


Chapter 15

Eklavya Effect in Language Education in India: The Surge for English Medium in Multilingual Education

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ABSTRACT

Emergence of English as an uncontested language in education and the increasing demand for the language for upward mobility has placed the Indian languages at a disadvantage. The India's language-in-education policy, the three-language formula appears to be redundant for English takes over the Indian languages in school education. This development places the learners from tribal, minor, minority languages and rural learners from state majority languages at a disadvantage for these learners are not given their right to learn their language in school, both as a language and as medium of learning. Adopting a mixed method (both qualitative and quantitative processes), this paper presents this critical scene of Indian school education today with the metaphor of Eklavya from the famous Indian epic, the Mahabharatha through an analysis of perceptions of learners on English language education, English and content language classrooms from diverse Indian contexts. The 'Eklavya effect' like the Mathew effect is noticed in the Indian language education landscape today.

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INTRODUCTION

English language has emerged as an uncontested language in school education in India since the liberalization of Indian economy in the early 1990s. The language which was perceived as a library language and the language of higher education (GOI, 1966) has now become the language of popular demand for upward mobility (Graddol, 2010; NCERT, 2006a). Movement of the language from a colonial or foreign language to second language and as a language of medium of instruction in Indian school systems exercises immense pressure on the state (provincial) governments to open English medium sections in select schools and converting their schools into full-fledged English medium schools in order to prevent learners migrating to private English medium schools (Meganathan, 2011; 2015a; 2015b; Mohanty, 2006; 2008). Most Indian schools would be English medium schools within two or three decades, if the trend of demand for English medium continues and is addressed politically to cater to the needs and aspirations of people. This does not mean that all the English medium schools have considerable standard and quality, even minimum requirements to have English medium. Given the diversity and availability of resources quite a percentage of schools are not English medium schools at all in the true sense (Mohanty, 2009; Bhattacharya, 2013). The demand, overstated or real one needs to be addressed on many counts. It appears that there is no going back. In other words, academic thinking and educational planning which calls for idealism of mother tongue-based multilingualism where learners begin their schooling in their mother tongue or the home language and move on to add at least two more languages with their mother tongue or home language as medium of instruction till end of ten years of schooling could not be realized for various reasons (GOI, 1986; GOI 1992; NCERT, 2005). In other words, the popular demand for the English language originates from the thrive for upward mobility which is not driven by sound educational and academic thinking so it is responded politically by many of the governments at the state level (NCERT, 2005a).

This paper explores the current crisis in language-in-education policy in India in which English language is heading towards the sole medium of teaching-learning in school education. Learners from the lower strata of society and from rural pockets are at the disadvantage in the spread of English medium as these learners have to contend with a low English language environment. Teacher's English language proficiency and lack of pedagogical understanding of how a language is taught / learnt to provide an engaging environment where learners work in language appear to be major constraints in English language education (Meganathan, 2015a; Kurian, 1997). This paradoxical scene of how the introduction of English medium without ensuring the resources for English language environment is discussed through an analysis of English language classrooms as well as content subject classrooms and

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