Curriculum and Pedagogy in Multilingual Contexts: Rethinking the Language Issue in Odisha Adarsha Vidyalaya

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Abstract

The diverse range of languages spoken in India creates a complex situation for building a strong educational foundation and for developing appropriate teaching methods. This paper explores the real-world implications of language dynamics in classrooms, with a specific focus upon Odisha Adarsha Vidyalaya Sangathan (OAVS). While the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCFSE) 2023 prioritize improved literacy and numeracy (FLN) skills, achieving this goal necessitates addressing the language barriers faced by students in OAVS, many of whom come from diverse linguistic backgrounds. This paper focusses onto the challenges associated with the dominance of English in education, particularly for those students whose home language differs. Furthermore, the inherent linguistic diversity within Odisha adds another layer of complexity. By critically analysing relevant scholarly literature and reports, this study examines how language influences not only what students learn but also how they learn it. It dissects language policies, instructional strategies, and their efficacy within OAVS, highlighting the disconnect between policy intent and implementation realities. Despite the challenges, the paper tries to identify inspiring examples of OAVS pioneering innovative solutions, advocating for a reconceptualization of curriculum and pedagogy that embraces multilingualism. Ultimately, this research emphasizes the importance of recognizing and accommodating linguistic diversity in OAVS for achieving educational equity and quality for all students..

Keywords: *Multilingual education, Language barriers, Odisha Adarsha Vidyalaya Sangathan (OAVS), Policy-practice gap, Educational Equity.*

Introduction

The promise of quality education enshrined in the Indian Constitution (Government of India, 1949) faces a significant hurdle in the form of language. While NEP 2020 emphasizes the importance of FLN skills in foundational stages (Government of India, 2020), achieving this goal in a state like Odisha with its 'Linguistic Superdiversity' necessitates a nuanced approach. This paper explores the complexities of the language question in the context of OAVs, established by the Government of Odisha to provide high-quality education in rural areas (Government of Odisha, 2016). However, the effectiveness of this noble initiative hinges on n exploring the complex linguistic landscape of the state, where Odia, Hindi, Telugu, and various tribal languages coexist (Mohanty, 2023).

This research paper particularly dives into the

'language puzzle' in Indian education, focusing on how it affects foundational learning and teaching methods. We look closely at Odisha Adarsha Vidyalayas (OAVs) to understand how this plays out in real classrooms.

Imagine walking into a classroom where the teacher speaks a language you barely understand. This more or less is the reality for many students in OAVs. With the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2023 pushing for better basics in literacy and numeracy, we need to tackle this language hurdle head-on.

We've all heard about English being the ticket to success. But for many students, it's a barrier rather than a bridge. In OAVs, where English is often the medium of instruction, those students who possibly speak other languages at home find themselves struggling to keep up. It's like trying to run with weights tied to your feet.

But it's not just about English. India is a melting pot for plethora of languages, each with its own rich history and culture. When students are forced to learn in a language they don't speak at home, it's like asking them to dance to a tune they've never heard before.

Through this paper, we try to goe beyond just pointing out the problem. We dive into classrooms, observing and having informal conversations with the teachers, students, and parents to understand the real challenges they face. We look at how language affects not just what students learn, but also how they learn it. Is it any wonder that many students struggle to grasp the basics when they're grappling with language barriers at the same time?

But it's not all doom and gloom. We also try to explore innovative solutions that some OAVs are trying out. From bilingual teaching methods to community language programs, there are glimmers of hope on the horizon. By sharing these success stories, we hope to inspire others to rethink how they approach language in the classroom.

In the end, it's not just only about teaching children (students) to read and write. However, it is about mostly giving them the tools they need to succeed in their respective lives. And if we want to do that, we need to start by speaking their language.

The study focusses on few pertinent research questions to address the 'Language Issue' in the context of OAVS. This research by and large seeks to answer the following key questions. First, how does the dominance of English as the medium of instruction in OAVs impact student learning outcomes, particularly for the students from non-English speaking backgrounds? Second, what are the challenges and opportunities associated with the linguistic diversity within OAV classrooms? Third, how can current assessment practices in OAVs be adapted to effectively evaluate student learning in a multilingual environment? Fourth, what innovative approaches and strategies can be implemented to create inclusive learning environments that value and leverage students' home languages in OAVs?

Nonetheless, the study aims to address the following objectives. First, it tries to analyse the impact of language policies like NEP 2020 and NCFSE 2023 on language practices within OAVs. Second, it critically examines the challenges particularly faced by students due to the dominance of English as the medium of instruction. Third, it explores the potential of multilingual education to enhance learning outcomes and foster inclusivity

in OAVs. Fourth, it identifies successful strategies employed by OAVs to integrate multiple languages into the curriculum and pedagogy. Finally, it makes a subtle attempt to propose recommendations for policymakers, educators, and communities to create a more linguistically responsive learning environment in OAVs.

This research employs a qualitative-methods approach, which employs Critical Analysis of Policy Documents and Scholarly Literature. It involves a comprehensive review of NEP 2020, NCFSE 2023, and relevant research on multilingual education, language acquisition, and assessment practices. Observations of OAVs and specifically, language classroom of OAVs were carried out. Further, the informal interactions with the key stakeholders, including teachers, students, and parents/community members were treated as a strong base, to gain deeper insights into their lived experiences regarding 'language use' or 'language issue' in OAVs.

The Varied Linguistic Dilemmas Faced by OAVs

To begin with, the first 'Linguistic Dilemma', is The Dominance of English as a Hurdle in the Race. The dominance of English in Indian education presents a double-edged sword. While proficiency in English holds undeniable importance in the globalized world, its use as the primary medium of instruction can create barriers for students from non-English speaking backgrounds (Tilak, 2003). Consider the case of Lakshmi, a student from a remote village in Odisha. At home, she speaks Kui, a tribal language. When she enters an OAV, English becomes the primary medium of instruction. Laxmi struggles to grasp basic concepts due to the language barrier, leading to discouragement and

impacting her learning potential (Scenario based on reports by Central Institute of Indian Languages, 2018). This scenario exemplifies the challenge – English, intended as a tool for empowerment, risks becoming a hurdle for students like Lakshmi.

The continued dominance of English in Indian education, despite pronouncements like NEP 2020, presents a significant challenge for OAV students. Research by Cummins (1998) suggests that students taught in a language they don't understand experience cognitive overload, hindering their ability to grasp concepts and develop critical thinking skills. This can lead to feelings of alienation, frustration, and ultimately, disengagement from the learning process (Kangas & Cummins, 1988). The situation in OAVs mirrors a race where students from non-English speaking backgrounds are forced to run with weights strapped to their feet.

Next, 'exploring the linguistic diversity within Odisha' becomes utmost important. The linguistic scenario of Odisha further complicates the language question in OAVs. Students may come from homes where Odia, Hindi, Bengali, or various tribal languages are spoken (Mohanty, 2023). Take the example of an OAV classroom. Smita speaks Odia at home, while Rahul speaks 'Juang, another tribal language. Both struggle to comprehend concepts explained in English by their teacher. This diversity necessitates a shift from a monolingual approach to a more inclusive one that values and leverages the linguistic resources students bring to the classroom (García, 2009). However, a report by (Coelho, 2004) highlights that many of the teachers, particularly those from monolingual backgrounds, lack the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively cater to students with diverse linguistic abilities. This lack of preparedness can aggravate the existing

language barriers and hinder the effectiveness of NEP 2020's vision for improved FLN skills.

Additionally, the onus lies upon 'Bridging the Language Gap by Rethinking the ways of Assessment'. The shift towards formative assessment emphasized in NCFSE 2023 (National Council for School Education, 2023) presents both opportunities and challenges in the context of multilingual OAVs. Conventional assessment methods often rely heavily on written language proficiency, potentially disadvantaging students from non-dominant language backgrounds (Cummins, 1998). This raises concerns about perpetuating educational inequalities through language-based assessments. Imagine Rama, a student from a tribal community, excelling in explaining scientific concepts through drawings and oral explanations in his native language. However, a written English language assessment fails to capture his understanding. This scenario highlights the need for "Multilingual Assessment Tools" that cater to diverse language abilities. Developing "Multilingual Assessment Tools" that cater to diverse language abilities is crucial, necessitating the need of the hour. This could involve translated rubrics ensuring clear communication of expectations across languages (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). Conducting oral assessments in students' home languages allows them to demonstrate understanding without being limited by writing skills in the dominant language (Gibbons, 2002). However, the feasibility of implementing such multifaceted assessments within resource-constrained settings like OAVs needs to be carefully considered.

A more critical reflection on assessment practices is necessary. Should the focus solely be on measuring content knowledge in the dominant language, or should it encompass a broader understanding of learning processes that transcends language barriers? Wiggins and McTighe (2005) advocate for a shift towards assessing students' problem-solving strategies, collaborative work, and participation in classroom discussions, irrespective of the language used.

The Phenomenal Experience of Learning: Beyond Language Acquisition

The complexities of language in OAVs extend beyond the practicalities of communication and assessment. Language is intrinsically linked to a learner's experience of the world around them. The way a concept is explained, or a story is told in a student's home language can evoke a deeper understanding and emotional resonance compared to encountering it for the first time in an unfamiliar language (Tong & Tsung 2022). This highlights the phenomenal aspect of learning, where language shapes how students perceive and interact with the world of knowledge.

Imagine a student from a tribal community in Odisha encountering scientific concepts for the very first time. To be more precise and concrete, let us imagine Priya, a student from a Kondh tribal community in Odisha, encountering the concept of photosynthesis for the first time. Explaining this concept through the lens of her own cultural narratives and vocabulary, perhaps referencing the life cycle of plants or the importance of sunlight in their agricultural practices, can create a bridge between the unfamiliar and the familiar. In short, explaining these concepts through the lens of their own cultural narratives and vocabulary can create a bridge between the unfamiliar and the familiar. Nonetheless, had it been 'English' instead of their own 'L1', they would have struggled hard to put

their thoughts together into the language which if not completely 'alien' to them but surely is 'unfamiliar' to them and their immediate contexts. Interestingly, at the same time, it is not less than a 'cakewalk' for them to execute such academic or daily tasks in the language that they identify as their own, which by and large is their 'mother-tongue'. This approach resonates with the work of Lakoff and Johnson (2008) on embodied cognition, suggesting that our understanding of the world is shaped by our experiences and the language we use to describe them. By neglecting the phenomenal experience of learning through a student's home language, OAVs risk creating a disconnect between the world of education and the lived realities of their students.

NEP 2020, NCFSE 2023, and the OAV Context

While NEP 2020 and NCFSE 2023 hold promise for transforming education, a critical analysis reveals potential gaps between policy and implementation in the context of OAVs. The silence on language transition in NEP 2023 creates uncertainty for educators and students. Furthermore, NCFSE 2023, while emphasizing teacher training, might not adequately address the specific needs of multilingual classrooms. These gaps necessitate a more nuanced approach to curriculum and pedagogy in OAVs.

Although, there's a Glimmer of Hope in the name of practices that foster Innovative Solutions in OAVs. Despite the challenges, some OAVs are pioneering innovative solutions to address language barriers, offering a counterpoint to the often-criticized top-down policy approaches. These efforts challenge the ultimate status quo and inspire a more critical look at language integration strategies.

One approach involves adopting bilingual education models in higher grades. This allows for continued development of foundational skills in the mother tongue while gradually introducing content in English or another secondary language (Kumaravadivelu, 2008). Research by Baker (2006) suggests that bilingual education programs can promote cognitive development and foster metalinguistic awareness, leading to improved learning outcomes in both languages.

Another strategy involves dedicated language acquisition programs that equip students with the necessary linguistic skills to route the transition between languages (Gibbons, 2002). However, concerns remain regarding the resourcing of such programs within OAVs, particularly in remote areas with limited teacher availability and expertise in language pedagogy.

Furthermore, some OAVs are collaborating with local communities to develop context-specific learning materials and integrate local languages into the curriculum (Tharakan, 2015) This fosters a sense of ownership among students and their communities, promoting the value of students' home languages and their cultural identities (Gay, 2010). These examples showcase the potential for creative solutions to bridge the language gap and create more inclusive learning environments in OAVs.

By empowering local communities as stakeholders, OAVs can leverage the linguistic and cultural wealth of their student base. Here are some of the possible ways to achieve it, the first one focusses on the 'Community members acting as language facilitators', the individuals fluent

in students' home languages can assist teachers in explaining concepts and translating learning materials (Hornberger, & Link, 2012). This can be particularly helpful for students struggling with the dominant language of instruction. Second one could be, by 'Integrating local knowledge systems and stories'. The Indigenous knowledge and cultural narratives can be incorporated into the curriculum, making learning more relevant and engaging for students (Ladson-Billings, 1995). This approach validates students' cultural backgrounds of the varied learner groups and fosters a sense of belonging within the classroom. The third one highlights the focus upon 'Developing assessment tools that reflect local contexts'. Assessment practices can be designed to value students' understanding in their home languages and cultural frameworks (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). This could involve oral presentations, demonstrations of traditional skills, or projects that allow students to showcase their learning in culturally relevant ways.

Now, these leads to showcasing 'The Road Ahead by Rethinking Multilingualism in OAVs'. Reconceptualizing curriculum and pedagogy in OAVs necessitates a shift from a monolingual to a multilingual approach. This can be achieved through some of the following strategies, mentioned hereafter. One of the primary strategies could be, Teacher training programs, which requires equipping teachers with the skills and knowledge to traversing multilingual classrooms is crucial. This includes training in translanguaging strategies (using students' full linguistic repertoire), differentiated instruction, and assessment for multilingual learners (García, 2009). Teachers should be encouraged to view students' diverse languages as assets, not obstacles, to learning.

Developing multilingual learning materials by creating textbooks, worksheets, and other resources that incorporate multiple languages and cater to diverse learning styles can significantly improve student engagement and comprehension (Gibbons, 2002). This may involve providing translations of key concepts, using visuals and graphics, and offering differentiated instruction to cater to students' varying language abilities.

Nonetheless, promoting translanguaging by encouraging students to draw on their entire linguistic repertoire (home languages and English) to construct knowledge and participate in classroom activities fosters a more inclusive learning environment (Baker, 2006). This allows students to leverage their existing linguistic skills and build confidence in expressing themselves across languages.

Conclusion

The promise of quality education for all in Odisha hinges on acknowledging and addressing the linguistic complexities within OAVs. By moving beyond the limitations of a dominant language approach and embracing the richness of multilingualism, OAVs can create inclusive learning environments that cater to the diverse needs of their students. This necessitates collaboration between educators, policymakers, and local communities to develop a framework that fosters not just language acquisition, but also a deeper understanding of the world through the lens of students' own languages and cultural experiences. Rethinking language in OAVs is not just about communication; it's about unlocking the full potential of every learner and ensuring equitable access to quality education.

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