

Language as a Barrier in Higher Education for Hindi Medium Students in Bilingual Courses

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Abstract

The dominance of English as the official language in India is intertwined with colonial history. English and Hindi are not the only official languages in India, but they are both important. The aim of this study is to find the barriers in bilingual courses encountered by Hindi-medium students. As per the nature of the research the descriptive research method was adopted with a qualitative approach. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews and participants of the study were 30 students enrolled in B.El.Ed. course. The findings of this study revealed that Hindi-medium students face various barriers in Bilingual courses.

Keywords: Bilingual courses, Language barriers, Hegemony

Historical Perspective

The dominance of the English language has caused many universities across India to focus on the English language as the primary language of instruction. This dominance of the English language is intertwined with complex colonial history. The early contacts with the language started with trading between Indians and East India Company. Over time, the British East India Company gradually expanded its control over various parts of India. As British influence grew, English was increasingly used as a medium of administration, trade, and education. English education in India was introduced during the 19th century with Macaulay's minutes in 1835. Many English language schools were set up in India. The English language was promoted as the language of elites and schools were given grants to teach the language. As India is a diverse land with many languages and cultures, English helped to unite the nation to some level. It grew as a language that allowed speakers of other languages to communicate with one another.

India's independence in 1947 sparked debate over the role of English in the country. Attempts by the government to make Hindi the sole official language was met with opposition in regions where Hindi is not spoken. Eventually, a bilingual policy was adopted, recognizing both Hindi and English as official languages. English continues to play a significant role in India's

education system and is widely spoken by businesses and professionals in the country. Its importance is also reflected in India's position as the world's second-largest English-speaking country. While Hindi remains the most widely spoken language, English has become an important tool for communication and has found a place in various aspects of Indian society. Although throughout India, Hindi has a great cultural and linguistic significance with the other 21 scheduled languages.

Language Problems and ‘Committee and Commissions’

Several commissions and committees were formed after Independence to address various aspects of education, ranging from primary education to higher education and educational reforms. India's language education policies have evolved over time, reflecting the country's linguistic diversity, historical context, and educational goals. Indian language education policies reflect the country's commitment to preserving linguistic diversity while also preparing students for a globalised world. The Kothari Commission's opinions on Hindi were that it is the common language. It is essential that everyone in India has at least a basic understanding of Hindi for internal communication, and those who will be required to use it as the official language at the federal level or in the states should become considerably more fluent. Other commissions such as the Indian Education Commission (1882) and the Sadler Commission (1917-19) emphasised the importance of language education in India. They recommended that educational institutions impart a solid grounding in the mother tongue, which would enable students to comfortably grasp other languages as well. However, the commissions recognized that language education could not be standardised throughout India due to linguistic diversity, and that regional languages must not be neglected in the process.

Policy Framework

The National Education Policy (NEP) in 1968 and 1986 emphasised Hindi as the primary medium of instruction and the three-language formula, which required students to learn Hindi, English, and a regional language. The NEP 2020, however, replaces this with a flexible choice of three languages, including sign language, and encourages proficiency in at least one language other than Hindi or English. It also recognizes the importance of mother tongue or local language in early education. The focus on multilingualism in the NEP 2020 provides greater flexibility and inclusivity, promoting a deeper understanding of language and culture.

The Indian government's National Policy on Education aims to promote education in both rural and urban areas, from primary to college level. One of the key components of this policy is the promotion of the use of Indian languages in education. This is intended to preserve and promote India's diverse linguistic heritage and give students a strong foundation in their mother tongue. In addition to this, English is also to be taught as a mandatory subject to ensure that students are able to communicate effectively on a global level.

Bilingual education has gained significant attention in recent years as it promotes linguistic diversity and prepares students for tolerance of different linguistic backgrounds and facilitates cross-cultural interactions. In bilingual courses, instructions are provided in two languages and offer students the opportunity to develop proficiency in both their native language and a target language. The Bachelor of Elementary Education (B.El.Ed.) course is a four-year integrated professional degree programme for primary teachers. This course is bilingual in nature, accommodating the learners of Hindi and English languages in the same classroom. This bilingual course has been conceptualised by The Maulana Azad Centre for Elementary and Social Education (MACESE) of the Department of Education, University of Delhi. The course was started in the academic year 1994–1995 and aims to meet the growing demand for educated elementary school teachers proficient in both languages. The study of subject knowledge, child development, pedagogical practices, philosophical beliefs, and communication skills are all integrated into the B.El.Ed. programme.

Language poses a significant barrier to effective learning in English medium classrooms, particularly for students who come from a non-English speaking background. In higher education, students from different mediums often face difficulties in understanding and expressing themselves in English, which can impact their academic performance and hinder their overall success. Therefore, it is important to explore the pedagogical practices and resources available to support these students in overcoming language barriers and achieving academic success.

NEP 2020 promotes multilingualism and holistic development, which aims to make many courses bilingual and provide students with the opportunity of higher education in their regional languages. Bilingual courses have an aim to interconnect and align local knowledge with global knowledge. It's important to note the problems encountered by minority language groups in bilingual education and to adapt strategies to overcome these obstacles and get maximum

benefits of bilingualism in order to ensure equal access to education and promote inclusive learning environments.

Therefore, it becomes important to Recognize and address these barriers in order to promote equal educational opportunities and support the linguistic and academic achievements of Hindi medium students in bilingual education settings. The findings of this study can help educational policymakers, students, and educators in adapting sufficient strategies and support systems to address language barriers for Hindi medium students in bilingual courses. Therefore, this research will contribute to the bilingual educational environments which will facilitate the linguistic and academic achievement of Hindi medium students in bilingual education classrooms.

Operational Definition of terms used.

Bilingual Courses: Educational programs designed to teach students in two languages simultaneously. In these programs students receive instruction in both languages.

Language Hegemony: It is the dominance or supremacy of one language over another in the classroom teaching.

Language Barriers: Language barriers are the hurdles in understanding the content and context, which arises due to unfamiliarity with a language.

Objective

- To explore the status of communication and interaction between teacher and Hindi medium students.
- To study the difficulties faced by Hindi medium students in bilingual courses.
- To identify the availability of resources.

Research Questions

1. What are pedagogical practices in bilingual classrooms?
2. What are the major areas of difficulties faced by Hindi medium students in higher education?
3. What are the resources available for Hindi medium students?

Research Methodology

To study the difficulties that bilingual courses present for Hindi-medium students and to identify the resources that are available. The descriptive research method with a qualitative approach was chosen in accordance with the nature of the study. Students studying in Hindi-medium at the University of Delhi's B.El.Ed. course represented the study's population. Purposive sampling, a non-probability method that includes choosing students who fit the study's eligibility requirements, was used to choose the participants. Semi-structured interviews were employed in this study to collect data.

Findings

The interviews were recorded, and the four language skill areas served as the framework for the study.

1. Listening

Listening facilitates receiving and responding to the information being transmitted but if the listeners are unfamiliar with the language, they face problems comprehending the information and responding in a desired way. During the interview one of the participant replied “कभी-कभी मैं क्लास के टाइम खो जाता हूँ क्योंकि कुछ समझ नहीं आता और फिर मुझे आगे का पूरा लेक्चर ही समझ नहीं आता है”, students feel lost during lectures as they are unable to comprehend lecture and goes on missing the whole lecture. Delhi attracts students from various states and areas, bringing their own dialects, accents, and ways of pronouncing words. This lack of common language exposure makes it difficult for students to comprehend pronunciation and accents from peers and teachers. Hindi-medium students often face challenges in classrooms due to their poor vocabulary, rapid-fire pace of lectures, difficulty with keeping up with the conversation and varied accents or dialects. Teachers often use technical terminology in English, which they must translate into Hindi. Contextualised examples are provided in Hindi to help students understand the material, but most conversations are conducted in English, making it difficult for Hindi-medium students to keep up. The sophisticated language structure, including jargon and opacity, makes it difficult for Hindi-medium students to understand idiomatic expressions and unusual terms. Additionally, technical jargon is a significant issue, as lecturers often use English terms in the classroom.

2. Speaking

Speaking allows individuals to express themselves, classroom conversations in English often lead to self-consciousness and pressure for Hindi-medium students, who may struggle with linguistic proficiency and dominance. Hindi-medium students face various challenges in class, including lack of linguistic proficiency, dominance, unfair participation, insufficient comprehension, fear of making mistakes, and self-consciousness. English-medium students dominate discussions due to their excellent language skills, while Hindi-medium students are underrepresented, resulting in excessive participation. This imbalance in involvement is due to the low proportion of Hindi-medium students compared to English-speaking students. Additionally, Hindi-medium students face self-consciousness due to their limited grammatical knowledge and pronunciation issues due to accents. This fear of making mistakes hinders their ability to participate in class discussions and negatively impacts their confidence and self-esteem. The frequent use of English in the classroom also negatively impacts their motivation and performance in class.

3. Reading

Reading plays an important role in acquisition of knowledge, exposure to various perspectives and helps us broaden our understanding. Engaging with written knowledge helps in connecting with previous knowledge in a structured way. Hindi-medium students face challenges in understanding concepts due to a lack of study material, complex language, and a lack of support. Academic writing requires formal vocabulary and jargon, making it difficult for them to understand readings. Additionally, they must catch up with English language students in terms of vocabulary, which requires a significant amount of content they have not been exposed to before. " सारी रीडिंग्स हिंदी में नहीं होती, जो बाहर के राइटर्स होते हैं उनका ट्रांसलेशन नहीं रखा होता लाइब्रेरी में तो हम फोन से ही स्कैन करते हैं और पढ़ लेते हैं।" As most readings are available in English only, students often use Google Translate and YouTube videos to understand concepts. Time management challenges arise as they allocate extra time to understand concepts using assistive technology, often falling behind their peers. To understand classroom discussions, students familiarise themselves with English terminologies using dictionaries.

4. Writing

Writing is a structured method of self-expression and aids in remembering concepts and allowing students to process information efficiently. However, Hindi-medium students face difficulties in English-based classroom teaching and material, leading to high anxiety during examinations. Translation from Hindi to English is challenging, as students have internalised both terminologies. Additionally, blackboard instruction, where teachers write only in English, can make it difficult for Hindi medium students to grasp concepts and make notes. Participant stated that “क्योंकि टीचर हिंदी मीडियम के नहीं है इसलिए हमें कम नंबर मिलते हैं, इंग्लिश वालो से कम नंबर आते है।” Hindi-medium students often feel biased in markings of their assignments. Overall, writing is essential for students' learning and development.

Discussion and Conclusion

The objective to explore the status of communication and interaction between teacher and Hindi medium students and its associated research question of pedagogical practices in bilingual classrooms. It is remarked that classroom instruction follows the traditional teaching approach, where students passively receive information and teachers lecture. Classroom instruction is a one-way communication, so students rarely disturb teachers during lesson planning. Lecture method is time efficient. Teachers use verbal and sometimes visual representations to convey knowledge. Students are required to take notes. This method of teaching is very efficient in higher education because it saves time, but it becomes inefficient in bilingual courses because teachers unconsciously tend to impart knowledge in only one language.

Teaching practices in the bilingual classroom focus on imparting knowledge while ignoring student receptivity. There should be minimal interaction and positive engagement between teachers and students. However, once a month she has tutorials for student-teacher interaction in small groups. Teachers initiate and lead conversations on specific topics and concerns, encouraging student participation and critical thinking. Due to lack of time and many editing hurdles, these tutorials are ineffective in meeting the needs of students. During the tutorial, the teacher will try to support each student individually and solve their problems. Teachers give clear and organised instruction by breaking complex ideas into easier-to-understand sections.

This method often includes detailed models, explanations, and demonstrations in the student's preferred language.

Assessment is based on annual exams and homework submitted by students. Assessments are conducted to assess student comprehension and progress. The findings of the study are endorsed by the research of (Chi, 2017) that there is a gap between the objectives of bilingual education and its implementation, as the medium of instruction is Vietnamese in school and the school failed to create an immersive environment in English language learning. Bilingual courses often fail to balance the language strategies to meet the requirements of the students from different linguistic backgrounds. (Harrison and Shi, 2016), “English Language Learners in Higher Education: An Exploratory Conversation”, provided suggestions for the instructors to enhance the learning of the English language. (Moissac, Drolet, Savard, Savard, Giasson, Benoit, Arcand, Lagace and Dubouloz, 2023) study showed that many professionals were insufficient in providing bilingual services, organisations also lacked staff and tools to provide services to Hindi medium students and were insufficient in providing services in the languages of minorities.

With reference to the second objective to examine the difficulties faced by Indian medium students in bilingual courses and mention the related question: What are the main difficulties faced by Indian medium students in higher education? Hindi-medium students lack confidence and self-esteem, which limits their participation in speaking and writing and their willingness to take risks. A Hindi learner in a bilingual classroom faces enormous obstacles in his four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Below we discuss the obstacles faced by Indian high school students. Listening: Hindi students cannot understand due to lack of pronunciation, accent, and vocabulary. Hindi-medium students may have difficulty understanding spoken English. The speed of the class also affects us because we tend to translate sentences. Hindi-medium students may have difficulty following and absorbing information in the classroom. Speaking: Hindi-medium students do not participate in classroom discussions and the discussions are in English. They often do not understand the rhythm of the conversation. We need time to understand and respond to arguments. Reading: In bilingual courses, Hindi-medium students often face a lack of targeted academic material and resources to address challenges. Hindi-medium students may find it difficult to understand and use non-Indian idioms in certain areas. A major challenge is the lack of scientific writings in Hindi. Students usually use Google Translate to get English language learning material. Writing:

While reading books in English, Hindi-medium students find it difficult to transfer their thoughts and ideas from English to Hindi. Hindi written exams take longer because students are made familiar with both Hindi and English terminology.

The findings of the study are in consistency with (Mishra, 2017; Chi, 2017; Moissac, Drolet, Savard, Savard, Giasson, Benoit, Arcand, Lagace and Dubouloz, 2023; Kuo,2011; Hashmi, 2016) have all found that the majority of Hindi medium students face more difficulties in learning environments than English medium students due to different learning environments, different background and pedagogical practices. (Mishra,2017) study showed lack of awareness of terms used in mathematics and resources to be used for study, while many Hindi medium students faced issues related to language and were uncomfortable discussing their issues in class or with teachers due to low self-esteem. (George and Abdullah, 2021), Challenges of Chhattisgarh Hindi Medium Students in English Language Hotel Management and Restaurant Courses, found that the change in environment has affected most of the students., they say they have trouble listening and understanding. After all, the effect is also reflected in the test results. Incompatible language skills created obstacles in the acquisition of knowledge.

With reference to the third objective of identifying the resources available and its associated research question ‘What resources are available for Hindi middle school students?’ It has been remarked that many books have been translated into Hindi and academic papers are also available for study, but most books are only available in English and students use Google Translate to read and interpret the books. often do. Students also watch many YouTube videos that help them understand the topics and concepts taught in class. Students are supported by professors during tutorials. They take notes in Hindi from seniors to help them in exams. The university library has a large collection of course-specific books available in both languages. Assistive technology has greatly helped students understand concepts, with translators, text-to-speech, and speech-to-speech software assisting with assignments. Online databases also help students obtain a variety of research papers and other relevant materials. The findings of the study are inconsistent here as (Panday and Anshu, 2014), 'The Language of Knowledge? A Case Study of English-medium Teaching in Delhi University', found that due to the lack of Hindi learning materials, Hindi-medium students found to be at a disadvantage. They face many difficulties and a poor understanding of the widely spoken English.

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