

INFUSING HUMAN VALUES IN POSTGRADUATE CURRICULUM THROUGH COURSES IN BI-/MULTILINGUALISM

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Abstract

University education plays a pivotal role in fostering human values in individuals and in creating communities of ethical practitioners. This paper presents how the postgraduate curriculum of English language Teaching (ELT) and Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) at The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad infuses humanistic and ethical values in its learners through its programme objectives and courses in language education. It will discuss one course in particular titled *Bilingualism and Bilingual Education* that claims to align with the programme outcome of embracing and practicing constitutional, humanistic and ethical values in one's life. This course aims to equip students to strive for equity and social justice through ethical practices in English Language Education. The course content, class assignments, students feedback and learning trajectories will be considered to argue that this course instils ethical values in students and prepares them to create communities of practice that uphold human values of linguistic and cultural diversity and create solutions for multilingual communities to learn English without having a detrimental effect on their other language identities.

Introduction

The master's programmes in English Language Teaching (M.A. ELT) and in Teaching English as a Second Language (M.A. TESL) at

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The English and Foreign Languages University (EFLU), Hyderabad as part of implementation of NEP 2020 went through a phase of curricular restructuring in 2021. Consequently, new programme outcomes were drawn up to match with NEP 2020 recommendations. During this exercise, one of the programme outcomes (PO) in both these programmes was included that revolves around imbibing constitutional, humanistic and ethical values. MA ELT's PO14 states *embrace and practice constitutional, humanistic, and ethical values in one's life* and MA TESL's PO12 states *imbibe constitutional, humanistic, and ethical values. Three are three courses that align with this PO*. They are bi-multilingualism (semester 1), ELE in multilingual contexts (semester 2) and Bilingualism and Bilingual Education (semester 4). I will discuss the third course in detail. Drawing from the course outline, teaching strategies, assignment prompts, this paper reflects on how this course orients students to work for equity and social justice in English Language Education thereby equipping them with knowledge to find more holistic solutions to learning problems in multilingual communities than aligning with the hegemonic forces of English and economic forces of the market.

About the Course

The course *Bilingualism and Bilingual Education* prepares students to understand bilingual environments in educational contexts to undertake research or to better serve bilingual students and communities. It draws from areas such as bilingualism, second language acquisition and language education. The course begins by understanding the concept of bilingualism, problematising definitions, and closely looking at concerns related to bilingual education from the perspective of various stakeholders such as learners, teachers, administrators, and parents. It then focuses on early development of bilingualism and discusses debates related to assessment of bilingualism and connection with cognition. The third module discusses different types of bilingualism and bilingual programmes and the politics of bi-/multilingualism. We also review some policy frameworks from across the world to understand challenges in language planning and implementation with a special focus on the Multilingual Education (MLE) and MLE plus programmes of Odisha. Case studies and learner profiles are used along with research studies for students to deepen their understanding of the concepts. The course also exposes participants to evaluate, select and adapt materials for multilingual teaching. The

final module trains them in various steps involved in undertaking a research project with bilinguals/multilinguals. Overall, this course connects students to their own communities and minority languages that they are surrounded by but never take note of them with a critical lens. This course compels them to look at those communities closely and question the language hierarchies that surround them and come up with strategies to design English language learning solutions that are embedded in local context, respecting the cultural and linguistic resources of the learners than stripping them off their identities and adopt ethical/inclusive pedagogies in the classroom thereby leading to ethical community practices.

Class Discussions, Readings and Assignments

The course begins by evaluating some common myths around bilingualism. It draws from Baker (2000) that discusses questions from teachers and parents about bilingualism. Notions such as — children get confused if they are exposed to multiple languages in early childhood, mixing languages can have a detrimental effect on language development, effect of caregiver's speech on language acquisition, the controversial views on codemixing, the best age to learn a second or a foreign language, debates around the medium of instruction in the primary classes and so on are thoroughly debated. Through class discussions, students get an opportunity to question their own beliefs around bi-multilingualism and learn to look at evidence-based reasoning to realign their understanding of some concepts. They are also put in situation where they must critically reflect on their own experiences as learners and evaluate the practices of their communities, schools and families - how far were those ethical? They also reflect on how their experiences have shaped their beliefs and assumptions about bilinguals and what will they do as change makers once they return to their communities as a member, teacher or researcher.

The research evidence and studies in bilingualism and bilingual education are drawn from Baker (2002). Selected reading from this book gives a solid foundation in bilingualism and bilingual education. It gives a historical backdrop in which changes in our understanding of the bilingual brain has happened and how 1920s was dominated by prejudices and biases against bilingual communities and immigrant children who had to face various disadvantages in accessing the school system across the world. Cummin's work in bilingualism along with sociocultural theories

such as nativisation model and accommodation theory provide a strong understanding of the developments in the field. Tracing the history of those discriminatory practices and the development of research that countered such biased practices provides a framework for the students to observe the challenges in trying to address the discontinuity between theory and practice that exists even today in our educational and community practices.

Another important book that this course draws from is Skutnubh-Kangas, Philipson, Mohanty and Panda (2009). The introduction of this book by Prof. Ajit Mohanty provides a context for the need to reimagine language education from a multilingual perspective. His use of the word bridge as a metaphor to describe the conditions of tribal children who face double divide in the hierarchies of languages drives home the point that there is an urgent need to look at English education from an alternate perspective than aligning with dominant methods that are monolingual, uncritical, often reductionist in approach and utilitarian. However, the responsibility lies with the critical practitioner to identify the contextual factors operating in a teaching-learning situation and then devise a context-sensitive pedagogy that is relevant and draws adequately from the existing cultural and linguistic resources of the students than approaching the classroom from a deficit view of lack of knowledge of the dominant/powerful language in this case English. Ideas such a linguistic imperialism, language as a human right and the ugly consequences of globalisation on English Language Education are all discussed to develop a critical orientation to understand the problems of multilingual educational contexts. Prof. G.N. Devy's work on Adivasi languages also provides a context for further deliberations on language policy and education.

By analysing the case study of Odisha's MLE programme through documentaries, reading articles and discussion with researchers from the field, the course provides ample opportunity to the students to connect theory and practice. I invite at least one researcher whose work they have read into the classroom through an online interaction that allows the students to ask questions and share ideas with the author-researchers and expand their understanding of the Odisha context.

Class discussion sheets help students reflect on their experiences and make connections with the readings. The assignments are also designed to help students synthesise their understanding and put their existing knowledge to critical examination. The first set of assignment provides a case study of a multilingual child that they

analyse using different terminologies and conceptual categories that they have learnt. They also draw up their own case studies based on their learning and acquisition environments and experiences of interacting with various language ecosystems. The second assignment requires the students to identify a speech community in the university campus and draw up a detailed linguistic profile through a language questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. This assignment also trains them in conducting research following ethical standards and connect with several linguistic and cultural groups that testify the diversity on campus. They learn to celebrate diversity and become more inclusive in their everyday lives and more ethically aware in their research work. The final assignment of the course requires the students to identify a research problem and conduct a research based on secondary sources only and develop an argumentative paper to explore solutions to the problem identified. They make work-in-progress presentations to sound board their ideas and collect peer and instructor feedback before submitting their final paper.

Students Participation, Feedback and Growth Trajectories

Student participation is very high on this course as their experiences, opinions and reflections form the base for theorisation to happen, for concepts to be introduced and for common understanding to emerge. Group and pair work along with whole class discussions form the core of class discussions. Student presentations of their work provide an opportunity for peer feedback. The course feedback collected in the last three years suggest a transformative effect on student knowledge and experiences.

In 2024 feedback form, when students were asked if this course gave them insights into human values, 85% of the respondents were able to make connections between the course content and the values of equity, inclusivity and diversity. They reported that they are now more critical of their own language practices and prejudices that they hold about people based on their regional identities. Some participants also identified their strengths as speakers of minority languages and the need to work in their own contexts to spread such ideas of inclusivity and developing alternate learning solutions for student communities that are speakers of endangered or minority languages. 30 percent of the students took up research in bi-/multilingualism in their own under-researched contexts and 30 percent students went back to their home states to take up teaching in multilingual contexts where there is a need to initiate conversations

around transformative practices. Almost 70% of students reported that their awareness of ethical practices in teaching and research had increased in concrete ways after doing this course.

Conclusions

This paper highlights the transformative role of the university curriculum in fostering human values and critical practices. Through course content that is oriented towards developing values of inclusivity, preservation of diversity and promoting ethical practices in research and teaching can be a powerful tool to mould young minds who are the future change makers in their communities. The course *Bilingualism and Bilingual Education* as part of EFLU's MA ELT and MA TESL aims to do precisely that. Under NEP 2020, there is a greater push for multidisciplinary courses across programmes. This opens a unique opportunity to bring in programme outcomes revolving around developing constitutional, humanistic, and ethical values in our students through innovative curricular imaginations that cut across disciplines.

References

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