
The Impact of Multilingualism on Education and Language Learning

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Abstract

It is not new; the world has always been multilingual, and the ways in which we develop language learning and teaching success must take into account the multilingual realities of the world. We accept that English alone is insufficient. Multilingualism has always been the default discourse on human beings. Children in most parts of the world grow up with two or more languages available to them and increasingly young people in their studies and work move to places where languages other than their mother tongue are used, and they must learn to be bilingual or multilingual. Business, employment, and scholarship are increasingly global and multilingual, and 21st century citizens need a new range of skills and strategies, such as code-switching and

translanguaging, to increase their core language learning skills.

This paper explores the impact of multilingualism on global education and language learning and argues that it is a positive phenomenon that needs to be encouraged and supported. There are benefits of multilinguistic practices in education that include the creation and appreciation of cultural awareness, adding academic and educational value, enhancing creativity, adjustment in society, and appreciation of local languages.

Keywords: Multilingualism, Language Learning, Communication, impact, education

Introduction:

One significant feature of globalization is the impact of multilingualism and the related phenomena of multiculturalism. Very few contemporary societies are considered homogenous; they are increasingly diverse, whether in the languages spoken or in the ways people live and express themselves (their culture).

"The term multilingualism which is the focus of this article is derived from two Latin words namely "multi" that means many and "lingua" that means language (H. Bussmann,1996)". Thus, multilingualism is regarded as the ability of a speaker to express himself or herself in several languages with equal native proficiency (H. Bussmann,1996). However, it has been apprehended in both written and verbal communicative practices that proficiency in one language usually tends to dominate in a multilingual setup as compared

to the others. Multilingualism can also be regarded as the coexistence of several languages within society (J. Lyons, 1981). These languages can be native or foreign, official or unofficial, or national or international.

Multilingualism – the normal human condition. ‘Speaking two or more languages is the natural way of life for three-quarters of the human race. [This] principle ... has been obscured in parts of Europe as a consequence of colonial history. We urgently need to reassert it, and to implement it in practical ways, for, in the modern world, monolingualism is not a strength but a handicap.’ (David Crystal 2006:409)

Multilingualism is often interpreted as having a population who knows or uses one or more languages in addition to one or two major languages learned in school. The provision of multilingual services can often mean the use of the national language with English as an alternative language, assuming that most visitors speak English. On the other hand, in some African countries, children are multilingual before beginning primary school, learning one language at home, one or more in the surrounding community, and then a third or even fourth as a school language, as a medium of instruction.

There are many reasons why multilingualism has become part of a progressive society, and it is an unstoppable phenomenon. First, there is a direct link between the way we communicate today and the globalized world's new economy. Furthermore, technologies that facilitate communication further facilitate the globalization of economies. Local sites are linked in networks, which must agree on how to organize, talk, and distribute functionally different languages.

Multilingualism

Multilingualism is a Latin term referring to the ability to express oneself in multiple languages. Thus, multilingualism indicates that speakers can express themselves in various languages equally (Okal, B 2014). However, many scholars have conducted research in the field of multilingualism, but more research is needed to enhance learning and teaching. The purpose of this literature review is to explore multilingualism and language learning and to illustrate the lack of analytical approaches regarding multilingualism and language learning. Furthermore, Smith, K (2016) explained that multilingualism in education encompasses primary and secondary education. For the purpose of this research, various sources, such as books, journals, papers, and online/offline publications have been reviewed.

Consequences of Multilingualism:

"The consequences of multilingualism are numerous ranging from linguistic and socio-political. Linguistic consequences of multilingualism include among others the creation and growth of lingua franca that normally develops because of the need for cross group communication" (V. Webb, Kembo Sure, eds, 2000). For example, Kenya has Kiswahili as a lingua franca (I. Mbaabu,1996). There is also a lingua franca called Lingala in the Democratic Republic of Congo (V. Webb, Kembo Sure, eds, 2000). Multilingualism creates the development of mixed languages mainly because of intense language contact. As a result speakers therefore tend to involve a mixture of languages during verbal communication. This contact may also result into the creation

of slangs. These slangs are generally caused by urbanization, migrant labour and also industrialization as was witnessed in Kenya in the creation of Sheng (I. Mbaabu,1996)

Multilingualism practice generally develops cross linguistic communication strategies like code switching and code mixing. When people switch from one language used at homes to the other outside the home environment then code switching occurs. This is witnessed in countries like India where switching is witnessed between English, Hindu/Urdu, Bengali and Tamil (J. Lyons, 1981). Generally, where bilingualism or multilingualism exists, speakers normally tend to use these languages alternately as commonly witnessed in Belgium, Switzerland and China (H. Bussmann,1996).

Multilingualism creates an aspect of diglossia whereby when there are two official languages, there is always one language that tends to dominate the other which is generally referred to as subordinate. This happens when viewed from a functional point. A glimpse of the diglossia situation in Africa indicates that English, French and Portuguese are characterized as the high languages (H) and the indigenous ones as low languages (L) (N. M. Kamwangamalu,2000). For example, in Congo, the French language is a high variety for formal functions while Ciluba, Lingala, Kiswahili and Kikongo which are regarded as national languages form the low variety. English also plays a similar role as a high variety in the Anglophone Africa for instance in Nigeria, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Kenya and Tanzania among others as does the Portuguese language in Lusophone countries such as Angola and Mozambique. Multilingualism practice tends to create the development and

general acquisition of cross-cultural communication skills. In this regard people incline to learn different skills of the languages in place especially speaking, reading and even writing. These cross-cultural communication skills allow one to gain both the communicative and discourse proficiencies.

Besides the linguistic consequences, there is also a political consequence that relies on the economic and political order of the society (V. Webb, Kembo Sure, eds, 2000). This in the long run creates the majority and minority languages. Some of the majority languages become more powerful than others.

Multilingualism and its benefits

Before discussing benefits of multilingualism in education, I have found it essential to give a glimpse of how many people speak more than one language. I have also stated briefly which languages are spoken by more than 50 million people and the state of indigenous African languages in reference to multilingualism practices.

It is estimated that over a billion people in the world speak more than one language fluently (S. N. Barasa,2005). However, with the increased population of people in the world the number of bilinguals may be currently double. This increased number of speakers is probably attributed to the regionalism and internationalism principles that are now incorporated by many countries especially in the field of trade and commerce, innovation and also the technological advancements. These principles call for the speakers to be proficient in the working languages to effectuate communication.

Languages namely Chinese, English, Russian, Spanish, Hindu, Portuguese, Bengali, German, Japanese, Arabic, Urdu, French, Malay-Bahasa, Italian, Teluga and Tamil are generally spoken each by approximately 50 million people as first languages (P. Ochieng,2002). These languages tend to be official in many countries in the world thus contributing to official multilingualism practices. Generally, recent estimates show that there are about 7000 languages in the world and Africa tends to have more than half of this (V. Fromkin, R. Rodman,2007). However, many indigenous languages in Africa that constitute somewhat unofficial multilingualism also tend to lack orthography.

Due to regionalism practices, many countries and unions tend to crave to have a common language besides the native languages so as to conduct their activities. For instance, the East African Community bringing together Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi is banking on the use of Kiswahili as its official language. This has been caused by the situation that Kiswahili has its cradle in the East African region, is regarded as one of the world's fastest developing languages and is also Africa's most vital means of communication, but unfortunately it tends to be recognized by the rest of the world much more than we do (P. Ochieng,2010). Forexample, universities world over now have full-fledged Kiswahili programmes. Likewise, a number of people are fighting for Africa to be represented by Kiswahili and also to be considered amongst the official languages of the United Nations. If this is being fought for, then a monolingual must, therefore, learn more languages so as to be at par with the rest in the fast changing world.

The paper considers discussing the benefits of practicing multilingualism in the education sector not only in the formal education in learning institutions alone but also informal conditions probably at homes. Therefore, some major benefits of multilingualism in education whether formal or informal embrace the following:

Knowledge of more than two languages allows us to communicate with many people in both personal and professional settings. This is owing to the fact that the vast amount of knowledge that people possess is often only effectively accessible through particular languages (V. Webb, Kembo Sure, eds, 2000) whether official or unofficial. However, the unofficial languages that in most African contexts are generally regarded as native tend to be a viable medium for effective and clear presentation of knowledge that we possess. This is clearly manifested in proven situations whereby knowing an indigenous language is believed to provide an access to a vast reservoir of wisdom, expertise, knowledge and skills contained in the bodies of speakers of the languages concerned (V. Webb, Kembo Sure, eds, 2000). Therefore multilingualism is a big resource (V. Webb, Kembo Sure, eds, 2000). When one knows the official language and flawlessly speaks the native languages then the person will be able to synthesize knowledge and express it accordingly. It is therefore necessary to include indigenous languages in education so as to understand the benefits of synthesizing and clearly expressing knowledge.

Other scholars argue that anybody who knows only one language is generally not different from an animal that is restricted in communication. Thus a monolingual can best be

described as a restricted animal with a barrier in communication referred to as 'fixity of reference' (D. Bolinger, D. A. Sears, 1981). This means that animals have messages connected with just one thing in the real world like a growl to an enemy, a particular scent to an attraction to mate and a cluck to a summon to abroad of ducks (D. Bolinger, D. A. Sears, 1981). Speaking one language can also be equated to a holophrastic stage of language development [1](J. Lyons, 1981). This means that a monolingual can be considered as one who is still in the process of language acquisition and development and should learn other languages to effectuate multi-communication.

Thus, multilingualism opens the doors for quicker and easy communication. To remove the notion of 'fixity of reference', entrenching multilingualism in education will of course enable one to avoid restrictions in communication thus enabling him to move to another stage of communication. Multilingualism practices enhance intellectual flexibility and creativity. Recent studies have indicated that children who grow up in a supportive environment speaking more than one language from an early age are more perceptive and intellectually flexible than those who speak one language (A. King, 2007). By using the 'double first language acquisition' model as indicated by (A. King, 2007), children with parents constantly speaking different languages grow up being equally fluent and comfortable with the two home languages and can even learn a third and fourth language. Though this research focussed on the home contexts, this is also practical in the classroom contexts whereby students who are exposed to many languages will tend to be intellectually flexible.

Enhancement of intellectual flexibility is corroborated by various viable findings. While studying extensively on multilingualism practices, a speech and language therapist Dr. Elsie Naude from Pretoria realised that when parents encourage children to acquire additional languages then they are also investing in the child intellectually (A. King,2007). Thus, many children who are fluent in more than one language are superior lateral thinkers, have a greater social adaptability, their thinking and reasoning skills are better, and their cognitive abilities are also greater (A. King,2007).. A case in point is explained by [7] that children who speak at least two languages do better in school than those who speak one language. Recent research done by University of London Institute of Education (ULIE) concerning studies on bilingualism proved that when you speak two languages you do better in school (M. Mwololo,2008).

Multilingualism provides an insight into the understanding of different cultures and experiences hence a multilingual becomes multicultural in nature (S. N. Barasa, 2005). Since languages don't operate in a vacuum, culture and society play a key role in its existence. This is because language is a sociolinguistic, an ethno linguistic and a psycholinguistic issue (J. Lyons, 1981). Thus language relies on society, culture and mind. In this regard, multilingualism enhances an automatic understanding and appreciation of cultural values of the societies that are contained in the concerned languages. The experiences gained from learning different languages automatically tend to change the attitudes, skills, beliefs of the people, society and create an expansion of world view. All these attributes are formally taught in

classroom and informally in the daily communication outside classroom. For example, when we study Kiswahili language in the Kenyan context, we are forced to study its origin, the Swahili people and also their cultural and traditional values thus changing the readers' perceptions.

Multilingualism provides a competitive edge in today's job market. Besides the academic and professional credentials, employers also look for fluency in the desired languages as an added advantage. Therefore, being a multilingual is a plus to any job seeker in this millennium. This can only be realised if multilingualism is entrenched in the learning curriculum. A clear survey by the American Council on Education (ACE) realized that it is somewhat important to speak another language so as to compete successfully in the global economy (S. N. Barasa,2005). In this regard development of many language skills therefore helps in economic adjustments. For example, in Israel and Netherlands, knowledge of either Hebrew or Dutch respectively tends to limit his or her educational and employment opportunities (B. R. Chiswick, P. W. Miller,2007). In Canada, there is a wage premium for the bilinguals. In 1981 the Quebec residents who could speak only one language had 1.6% lower earnings than those who are English-French bilinguals (B. R. Chiswick, P. W. Miller,2007). Multilingualism is also a form of human capital(B. R. Chiswick, P. W. Miller,2007)..

This is because skills in multilingualism are created at a cost (time of the person, teachers and parents in enhancing the language skills, purchasing inputs and other school supplies). Language skills are productive especially in the

individual's role as a consumer and in the role as a producer. Those deficient in language skills find it very costly. It is therefore beneficial to have many languages entrenched in an education system in order to get a solid and an all round human capital.

Multilingualism helps in national unity especially if people learn national languages besides their indigenous languages and lingua franca. In the process, the people concerned will automatically embrace the value of togetherness. According to (M. Mwololo-, 2008) this fact of togetherness is emphasized by referring to the words of Dr. Ayman Al Asar an Egyptian lecturer who indicated that if taken seriously then Kiswahili can play a major role in uniting the 42 tribes in Kenya especially after the disputed general elections resulting into the 2007/2008 post election violence. Politicians and other leaders can use multilingualism by promoting a national language so as to work as viable roadmap in national unity and development.

Multilingual and Language Learning

The topic of multilingualism in education has been extensively researched by many scholars, but there are several aspects that have not yet been fully explored.

1.First Language Acquisition (FLA) is a crucial aspect of language acquisition, as noted by Yule (2014). During the early stages of language development, interaction with language users is essential to provide a language environment. According to Konigs (2013), the process of language acquisition is crucial in determining how language is acquired. Additionally, various factors such as adult input through gestures and dialogue can influence the development

of children's language acquisition. Children can develop gradually through various steps, including early multimodal buds, such as gestures and vocal aspects, and ultimately reach complex and sound multimodal outcomes (Facke, 2014).

2. Second Language Acquisition (SLA) is the study of how second languages are learned, as noted by Lightit et al. (2006). Benati (2014) added that SLA is a complicated phenomenon that involves numerous processes and mechanisms that work interchangeably. Corder (1967) stated that L2 learners have their own guidance and are restricted in their ability to acquire the language. Additionally, factors such as insufficient time, focus, motivation, age, and lack of practice can hinder many L2 learners.

3. Bilingual Acquisition: Similarities and Differences

3.1 Similarities

In terms of similarities, both L1 and L2 learners require input to build a language system, as argued by Brown (1967). Both L1 and L2 learners follow a predictable order in a formal context.

3.2 Differences

According to Robert Bely and Vroman (2009), children and adults acquire language differently. However, these perspectives depend on the language being referred to. It can also be stated that there are various differences between acquisition and learning, which can be explained in the following manner:

a. **Acquisition** refers to the gradual development of language ability in terms of communication with other people who use language. This can be achieved without the need for teachers.

b. **Learning** is a process of accumulated knowledge that includes various components of language, such as vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation, as in school settings (Yule.G, 2014). 4. Bilingual/Multilingual Language Teaching A second language can be acquired in different ways, including the bilingual language model. This model can be applied by providing equal or identical instructions to native speakers of each language. Additionally, bilingual learners can study their native languages while learning a second language (Halle et al, 2014).

Conclusion:

Research has shown that multilingual learners have stronger social, analytical, cultural, and academic skills than monolingual and bilingual learners. Multilingualism has been shown to help acquire better reading, writing, and speaking skills. Multilingualism provides a chance to learn from differences rather than being scared of them. Knowledge about various cultures and races develops diversity and a better understanding of different cultures and languages, and learners become more self-confident. People who learn and speak multiple languages acquire an understanding of other cultures and expand the area of language acquisition. For teachers, teaching in a classroom where multilingual students exist is a very difficult task. In such challenging situations, multilingual people play a significant role in making teaching – learning process successful. Encouraging teamwork and using technology for language support can improve learning in diverse classrooms, creating a more inclusive and effective learning space for language learning. In short, depending on the structure of the social order, multilingualism exercises in

education should embrace indigenous, national, official, and foreign languages as equal partners in language plan improvement and instruction.

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