment is the mother tongue and the other is another language considered important by their family or community and which is spoken by them or is the official language of the State. It may also be the language of the street which is spoken by friends and/or relatives and neighbours. Such children gain mastery in their native language and acquire good ability in the second and third language as well, depending upon their exposure to them. In fact, if the exposure is consistent they may acquire these languages as efficiently as their mother tongue – in other words, they may have ability to speak in these languages like their native language.

Let us now consider a few more situations to understand some other myths related to language development of children:

Situation 4: *Sonu belongs to a poor family and lives in a slum in Delhi. She began her schooling in a Hindi medium Government school in her slum area. After she passed Class VIII, her parents got her admitted to an English Medium Senior Secondary school in their area. Although in the Government school, she was taught English as one subject as a part of her curriculum, she did not know English well. However, in the second school in which the medium was English, she picked up English rapidly and within the next two years she had learnt to read, write and converse in English quite proficiently.*

Situation 5: *Mr. Tripathi was a software engineer in India. He got a job in a multinational software company in America. Hence he moved with his family to America. His sons Raj (18-years-old) and Piyush (13-years-old) had studied in an English Medium school in India and they knew English well. However, in America they faced difficulty in understanding English spoken by American children and teachers as the accent was very different. After a*

few months, they started understanding the American accent and they could talk with others without much difficulty. However, they could not speak English using the American accent and they would pronounce many words differently. They improved over a period of several months as they gradually interacted with more and more people there and picked up their way of speaking. Thereafter, they were fluent in American English. Piyush also chose German as part of his school curriculum. He became proficient in German as well within next three years.

Mr. Tripathi's daughter was only 2 ½ years old when he shifted to America. As she grew up, she gained mastery in American English quite naturally as her peers and teachers spoke in that language. There were no problems of understanding the accent and pronunciation of words. At home, the family largely spoke Hindi, though English was also spoken. Hence, she learnt to speak fluently in Hindi as well as in English.

Situation 4 shows the remarkable capabilities of older children and adolescents in acquiring second and more languages. Situation 5 clearly indicates the capabilities of the young child in acquiring two languages simultaneously as mother tongues. This leads us to question the second myth.

Myth 2: *The younger the child, the more skilled she is in acquiring a second language.*

The above situations indicate that this is true only in case of acquiring 'good' pronunciation and accent. **Otherwise, older children possessing higher level of maturity in their first language, pick up the morphology and syntax (grammar) of a second language faster and more effectively. This is a very important conclusion from the point of view of teaching as the following discussion brings out.**

Studies conducted on children studying in Hindi and English medium schools in India show that although children are taught English as a second language in Hindi medium schools from grades 4 or 5, their English reading and writing proficiency develops to the same level by grade 9 as that of children from English medium schools who have been studying all subjects in English since grade 1 and have also been studying English as a separate subject from grade 1. Hence, they simply take 4-5 years to reach the level of proficiency in English language which children from English medium schools take 9 years to attain. These studies dispel the third myth.

Myth 3: *Children who study in English Medium schools are more proficient in English as compared to children who study in Hindi medium schools.*

The studies mentioned above clearly prove that by grade 9 children from Hindi Medium schools have same level of proficiency in English as children studying in English medium schools except perhaps in the areas of spoken language.

It has been found that this is due to children's proficiency in their first language. As children have gained proficiency in reading and writing in their first language (i.e. in their mother tongue Hindi) in schools in primary grades,

reading and writing in a new language (i.e., English) becomes easier for children when it is introduced by grade 5 and hence they gain proficiency in it quite quickly. There is lot of research which shows that those children who acquire high levels of proficiency in one language find it very easy to learn another language efficiently. Hence, **it is a fallacy (wrong notion) to think that children, who are taught English from the beginning, would learn English language better.**

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

1) Fill in the Blanks:

- a) Children can learn more than one language provided people around them speak in those languages
- b) A child can learn up to languages simultaneously.
- c) Older children possessing higher level of maturity in their first language, pick up the.....and.....of a second language.....and more effectively.

2) Do you agree with the following statements? Give reasons, if you do not agree:

- a) The child should be exposed consistently to one language only during infancy and early childhood years so that she may have proper language development.

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- b) Children do not face any problem in their language development if they are brought up in a multilingual environment.

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- c) Children who study in English Medium schools are more proficient in English as compared to children who study in Hindi medium schools.

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30.3 INFLUENCE OF BILINGUAL/MULTILINGUAL ENVIRONMENT ON CHILDREN'S COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

When a child is exposed to more than one language at a time, she learns more than one name for an object, action or feeling. What is the influence of this on her cognitive development? Is it confusing for the child to have multiple labels for the same thing? Does it make understanding of simple facts/things far more complex for the child? Or is there any positive influence of bilingual/multilingual environment on the cognitive development of the child?

Studies prove that the following statements are not true.

Myth 4: *Multi-lingual environment has ill effects on children's cognitive development and creates confusion for the child.*

Many studies indicate that bilingual/multilingual environment has several positive influences on children's cognitive development. Studies show that children who are fluent in two or more languages are advanced in their cognitive development. They have better development of concepts and abstract thinking capabilities and are advanced in their analytical reasoning as well.

Myth 5: *Providing multilingual environment creates confusion for the child and slows down the language development of the child.*

Studies indicate that children exposed to bilingual/multilingual environment understand that words are simply arbitrary (random) symbols and a thing can be referred to in multiple words. They also understand the language structure and rules of grammar of the languages they hear. Hence, **multilingual environment has positive impacts on the language development of children.**

A very interesting case which shows that myths 4 and 5 are only myths and not true is given below.

In a rural school "Neel Bagh" in Kolar district, Karnataka, children learn Kannada, English, Hindi and Telegu (which is their mother tongue) all together simultaneously. In a study conducted on children studying in this school, it was found that there were no ill effects on the cognitive development of children! Rather children were found to be more advanced in their learning capabilities. Thus it is always beneficial to provide bilingual/multilingual environment to the child. A point to note, however, was that the school was headed by David Horsburgh who was a charismatic and brilliant teacher.

30.4 MULTILINGUAL ENVIRONMENT IN THE CLASSROOM

In Unit 28, while discussing emergent literacy, we have discussed that many children complete the primary grades without knowing how to read and write adequately. If this is the case, one will wonder what is the learning that they have acquired in school? In that Unit, we have also analyzed that one of the reasons why children find it difficult to read and write in school is because they are suddenly exposed to languages they may have not heard at home. In the school, the medium of instruction is the official language spoken in the State or English. We tend to think of a particular state, for example, Maharashtra, having a common language — Marathi. But the reality is quite different. There are many different ways in which Marathi is spoken – in other words there are many different dialects of Marathi. One of these dialects is accepted as the standard Marathi and this is recognized as the official language and is taught in schools. Children who speak a different dialect of Marathi will find the standard Marathi used as a medium of instruction in Marathi medium schools to be quite different. Similarly, if the medium of instruction is English, many children have no exposure to English at home. When these children encounter these languages they are not familiar with, they find it difficult to cope and do not learn. The situation becomes even more difficult when the child is not allowed to speak her mother tongue in the school by the teacher because according to the teacher that is not the correct language. You may have seen that in many English medium schools children in the nursery classes are not allowed to speak in Hindi or their mother tongue. So what we are trying to say is that while there are many other reasons why many children find it difficult to read and write during primary grades, one of the reasons for this lies in the medium of instruction. Added to this is the fact which we often tend to ignore that the teacher herself may not be proficient in the use of the standard state language or English, but is required to teach in these languages because that is the medium of instruction in schools. So when the teacher herself finds teaching in these languages difficult, we can imagine how difficult it will be for the children to learn these languages.

As you are reading this and if you are living in a city, you must be wondering that many people around you, and certainly the teachers in the schools, are good at English or the standard state language. While this is true, the point that you need to remember is that children living in cities form a very small part of our population and that even in cities the proficiency in English varies with the different strata in society. What we are saying is that a large number of our children experience difficulties with respect to the school language (that is medium of instruction in school) and home language (mother tongue).

The above discussion raises the following questions — Which language should be the medium of teaching in school during the early years in school? When should the official language of State/standard regional language and English be introduced? When should these be used as a medium of teaching? As discussed above, it is beneficial to provide multilingual environment to

the child. Now, how should this multilingual environment be provided to the child in school? The following discussion clarifies this:

You all know that by the time children begin school, they have gained ability to communicate meaningfully in their mother tongue. They have built a foundation of knowledge and experience through observing and interacting with peers and adults in their community. The language, knowledge and experience that children bring to school form an important foundation for their learning in the classroom. **Therefore, it is important that multilingual education in schools in the early years is based on the ‘Mother Tongue’ of children.** How can this be done?

- The medium of instruction should be in the mother tongue of children in school during the early years and children should be given opportunities to gain proficiency in reading and writing in their mother tongue first.
- Then the second language should be introduced, which could be the state language or English, and children should be allowed to gain proficiency in reading and writing in the second language first. Then finally the second language should be used as the medium of instruction in schools.

We will restate the point here. When we say that teaching should be through the mother tongue in the early years, we are not saying that children should not be taught the standard state language or English. We are only saying that the route to teaching children the standard state language OR English is by making the child proficient in the use of the mother tongue. The discussion further will help you to understand this.

30.4.1 Vision Regarding Mother Tongue Based Education

UNESCO also as far back as in 1953, suggested that children should be given opportunities to study in their mother tongue. In 2003, UNESCO published a position paper in which it was stated that:

“UNESCO supports mother tongue instruction as a means of improving educational quality by building upon the knowledge and experience of the learners and teachers.”

In India also, the importance of teaching children in their mother tongue during early years of their school years has been considered and initiatives have been taken in this regard. The latest initiative is that of the National Council for Education Research and Training (NCERT) through its National Curriculum Framework, 2005 (NCF) which makes it clear that language and culture are important to children’s learning. The following statements from the NCF show this:

a) Concerning language:

- “Home language(s) should be the medium of instruction in school.”
- “It is imperative that we honour the child’s home language(s).”
- “Bilingualism and multilingualism confer definite cognitive advantages.”

- “...evolving strategies that use the multilingual classroom as a resource.”
- “Oracy and literacy will be tools for learning and for developing higher order communicative skills and critical thinking.”

b) Concerning local culture and environment:

- “Child centred pedagogy means giving primacy to children’s experiences, their voices and their active participation.”
- “Children will only learn in an atmosphere where they feel valued.”
- “Knowledge (content of the curriculum) needs to be relevant, interesting and meaningful.”
- “Children’s community and local environment form the primary content in which learning takes place.”

30.4.2 What Happens When the Mother Tongue is Ignored as the Medium of Instruction?

As we have said earlier, many schools have a very rigid approach towards the medium of instruction. The teacher insists that the child speak in the language of the school and does not permit the use of the child’s home language in class. The classroom situation is like the following:

- The textbooks and the medium of teaching are in a language which children neither speak nor understand. As a result, children may not be able to understand whatever is taught in the class.
- The language of children, their learning and problem solving experiences and their knowledge of “how things work” in their own culture and social setting may not serve as the foundation for learning for them in the school, because the culture of the classroom, the teachers, and the textbooks is different.
- The children’s language and knowledge may be looked down upon by the teacher and the children are expected to quickly master a language which even the teacher finds unfamiliar.

Think about this situation in your own context. Suppose you were suddenly shifted to a city where you do not know the language spoken and no one speaks the language you know. What would you do to ask for things or express your feelings? Would you feel comfortable? Would you want to stay there?

Then what would be situation of children in such class? Write down your views.

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All these conditions in the school lead to harmful consequences for children, as discussed further:

- 1) **Children may lose confidence in themselves as learners:** When children's language, culture and experiences are ignored or excluded in classroom interactions, it means that everything they have learned about life and the world up to this point is being dismissed as irrelevant to school learning. All these cause children to lose confidence in themselves as learners.
- 2) If teaching occurs only in the second language which is unfamiliar to children, **children's understanding of concepts may be limited or confused.** Children may not understand concepts clearly. This is because children do not understand the school language well.
- 3) **Since** children are not able to relate to school environment, it may lower the children's interest in coming to school. Thus **children drop out of school or repeat classes.** In fact, it has been found that fifty per cent of the world's out-of-school children belong to those communities where the language of schooling is rarely, if ever, used at home. This is perhaps the major reason for lower levels of learning and high levels of dropout and repetition among children from such communities (World Bank, 2005).

In India, for example, it has been found that in case of children belonging to scheduled tribes in Orissa, 27% of children drop out before class 2 and 42% drop out before class 6. Only 21% remain in school by 7th grade (figures from Government of Orissa). The situation in most other states is not much better; Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Andhra are particularly in a similar situation.

- 4) Since the child's language and culture is not valued in their school – in fact, it is looked down upon – the children may also start devaluing their own culture and think of it to be inferior. Thus, the children become alienated **from their heritage, language and culture, from parents and community.** The children may be teased by other students for using their Mother Tongue in the classroom. Teachers advise them to use the second language instead of their Mother Tongue. Parents are asked not to use Mother Tongue at home in order to make children fluent in the second language. All this leads the parents and children to have a negative attitude towards their language.

Read the following description of a classroom in primary school in the tribal region of Chhindwara, Madhya Pradesh, as reported in a study by Jhingran done in the year 2005.

The medium of teaching in the school was Hindi. However, the tribal children knew their mother tongue only. It was observed in the classroom that:

The children seemed totally disinterested... They stared vacantly at the teacher and sometimes at the blackboard where some alphabets had been written. Clearly aware that the children could not understand what he was saying, the teacher proceeded to provide an even more detailed explanation in a much louder voice.

Later, tired of speaking and realizing that the young children were completely lost, he asked them to start copying the alphabets from the blackboard.

“My children are very good at copying from the black board. By the time they reach grade 5, they can copy all the answers and memorise them. But only two of the grade 5 students can actually speak Hindi”, said the teacher.

The researcher conducted several studies in primary schools for tribal children in four different States and found that:

- Children had no comprehension of teacher’s language even after about 6 months in Grade I.
- Grade I children showed no recognition of alphabets, except when arranged in the typical sequence (showing that they had only memorized the arrangement of the letters in a particular sequence).
- Teaching emphasised passive participation of students, i.e. copying alphabets and numbers from blackboards or text books.
- Children did very little oral work or conversation in the school language which was the medium of instruction.
- The situation was a little better when there was a tribal teacher speaking children’s language. While the medium of instruction was still in an unknown second language the tribal teacher could help them out by relating the second language with the children’s mother tongue.

Therefore, it is important to understand that especially in case of those children who are not exposed to the language of the school in their home environment, the teaching of the school language must be through a language familiar to the child, in other words, through the ‘mother tongue’.

30.4.3 Benefits of Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education

There are many benefits of Mother Tongue based Multilingual Education in schools:

- 1) When mother tongue is used as the medium of instruction in the early years, the language, knowledge and experiences that children bring to school become the foundation for their learning in the classroom. This leads to effective school learning. **As children understand basic concepts in their mother tongue, it ensures better academic achievement.**
- 2) The knowledge, concepts and skills children acquire in their first language “*transfer across languages from the mother tongue... to the school language*”. **Once children have understood a concept in their mother tongue, they need not relearn it in the other school language.** They will need to learn the vocabulary of the second language but they do not have to re-understand the concept.
- 3) You know that children learn by exploring things around them and by talking about these things. Participating in new kinds of situations in

school require from children a certain degree of confidence and ability in the language being used. When classroom activities are done in the language children are familiar with, it strengthens the abilities of children in using language. It enhances their logical thinking, their imagination, self-confidence, communication capabilities and children are able to widen their knowledge as well. Hence, **when children's mother tongue is used as medium of instruction in school, it enhances children's cognitive and socio-emotional development as well.**

- 4) Using children's native language in class is important for another reason: language is a part of one's identity. It is an integral part of our culture. Respecting the child's language means respecting the child. When children's native language is used in class children feel that their heritage and culture is respected and therefore **they develop a positive self-image**. When the language of the children is looked down upon in the school, children lack confidence whether what they say or feel will be respected or not and do not feel enthused to learn.
- 5) Moreover, achieving proficiency in the mother tongue followed by introducing the second language **prevents 'Semi-lingualism'**. Semi-lingualism means inadequate proficiency in both languages. When children are taught in second language only and not in their first language, they may not know their first language in depth – for example, they may not know how to write in it. They may also not understand the second language proficiently. As a result, children may end up being limited in both first and second languages for some time which may cause serious academic difficulties.

The benefits of mother-tongue first Multilingual Education (MLE) programmes have been amply demonstrated in studies conducted in India. In Andhra Pradesh, for instance, it has been found that the enrolment rates of tribal children have increased, dropout rates are reduced and children stay in school longer. They no longer arrive late and leave after the free midday meal. Teachers are happier being able to communicate freely with the tribal children in their native language, children are learning, parents and the community are involved (SSA evaluation of the Andhra Pradesh MLE, 2006). In a study conducted on these communities in December 2006, parents reported that children were sharing with them what they had learnt in school; something which never happened when schooling took place only in the second language there. Parents were requesting literacy lessons themselves from the teachers.

In another study conducted on children belonging to Bodo community in Assam, it was found that these children could neither speak in Assamese nor English. Hence, they faced great academic difficulties in schools in Assam. However, when they were taught in their native language 'Bodo' their academic performance improved. Therefore, World Bank (2005) suggests that, because of the reduced dropout and repetition, that **even though the initial costs may be high, it is more cost effective in the long term, to implement mother tongue programmes.**

Hence, multilingual education should always be mother tongue based. **Mother Tongue should be used as a medium of teaching for the early years.** As discussed in the earlier part of this Section, **as children gain proficiency in reading and writing in their mother tongue in primary grades, it becomes easier for them to read and write in second language when it is introduced later** and they gain proficiency in second language fast. The native languages of different children in the classroom can be used for a variety of exciting activities which would make their languages and cultures an integral part of the classroom. This would also enhance their self-image and reduce the sense of alienation.

When second language is introduced in primary grades, it should be for purposes of oral communication only in the beginning – the formal teaching of reading and writing in the second language should wait at least till later half of grade I or should be introduced early in the first half of grade II. By the end of Grade II, the second language can be used along with the first language for teaching. In strong MT-Based MLE programmes, both languages (Mother Tongue and the second language) are used for teaching throughout primary school.

- 1) Do you remember how were you taught in schools in primary grades? What was the medium of teaching?
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- 2) Find out what is the pattern of introducing mother tongue and other languages in primary grades in schools now-a-days?
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- 3) Discuss if this pattern is suitable for children’s learning in context of the discussion done in the Unit?
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30.4.4 How can the Teacher Teach Children Coming from Different Language Backgrounds?

Suppose there is a school in which children come from different language backgrounds. This may occur very commonly. For example, in a north Indian city, in a single classroom you may find one child speaking fluently in

Punjabi, another child speaking in Garhwali, another child speaking proficiently in Bengali; some children having Tamil/Malayalam as their native language and the others Hindi. Some of these children may also speak some English and some may be quite proficient in English. In which language, would you suggest should the teacher teach the children?

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In such situation, **the teacher should identify one language which is a link language for all children, i.e., the language which all or most children can speak and understand and use that language for conversing with children.** The dialogue in the classroom must be in the common language so that children may participate actively in class discussions and activities and are involved in learning process. However, this does not mean that languages of other children should be neglected completely. This would go against the very concept of multilingualism. We should use multilingualism as a resource. That does NOT mean that the teacher has to know all the languages. On the contrary, teacher also becomes a learner in the process. Imagine for example, in a class you have Hindi, English, Mewari and Telugu represented. You might engage children in an exercise to name different objects in their own languages.

Then the teacher can introduce the second language, which is the language that the school uses, through the first language. This means that while introducing words and sentences in the second language, the teacher should help the children understand their meaning in the first language as well. The children would then find the second language meaningful. Thus for some months the teacher has to be bi-lingual in the class and give children many opportunities to express themselves in the second language without being too critical of their sentence construction or use of grammar in the second language. Children will learn appropriate language structure of the second language as they talk and get opportunities to hear others.

For instance, in the example of the classroom mentioned above, the teacher may identify that all children can understand and speak in Hindi. Therefore, she may most commonly give instructions in Hindi and have classroom discussions in Hindi so that all children can be involved in the classroom activities. Alongside, she may also introduce English in class. Suppose the teacher identifies that most children can speak fluently and understand Tamil, she may interact in class in Tamil and alongside introduce English. She may also use translation and translate a small poem into the languages known to the children in the class.

In contrast, if the teacher would speak only in a language that students cannot understand, then children display frustration, boredom, and withdrawal. For instance, in the example mentioned above, if the teacher prefers to interact only in English with the students then all children may not understand what

the teacher is saying and hence may not follow her and may feel bored in class. Also, they may not be able to explore and talk about their experiences. They would not feel confident to express themselves and there are a lot more negative consequences of such a situation in the classroom.

To summarize, children need to be allowed to use their own language and to play with all the languages spoken at home by the children in the class. They can use words from various languages to express themselves thereby developing an enriched capability to dialogue. **By using the language children are familiar with, the children can be introduced to the school language.**

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) Describe in brief as how the education in schools can be based on the 'Mother Tongue' of children?

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- 2) Describe in brief the problems faced by children when their mother tongue is ignored as the medium of instruction in schools.

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- 3) Describe in brief the benefits of mother tongue based multilingual education.

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- 4) How can teacher use multilingualism as a resource in classroom?

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30.5 SUMMING UP

This Unit dispels several myths related to learning of more than one language by children. In the Unit, it has been described that children can learn more than one language provided people around them speak in those languages consistently. The child can acquire both/all languages simultaneously or may master one language first and then acquire the second language and so on, depending on the level of exposure of those languages. Older children possessing higher level of maturity in their first language, pick up the morphology and syntax (grammar) of a second language faster and more effectively.

Children do not face any problem in their language development if they are brought up in a multilingual environment. Multilingual environment in fact has several positive influences on children's cognitive development. Children who are fluent in two or more languages are advanced in their cognitive development. They have better development of concepts and abstract thinking capabilities and are advanced in their analytical reasoning as well. Therefore, multilingual education in schools in the early years is based on the 'Mother Tongue' of children. It enhances children's cognitive and socio-emotional development. However, when the mother tongue of children is ignored as the medium of instruction in schools, it may cause several harmful consequences for children. Children may lose confidence in themselves as learners and their understanding of concepts may be limited or confused. Children may also become alienated from their heritage, language and culture, from parents and community. Therefore, the teacher should always use different languages spoken by children as a resource in the classroom.

Mother Tongue should be used as a medium of teaching for the early years. Teaching should begin in children's native language in schools and as children gain proficiency in reading and writing in their mother tongue in primary grades, it becomes easier for them to read and write in second language when it is introduced later. It is important to note that when second language is introduced in primary grades, it should be for purposes of oral communication only in the beginning – the formal teaching of reading and writing in the second language should wait at least till later half of grade I or should be introduced early in the first half of grade II. By the end of Grade II, the second language can be used along with the first language for teaching.

30.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1)
 - a) consistently
 - b) 8 languages
 - c) morphology, syntax, faster
- 2)
 - a) No
 - b) Agree
 - c) No

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) The medium of instruction should be in the mother tongue of children in school during the early years and children should be given opportunities to gain proficiency in reading and writing in their mother tongue first. Then the second language should be introduced and children should be allowed to gain proficiency in reading and writing in the second language. Then finally, the second language should be used as the medium of instruction in schools.
- 2) When the mother tongue of children is ignored as the medium of instruction in schools, it may cause several harmful consequences for children. Children may lose confidence in themselves as learners and their understanding of concepts may be limited or confused. Children may also become alienated from their heritage, language and culture, from parents and community. Children may drop out of school or repeat classes.

For details see Sub-section 30.4.2

- 3) The benefits of mother tongue based multilingual education in schools are:
 - i) As children understand basic concepts in their mother tongue, it ensures better academic achievement.
 - ii) Once children have understood a concept in their mother tongue, they need not relearn it in the other school language.
 - iii) When children's mother tongue is used as medium of instruction in school, it enhances children's cognitive and socio-emotional development as well.
 - iv) When children's native language is used in class children feel that their heritage and culture is respected and therefore they develop a positive self-image.

For details see Sub-section 30.4.3

- 4) The teacher should not neglect different languages spoken by children in class. She should use multilingualism as a resource. That does NOT mean that the teacher has to know all the languages. On the contrary, teacher also becomes a learner in the process. For example, suppose in a class there are children from different language backgrounds like Hindi, English, Mewari and Telugu etc. The teacher might engage children in an exercise to name different objects in their own languages. This activity would be fun for children and alongside there would be cognitive development of children and also all children would feel their language and heritage respected in class.

FURTHER READINGS FOR BLOCK 6

The following are some books that you will find useful for further reading of topics discussed in Block 6.

- 1) Honig, A. S. (2007). *Oral language development. Early Child Development and Care* 177, no. 6-7: 581-613. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430701377482>
- 2) Jackie, M. and Hallet, E. (eds.). (2008). *Desirable Literacies: Approaches to language and Literacy in the Early Years*. London: Sage.
- 3) Pullen, P. C. and Justice, L. M. (2003). Enhancing phonological awareness, print awareness, and oral language skills in preschool children. *Intervention in School and Clinic*. 39, no. 2: 87-98.
- 4) Dyson, A. H. (1988). *Drawing, Talking, and Writing: Rethinking Writing Development*. Occasional Paper No. 3
- 5) Dyson, A. H. (1990). Symbol Makers, Symbol Weavers: How Children Link Play, Pictures, and Print. *Young Children*. 45(2). 50-57. doi: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42725013>
- 6) Lynne Cameron, L. (2001). *Teaching Languages to Young Learners*. New Delhi: Cambridge University Press
- 7) Pandey, L. (2008). *Padna Sikhane Ki Shuruat Aur Padhne Se Sambandhit Anya Lekho Ka Sankalan*. Reading Development Cell, NCERT (Publication available in Hindi)
- 8) NCERT. (2013). *Likhne ki Shuruat: Ek Samvad: A Teachers' Handbook*. New Delhi. (Publication available in Hindi)
- 9) Skutnabb-Kangas, T., Phillipson, R., Mohanty, A.K., & Panda, M. (2009) *Social justice through multilingual education*. Bristol, Blue Ridge Summit: Multilingual Matters, 2009, <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781847691910>