



Multilingualism and Education

This editorial is based on [Education in regional languages will foster inclusivity](#) which was published in The Hindu Businessline on 02/08/2023. It talks about the role of multilingualism in education.

For Prelims: [National Education Policy](#), [NIPUN Bharat Mission](#)

For Mains: Benefits and Challenges of Multilingualism in Education

Multilingualism is the **ability to speak, understand, read, and write** more than one language. It can be individual or societal, depending on whether a person or a community uses multiple languages. Multilingualism can also be **classified into different types, such as additive or subtractive, balanced or dominant**, sequential or simultaneous, depending on how languages are **acquired, used, and valued**. Language is a powerful tool for communication, learning, and cultural expression. It is also a **key aspect of human development and identity**. However, in a diverse and multilingual country like India, language can also pose significant challenges for education.

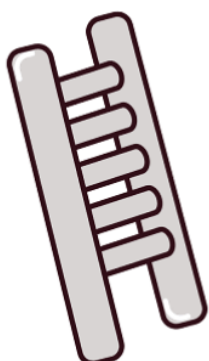
Why is Multilingualism Important in Education?

- **Enhancing Cognitive Development:**
 - Research shows that learning **more than one language can boost brain functions, such as memory, attention, problem-solving, and creativity.**
 - It can also improve metalinguistic awareness, which is the ability to reflect on and manipulate language structures and rules.
- **Fostering Cultural Diversity:**
 - Learning multiple languages can expose students to **different cultures, perspectives, and values.** It can also help them **develop intercultural competence**, which is the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with people from diverse backgrounds.
 - With over **22 officially recognised languages and hundreds of dialects**, each with its own unique cultural and historical significance, language is a crucial aspect of our identity.
- **Improving Academic Achievement:**
 - Studies have consistently shown that students who receive instruction in their mother tongue or home language **perform better in school than those who are taught in a foreign or unfamiliar language.**
 - This is because they can access the **curriculum content more easily and confidently**, and transfer their skills and knowledge to other languages.
- **Promoting Social Inclusion:**
 - Providing education in multiple languages can **ensure that every child has equal access and opportunity to learn, regardless of their linguistic background.**
 - It can also foster a sense of belonging and identity among minority language speakers, and reduce discrimination and marginalization.

How Can Multilingual Education be Implemented Effectively?

- **The Choice of Languages:**
 - Multilingual education should be based on the linguistic realities and needs of the learners and the communities.
 - It should also respect the constitutional provisions and the three-language formula of the [National Education Policy](#) (NEP 2020).
 - Ideally, multilingual **education should start with the mother tongue or home language** of the learners as the medium of instruction, and gradually introduce other languages as subjects or additional media of instruction.
- **The Pedagogy of Languages:**
 - Multilingual education **should adopt a learner-centered and interactive pedagogy** that fosters language awareness and proficiency.
 - It should also **promote cross-linguistic transfer and multiliteracy skills** among the learners.
 - Moreover, it should use culturally relevant and contextually appropriate materials and methods that reflect the diversity and richness of languages and cultures.
- **The Assessment of Languages:**
 - Multilingual education **should use fair and valid assessment tools and criteria** that measure the learning outcomes and progress of the learners in multiple languages.
 - It should also provide **constructive feedback and support to the learners** to improve their language skills.
 - Furthermore, it should **recognize and reward the achievements and efforts** of the learners in multilingual education.

// Multilingual Education Program Stages



- Stage 1: Learning takes place entirely in the child's home language.
- Stage 2: Building fluency in the mother-tongue. Introduction of oral fluency in second language.
- Stage 3: Building oral fluency in the Second language. Introduction of literacy in second language.
- Stage 4: Using both first language and second language for lifelong learning

What are the Benefits of Multilingual Education for India?

- **Enhancing Human Capital:**
 - Multilingual education can equip the learners with the **necessary language skills and competencies to participate in various domains** of life, such as education, employment, research, innovation, etc.
 - It can also increase their employability and mobility in the globalized world.
- **Preserving Linguistic Diversity:**
 - Multilingual education can help **preserve and revitalize the linguistic diversity and heritage of India**.
 - It can also promote **linguistic rights and dignity of the speakers** of different languages, especially those who are endangered or marginalized.
- **Strengthening National Unity:**
 - Multilingual education can **foster mutual understanding and respect among the speakers** of different languages and cultures.

- It can also **enhance social cohesion and harmony** among the diverse groups of people in India.
- **Stronger Foundation for Learning Additional Languages:**
 - Starting education in **one's mother tongue provides a solid foundation for learning additional languages**, including the national language and English, promoting multilingualism.
- **Higher Retention Rates:**
 - When students can understand what they are being taught, they are **more likely to stay in school and complete their education.**

What are the Challenges of Multilingualism in Education?

- **Lack of Resources:**
 - Implementing multilingual education requires adequate resources, **such as trained teachers, appropriate curricula, quality textbooks, assessment tools, and digital platforms.**
 - However, many schools **lack these resources, especially in rural and remote areas.**
- **Lack of Policy Support:**
 - Although the **NEP 2020 and the NIPUN Bharat Mission** advocate for multilingual education, there is still a gap between policy and practice.
 - Many states have not yet adopted or implemented these policies effectively.
 - There is also a need for more **coordination and collaboration among different stakeholders**, such as central and state governments, educational institutions, civil society organizations, and communities.
- **Lack of Awareness:**
 - Many parents, teachers, students, and policymakers are **not aware of the benefits of multilingual education.**
 - They **may have misconceptions or prejudices** about certain languages or dialects.
 - They may also **prefer English as the medium of instruction, believing that it will provide better opportunities for their children's future.**
- **Curriculum Alignment:**
 - Balancing the use of mother tongues or regional languages **with national or standardized curricula can be challenging.**
 - Ensuring that students have access to a well-rounded education while also valuing their linguistic backgrounds is crucial.
- **Assessment and Evaluation:**
 - Developing fair and **standardized assessment methods across different languages** can be difficult.
 - Ensuring that students are evaluated fairly and consistently can be a challenge when using multiple languages.
- **Transition to Higher Education and Employment:**
 - While multilingual education can be **effective at the primary level, transitioning to higher education or the job market** might require proficiency in a more widely spoken language, potentially disadvantageous to students who were educated in their mother tongue.

What are the Policy Recommendations for Multilingualism in Education?

- **Adopting a Flexible and Inclusive Approach:**
 - Multilingual education should be **tailored to the needs and contexts of different learners and communities.**
 - It should also be **inclusive of all languages and dialects spoken in India**, including tribal languages, sign languages, classical languages, foreign languages, etc.
- **Developing a Continuum of Language Learning:**
 - Multilingual education should not be limited to the foundational years of schooling.
 - It should be extended throughout the educational system, **from pre-primary to higher education.** It should also provide opportunities for students to learn new languages at

different stages of their academic career.

▪ **Strengthening Teacher Capacity:**

- Teachers play a crucial role in delivering multilingual education.
- They should be provided with **adequate training and support to teach effectively** in multiple languages.
- They should also be encouraged to **use innovative pedagogies and technologies** to enhance language learning.

▪ **Engaging Parents and Communities:**

- Parents and communities are key partners in promoting multilingual education.
- They **should be informed about the benefits of multilingualism** for their children's development and learning.
- They should also be involved in **decision-making processes regarding language policies** and practices.

▪ **Creating a Culture of Multilingualism:**

- Multilingualism should be **celebrated as a valuable asset for India's social and economic development**.
- It should be integrated into various aspects of public life, **such as media, arts, sports, governance, etc.**
- It should also be recognized and rewarded in various domains, such as education, employment, research, etc.

Conclusion:

- India needs to adopt **LEAP - Language Empowerment for Achieving Potential**. By supporting multilingualism and providing sufficient training and resources to teachers, LEAP will **help enhance linguistic skills, improve cognitive development and create a more culturally diverse and intellectually enriching** educational environment.

Drishti Mains Question:

Discuss the benefits and challenges of multilingualism in education in India. Suggest some policy recommendations and innovative models for promoting multilingual education in India.