

Advantages of Multilingualism

The advantages that multilinguals exhibit over monolinguals are not restricted to linguistic knowledge only, but extend outside the area of language. The substantial long-lived cognitive, social, personal, academic, and professional benefits of enrichment bilingual contexts have been well documented. Children and older persons learning foreign languages have been demonstrated to-

- i. have a keener awareness and sharper perception of language. Foreign language learning “enhances children’s understanding of how language itself works and their ability to manipulate language in the service of thinking and problem solving” (Cummins 1981);
- ii. be more capable of separating meaning from form;
- iii. learn more rapidly in their native language (L1), e.g. to read, as well as display improved performance in other basic L1 skills, regardless of race, gender, or academic level;
- iv. be more efficient communicators in the L1;
- v. be consistently better able to deal with distractions, which may help offset age-related declines in mental dexterity;
- vi. develop a markedly better language proficiency in, sensitivity to, and understanding of their mother tongue;
- vii. develop a greater vocabulary size over age, including that in their L1;
- viii. have a better ear for listening and sharper memories;
- ix. be better language learners in institutionalized learning contexts because of more developed language-learning capacities owing to the more complex linguistic knowledge and higher language awareness;
- x. have increased ability to apply more reading strategies effectively due to their greater experience in language learning and reading in two—or more—different languages;
- xi. develop not only better verbal, but also spatial abilities;
- xii. parcel up and categorize meanings in different ways;
- xiii. display generally greater cognitive flexibility, better problem solving and higher-order thinking skills;
- xiv. “a person who speaks multiple languages has a stereoscopic vision of the world from two or more perspectives, enabling them to be more flexible in their thinking, learn reading more easily. Multilinguals, therefore, are not restricted to a single world-view, but also have a better understanding that other outlooks are possible. Indeed, this has

always been seen as one of the main educational advantages of language teaching” (Cook 2001);

- xv. multilinguals can expand their personal horizons and—being simultaneously insiders and outsiders—see their own culture from a new perspective not available to monoglots, enabling the comparison, contrast, and understanding of cultural concepts;
- xvi. be better problem-solvers gaining multiple perspectives on issues at hand;
- xvii. have improved critical thinking abilities;
- xviii. better understand and appreciate people of other countries, thereby lessening racism, xenophobia, and intolerance, as the learning of a new language usually brings with it a revelation of a new culture;
- xix. learn further languages more quickly and efficiently than their hitherto monolingual peers;
- xx. to say nothing of the social and employment advantages of being bilingual – offering the student the ability to communicate with people s/he would otherwise not have the chance to interact with, and increasing job opportunities in many careers.

Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, in their document on Language Education, clearly states that -

Language being the most important medium of communication and education, its development occupies an important place in the National Policy on Education and Programme of Action. Therefore, promotion and development of Hindi and other 21 languages listed in the schedule VIII of the Constitution including Sanskrit and Urdu has received due attention. In fulfilling the constitutional responsibility, the Department of Higher Education is assisted by autonomous organization and subordinate offices.

Multilingualism and Language Policy

The Language Policy of India relating to the use of languages in administration, education, judiciary, legislature, mass communication, etc., is pluralistic in its scope. It is both language-development oriented and language-survival oriented. The policy is intended to encourage the citizens to use their mother tongue in certain delineated levels and domains through some gradual processes, but the stated goal of the policy is to help all languages to develop into fit vehicles of communication at their designated areas of use, irrespective of their nature or status

like major, minor, or tribal languages. The policy can accommodate and ever-evolving, through mutual adjustment, consensus, and judicial processes. Political awareness or consciousness relating to the maintenance of native languages has been very high, both among the political leadership and among the ordinary people who speak these languages. Evolving and monitoring implementation of language policy is a major endeavor of the Language Bureau of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India. This is done by the Bureau through language institutions setup for the purpose under its aegis: Central Hindi Directorate, Centre for Scientific and Technical Terminology, Central Hindi Institute, Central Institute of Indian Languages, National Council for Promotion of Sindhi Language, National Council for Promotion of Urdu Language, Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan (RSKS), Maharishi Sandipani Rashtriya Vedavidya Pratishthan (MSRVVP) and Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages. This was seen as a necessity in nation-building.

Due to their co-existence from time immemorial, the plural societies with people of multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-lingual background belonging to different socio-economic strata, give birth to natural communication policies to suit their realities with a genuine understanding of inter-woven relations. The language of administration is not an exception. A nation is historically evolved, hence it is essential to know about the languages that the rulers of a country used for administration of their region. Many Indian rulers ruled territories in which different languages were used for communication by their subjects. Often the language of the king and the language of those whom he ruled were different. Historically in India, the language of the people and the language or languages used to govern them used to correspond with each other. In India, though there are instances after instances wherein only one language was the Official Language, it is very difficult to find a point of time where only one language was used as the sole language of administration in a specific region. It seems that the official language was used for the purposes of rules and other interrelated activities. And these were used within the set up of the Government to a large extent. However, the languages of the people were used for all the necessary communicative purposes, and plurality was honored. There is a distinction between the 'Official Language' and 'Language(s) used in Administration'. To illustrate this point, an example can be cited here. Though the Official Language Act of Andhra Pradesh, 1966 recognizes Telugu as the Official Language for use in its territory, it also permits the use of English, Urdu, Kannada, Tamil and Oriya in certain specified situations and regions for administrative activities. Hence, these latter ones are the

Languages Used in Administration in Andhra Pradesh though only Telugu is the Official Language. Like this, each state and the union territory, including the Union Government, have honored the linguistic plurality by accommodating interests of the speakers of other languages as well, even after declaring one or two languages as the official languages of the concerned state. After the promulgation of the Official Language Acts the following 16 languages are the official languages in different states and union territories : Assamese, Bengali, English Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Konkani, Malayalam, Nepali, Manipuri, Marathi, Oriya, Punjabi, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu became Official Languages in various states and union territories of the country.

The Constitution of India makes provision for '... free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years.' But the Constitution has no explicit statements regarding the language(s) to be taught in education or the language(s) through which education has to be imparted (except in the case of linguistic minorities). This may have been a tactical compromise or declaration on the part of the Constitution makers, because every one could sense the great linguistic complexity of free and democratic India.

The National Policy on Education of 1968 spoke about the regional languages and the Three Language Formula. The 1986 Policy reiterated the earlier stand. The States Reorganization Commission had asked the Union Government to elucidate a policy outline for education in mother tongue at the Secondary stage. The All India Council for Education recommended the adoption of the Three Language Formula (TLF) in September 1956. The endorsement for this formula came from various directions. It was adopted by the Chief Ministers' conference. The National Policy on Education 1968 recommended the inclusion of the Three Language Formula which includes the study of a modern Indian language, preferably one of the Southern languages, apart from Hindi and English in the Hindi speaking states, and of Hindi along with the regional language and English in the non Hindi-speaking states at the Secondary stage. This was reiterated in the Education Policy 1986 and was adopted as the Programme of Action by the Parliament in 1992.

These are major attempts to arrive at a language policy for education. Since education is in the concurrent list of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution, the language policy formulation for education and its implementation is left to the State governments under the Constitutional safeguards and broad guidelines cited above.

The "National Curriculum Framework for School Education: A Discussion Document" released on January 1, 2000, while reviewing the Three Language Formula, states,

- In a number of states/organizations/ boards, however, the spirit of the formula has not been followed and the mother tongue of the people has been denied the status of the first language ... because of the changed socio-economic scenario, the difference between the second and the third languages has dwindled. Thus, in reality, there may be two-second languages for all purposes and functions. Some states follow only a two-language formula whereas in some others classical languages like Sanskrit and Arabic are being studied in lieu of a modern Indian language. Some boards/institutions permit even European languages like French and German in place of Hindi. In this scenario, the three-language formula exists only in our curriculum documents and other policy statements.

According to this document the three languages are: (i) the home language/the regional language, (ii) English, and (iii) Hindi in non-Hindi speaking states and any other modern Indian language in Hindi speaking states.

With all these provisions for education in multiple languages and mother tongues, the Sixth All India Education Survey informs that 41 languages are taught as school languages, and 19 of them are used as media of instruction at different levels.