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Multilingualism, Language Policy, and ELT in Karnataka Higher Education: A Qualitative Document Analysis

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Abstract:

This study explores the relationship among multilingualism, language policy, and English Language Teaching (ELT) practices within a wide context of the higher educational system in Karnataka. This paper mainly focuses on the gap that exists between multilingual educational policies and their actual implementations on the ground. Drawing upon India's National Education Policy (NEP 2020), university curriculum frameworks, policy documents, and selected ELT materials, the research investigates how multilingualism is represented, negotiated, and institutionalized in contemporary academic discourse. Adopting a qualitative research framework, such as document analysis and thematic analysis, the study explores the institutional importance and placement of English alongside regional languages like Kannada in the Karnataka context in higher education. The research is informed by theories of Global Englishes and multilingual pedagogies, particularly the works of Kachru (1992) and García and Wei (2014). This paper's objective is to contribute to current discussions on language policy, multilingual communication, and present ELT practices in Karnataka, at the same time bringing out the tensions between global English and local and regional linguistic identities.

Keywords: Multilingualism, English Language Teaching (ELT), Language Policy, Global English, Document Analysis.

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INTRODUCTION:

India, popularly known as the subcontinent, is one of the most linguistically diverse

nations, characterized by the parallel existence of several regional and local

languages with their different attached dialects, variable cultural identities, which is unique in its own sense within its educational and social frameworks. This linguistic diversity has significantly influenced the development of language policy in general and English Language Teaching (ELT) in particular, and its practices differ across different levels of education. In the field of higher education, English continues to play a major role and has always had its dominant position as an academic language, with technical compatibility, which goes hand in hand with ever-emerging science and technology employability, global communication, and institutional prestige. On the other hand, regional and local languages are considered to be the most important part of one's identity, cultural continuity, and great. Storehouse of conventional and local knowledge systems (Kachru, 1992). The amalgamation of the local language and global language has often raised many questions and has generated a serious discussion concerning linguistic equity, access, pedagogical effectiveness, and educational policy implementation within multilingual societies such as India.

The ever-increasing demand for multilingual education, especially in India, has taken a new momentum and renewed attention

following the introduction of the National Education Policy (NEP 2020), replacing the previous 1986 policy. NEP mainly lays more emphases of multilingualism, mother tongue-oriented primary education, and linguistic inclusivity across educational institutions (Ministry of Education, 2020). Despite the fact that the policy places more importance on the importance to regional languages, local and multilingual pedagogies, English continues to maintain considerable symbolic and socioeconomic value within higher education contexts. According to Bourdieu (1991), language functions not only as a medium of communication but also as a form of symbolic dominance linked with structures of power, prestige, identity, privilege, and social mobility. In the context of Karnataka higher education, English functions as a gatekeeping mechanism that shapes access to academic opportunities and professional advancement.

In multilingual educational environments such as Karnataka, the relationship between language policy and classroom realities becomes particularly significant. Karnataka presents a complex linguistic landscape in which Kannada, English, Hindi, Urdu, and several regional and minority languages interact within academic and institutional spaces. This multilingual setting creates both

opportunities and challenges for ELT practices, especially in undergraduate education where students often negotiate between local linguistic identities and the demands of global English communication. Recent scholarship in multilingualism and applied linguistics has increasingly emphasized the fluid and dynamic nature of language practices through concepts such as translanguaging, which recognizes the interconnected use of multiple linguistic resources in communication and learning (García & Wei, 2014).

Despite the increasing scholarly interest in multilingual pedagogies and language policy, significant gaps remain between policy discourse and institutional implementation within higher education contexts. Much of the existing research on ELT in India has focused on language proficiency, curriculum design, or pedagogical challenges, while comparatively limited attention has been given to the ideological representation of multilingualism within policy documents, curriculum frameworks, and higher education discourse. Furthermore, the tensions between global English and regional linguistic identities continue to shape educational practices in complex ways that require deeper qualitative exploration.

Against this background, the present study examines the intersections of multilingualism, language policy, and ELT within the broader context of higher education in Karnataka through qualitative document analysis and thematic analysis. Drawing upon policy documents, university curriculum frameworks, and selected ELT materials, the study explores how multilingualism is represented, negotiated, and institutionalized in contemporary academic discourse. By engaging with theories of World Englishes, translanguaging, and language ideology, the paper seeks to contribute to ongoing discussions concerning multilingual communication, linguistic diversity, and equitable ELT practices in Indian higher education.

Literature Review

The interconnected nature among multilingualism, language policy, and English Language Teaching (ELT) has evolved as an important area of inquiry, received growing attention among linguistic scholars, academic discourse and within applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, and higher education studies. In a diverse linguistic environment such as India, language works not just merely as a medium

through which communication is established but also functions as a socio-political and cultural mechanism moulded by its own history, institutions, and ideological perspectives. The existing studies have examined the role of English in postcolonial contexts, the tensions between global and local languages, and the implications of multilingual education policies in higher education.

India's linguistic diversity has long influenced its educational structures and language practices. Scholars have emphasized that multilingualism in India is not an exception but a social norm embedded within everyday communication and institutional life (Mohanty, 2019). The Indian higher education system reflects a complex interaction between English and regional languages, where English frequently operates as the dominant language of academic discourse, research, and employability. At the same time, regional languages continue to shape cultural identity and local forms of knowledge production.

The emergence of English as a global language has further intensified debates concerning linguistic equity and access in higher education. According to Kachru (1992), the spread of English in multilingual

societies has resulted in the development of localized forms of English that reflect distinct sociocultural realities. His theory of World Englishes challenged monolithic perceptions of English by recognizing the legitimacy of non-native varieties such as Indian English. This perspective remains particularly relevant in the Indian educational context, where English coexists with multiple linguistic traditions and educational practices. Recent discussions on multilingualism have increasingly focused on translanguaging and the fluid use of linguistic resources in educational settings. García and Wei (2014) argue that multilingual speakers do not operate within rigidly separated language systems; rather, they negotiate meaning through dynamic interactions among languages. Translanguaging has therefore become an important theoretical framework for understanding multilingual communication and pedagogical practices in classrooms characterized by linguistic diversity.

Language Policy and NEP 2020

Language policy has remained central to educational debates in India, particularly concerning the balance between English and regional languages. The National Education Policy (NEP 2020) foregrounds

multilingualism as an essential component of inclusive and equitable education. The policy advocates the promotion of mother tongue and regional language instruction while simultaneously recognizing the continued importance of English in higher education and global communication (Ministry of Education, 2020).

However, scholars have noted that the implementation of multilingual educational policies often encounters institutional and sociolinguistic challenges. Mohanty (2020) observes that although policy frameworks support linguistic diversity, English continues to possess significant symbolic and economic capital in Indian society. This reflects Bourdieu's (1991) argument that language operates as symbolic power, enabling access to social mobility, educational prestige, and professional opportunities. Consequently, English frequently occupies a privileged position within higher education institutions despite policy efforts to strengthen regional languages.

In the Indian context, the tension between policy aspirations and institutional realities has generated important discussions regarding language ideology and educational inequality. Researchers have argued that

multilingual policies often remain discursive commitments without adequate structural implementation mechanisms, particularly within higher education institutions where English dominates academic communication and evaluation practices.

ELT, Global English, and Linguistic Identity

The globalization of English has substantially influenced ELT practices in multilingual contexts. Pennycook (2007) argues that English should not be understood merely as an international language but as a language deeply connected to issues of globalization, power, identity, and cultural negotiation. Within Indian higher education, English frequently functions as a marker of academic competence and employability, reinforcing its association with socioeconomic advancement. At the same time, scholars have raised concerns regarding the marginalization of regional languages within English-dominated educational systems. Kumaravadivelu (2006) critiques the dominance of Western-oriented ELT pedagogies and advocates context-sensitive approaches that acknowledge local linguistic and cultural realities. His postmethod pedagogy emphasizes the importance of adapting ELT practices to multilingual and

postcolonial educational contexts rather than relying exclusively on standardized models of English teaching.

Research on language ideology has further demonstrated how linguistic hierarchies shape perceptions of identity, intelligence, and educational success. In multilingual educational spaces, students often negotiate between global English and local linguistic identities, creating hybrid communicative practices that reflect both aspiration and resistance. Such negotiations are particularly relevant in Karnataka, where multilingual interactions among Kannada, English, Hindi, Urdu, and other languages characterize academic and social environments.

Research Gap

Although substantial scholarship exists on multilingualism, language policy, and ELT in India, limited research has critically examined how multilingualism is represented and institutionalized within higher education policy documents, curriculum frameworks, and ELT discourse in Karnataka. Existing studies have largely focused on classroom pedagogy, language proficiency, or policy recommendations, while comparatively less attention has been given to qualitative document-based analyses of multilingual educational discourse.

Furthermore, there remains a need to investigate how higher education institutions negotiate the competing demands of global English communication and regional linguistic inclusivity within contemporary policy frameworks such as NEP 2020. The present study seeks to address this gap through qualitative document analysis and thematic analysis of policy texts, curriculum documents, and ELT materials related to higher education in Karnataka.

This study is grounded in three mutually reinforcing theoretical perspectives. World Englishes Theory, Translanguaging Theory, and Language and Symbolic Power. Collectively, these frameworks provide a conceptual lens for understanding how multilingualism, language policy, and English Language Teaching (ELT) are represented and negotiated within higher education discourse in Karnataka.

The idea of World Englishes, developed by Kachru (1992), challenges the very conventional assumptions that give more importance and emphasis to native-speaker varieties of English as the only standards of linguistic legitimacy. Kachru argues that the global spread of English has led to the emergence of several regional dialects and varieties formed by the sociocultural,

historical, and political contexts. His famous Three Circle Model groups English-speaking communities into the Inner Circle (mother tongue), Outer Circle (norm developing), and the vast, ever-expanding Circle. India occupies a very important place within the Outer Circle, where English is considered a second language and plays a crucial role in education, governance, and professional communication.

The relevance of World Englishes to the present study lies in its recognition of Indian English as a legitimate and contextually appropriate variety rather than a deviation from native norms. This perspective helps explain the continuing prominence of English in Indian higher education while acknowledging the multilingual realities within which English operates. It also provides a framework for examining how educational policies and curriculum documents conceptualize English in relation to regional languages and global communication.

The study further draws upon Translanguaging Theory, which has emerged as a significant framework in contemporary multilingualism research. García and Wei (2014) define translanguaging as the dynamic process through which multilingual speakers

draw upon their entire linguistic repertoire to create meaning, communicate effectively, and construct knowledge. Unlike traditional bilingual models that treat languages as separate systems, translanguaging views multilingual practices as fluid, integrated, and socially situated.

This framework is particularly relevant in the Indian context, where learners frequently navigate between English and regional languages in academic, social, and professional settings. Translanguaging theory challenges monolingual assumptions underlying many educational policies and pedagogical approaches by emphasizing the educational value of multilingual resources. In the context of this study, the framework facilitates an examination of how policy documents and curriculum frameworks conceptualize multilingualism and whether they support or constrain multilingual language practices within higher education.

Language and Symbolic Power

The study is also informed by Bourdieu's (1991) theory of language and symbolic power. According to Bourdieu, language is not merely a neutral medium of communication but a form of symbolic capital that confers social prestige, authority, and access to opportunities. Linguistic

practices are shaped by broader social structures, and certain languages acquire greater legitimacy and value within specific institutional contexts.

Within Indian higher education, English often functions as a form of linguistic capital associated with academic success, employability, and upward social mobility. Consequently, proficiency in English can influence access to educational and professional opportunities. Bourdieu's framework provides a useful lens for understanding why English continues to occupy a privileged position despite policy efforts to promote multilingualism and regional languages. It also helps explain the ideological tensions between linguistic inclusivity and the socioeconomic value attached to English in contemporary educational discourse.

Conceptual Integration

Taken together, these three theoretical perspectives offer a comprehensive framework for analyzing the intersections of multilingualism, language policy, and ELT. World Englishes highlights the legitimacy of localized English varieties within multilingual societies; Translanguaging Theory emphasizes the fluid and dynamic nature of multilingual communication; and

Language and Symbolic Power explains the sociopolitical significance of English within educational institutions. These frameworks collectively guide the thematic analysis of policy documents, curriculum frameworks, and ELT materials examined in this study.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore the intersections of multilingualism, language policy, and English Language Teaching (ELT) within the context of higher education in Karnataka. Qualitative research is particularly suitable for investigating how meanings, ideologies, and representations are constructed and communicated through texts and institutional discourse (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Rather than generating numerical data, the study seeks to develop an in-depth understanding of how multilingualism and language policy are conceptualized within educational documents and ELT-related materials.

The research is exploratory and interpretive in nature, focusing on the examination of policy texts, curriculum frameworks, and educational documents that shape language practices and pedagogical approaches in higher education. By adopting a qualitative approach, the study aims to uncover underlying assumptions, ideological

positions, and recurring themes related to multilingualism and English language education.

Data Sources

The study relies exclusively on documentary sources. The primary data consist of official policy documents, curriculum frameworks, and educational materials relevant to multilingualism, language policy, and ELT in higher education. These documents include:

- National Education Policy (NEP 2020)
- University Grants Commission (UGC) guidelines and curriculum frameworks
- Undergraduate English language syllabi and curriculum documents from selected universities
- Institutional reports and policy documents related to language education
- Selected ELT materials and academic documents relevant to higher education

These documents were selected because they provide insight into the ways multilingualism and English language education are represented, promoted, and institutionalized within higher education discourse.

Selection of Documents

Documents were selected purposively based on their relevance to the objectives of the

study. Purposive sampling is commonly employed in qualitative research when the researcher seeks information-rich sources that can provide meaningful insights into a particular phenomenon (Patton, 2015). The selection criteria included:

1. Relevance to multilingualism and language policy.
2. Focus on higher education and ELT.
3. Institutional or policy significance.
4. Accessibility and authenticity.
5. Contemporary relevance, particularly documents published or implemented in the context of NEP 2020.

The selected documents constitute a representative corpus for examining the relationship between multilingualism, language policy, and ELT within higher education.

Document Analysis

Document analysis serves as the primary method of data collection and interpretation. Bowen (2009) defines document analysis as a systematic procedure for reviewing, examining, and evaluating documents in order to elicit meaning and develop empirical knowledge. In this study, documents were carefully read and reviewed multiple times to identify references to multilingualism,

English language education, language ideology, linguistic diversity, and educational policy.

The analysis focused on both explicit and implicit representations of language. Particular attention was given to policy statements, curricular objectives, pedagogical recommendations, and discursive constructions of English and regional languages. The method enabled the researcher to examine how institutional texts frame multilingualism and language education within higher education contexts.

Thematic Analysis

To interpret the documentary data, the study employs thematic analysis following the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis is a flexible qualitative method used to identify, organize, and interpret patterns of meaning across textual data.

The analysis followed six stages:

1. Familiarization with the documents.
2. Initial coding of relevant textual segments.
3. Identification of recurring themes.
4. Review and refinement of themes.
5. Definition and naming of themes.

6. Interpretation and reporting of findings.

Thematic analysis facilitates the identification of dominant discourses and ideological patterns within educational documents. Themes such as multilingualism, linguistic diversity, English as a global language, language identity, and policy implementation are expected to emerge during the analytical process.

To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the research, the study relies on authentic and publicly available policy documents and institutional texts. The use of multiple documentary sources allows for triangulation of evidence and reduces the risk of relying on a single perspective. Furthermore, the analytical process is guided by established theoretical frameworks and transparent procedures of thematic analysis, thereby strengthening the validity of interpretations.

Limitations of the Study

The study is limited to documentary sources and does not include interviews, surveys, classroom observations, or other forms of primary field-based data collection. Consequently, the findings reflect representations and discourses contained within official documents rather than the

lived experiences of teachers or students. Nevertheless, document analysis provides valuable insights into the ideological and institutional dimensions of multilingualism, language policy, and ELT within higher education.

Findings and Discussion

1. The thematic analysis of policy documents, curriculum frameworks, and ELT-related materials revealed five interconnected themes that illuminate the relationship between multilingualism, language policy, and English Language Teaching (ELT) in Karnataka higher education. These themes demonstrate how multilingualism is promoted at the policy level while English continues to occupy a dominant position within academic and professional domains.

Multilingualism as an Educational Resource

2. A prominent theme emerging from the analyzed documents is the recognition of multilingualism as a valuable educational resource rather than a barrier to learning. NEP 2020 explicitly advocates multilingual education and emphasizes the pedagogical benefits of learning through multiple languages (Ministry of Education, 2020).

The policy framework positions linguistic diversity as an asset capable of enhancing cognitive development, cultural awareness, and inclusive learning environments.

3. The documents frequently portray multilingualism as an integral component of India's educational landscape and as a means of preserving linguistic and cultural diversity. This perspective aligns with contemporary multilingualism research, which views linguistic diversity as a resource for knowledge construction and communication rather than as an obstacle to academic achievement (García & Wei, 2014). The findings suggest that policy discourse increasingly acknowledges the educational value of multilingual competencies within higher education contexts.

English as Global and Academic Capital

4. Despite the emphasis on multilingualism, English remains strongly positioned as the language of academic advancement, employability, and global communication. The analyzed documents consistently associate English proficiency with higher education success, professional mobility, and participation in global knowledge networks.

5. This finding reflects Bourdieu's (1991) concept of linguistic capital; wherein certain languages acquire greater social and

economic value within institutional settings. English is frequently represented as a gateway to employment opportunities, international collaboration, and access to academic resources. While policy documents advocate multilingualism, they simultaneously reinforce the significance of English as a language of prestige and opportunity.

6. The findings also support Kachru's (1992) argument that English has become deeply institutionalized in multilingual societies such as India. The continued prominence of English within higher education demonstrates its dual role as both a communicative resource and a symbol of social mobility.

Regional Languages, Identity, and Inclusion

7. Another significant theme concerns the role of regional languages in fostering cultural identity and educational inclusion. The analyzed documents emphasize the importance of preserving linguistic diversity and promoting regional languages alongside English. Kannada, as the principal regional language of Karnataka, is frequently associated with cultural heritage, local knowledge systems, and social cohesion.

8. The findings indicate that policy discourse seeks to balance the global utility of English with the cultural significance of regional languages. This reflects broader debates within language policy scholarship regarding the need to protect linguistic diversity while preparing students for participation in globalized academic and professional environments.

9. Furthermore, the documents suggest that multilingual educational practices can contribute to greater inclusivity by recognizing the linguistic backgrounds of learners. Such representations align with translanguaging perspectives, which emphasize the legitimacy of utilizing multiple linguistic resources for learning and communication (García & Wei, 2014).

Policy–Practice Tensions in Higher Education

10. A recurring theme across the documents is the tension between multilingual policy aspirations and institutional realities. While policy frameworks strongly advocate multilingualism, English continues to dominate many aspects of higher education, including curriculum delivery, assessment, academic publishing, and professional communication.

11. The analysis reveals a discrepancy between the ideological commitment to multilingualism and the practical structures of higher education. Although multilingual education is promoted in policy discourse, the institutional mechanisms necessary for its effective implementation remain less clearly articulated. This finding supports previous scholarship suggesting that language policies often encounter challenges during implementation due to historical, social, and institutional factors (Mohanty, 2019).

12. The persistence of English as the primary academic language highlights the complexity of achieving linguistic inclusivity within higher education systems that remain strongly influenced by global academic norms.

Implications for ELT in Karnataka Higher Education

13. The findings have important implications for ELT within Karnataka's higher education sector. The analyzed documents suggest that ELT can no longer be conceptualized solely within monolingual frameworks. Instead, language teaching practices must recognize the multilingual realities of learners and the sociolinguistic contexts in which English is acquired and used.

14. The policy emphasis on multilingualism encourages a shift toward more inclusive pedagogical approaches that acknowledge the interaction between English and regional languages. Such approaches are consistent with contemporary perspectives in applied linguistics that advocate multilingual pedagogies and context-sensitive language teaching practices (Kumaravadivelu, 2006).

15. The findings therefore suggest that ELT in Karnataka should move beyond traditional monolingual models and embrace pedagogical practices that value linguistic diversity while maintaining the communicative and academic functions of English.

Discussion

16. The findings demonstrate that multilingualism, language policy, and ELT are deeply interconnected within the discourse of higher education in Karnataka. While policy documents increasingly recognize multilingualism as an educational asset, English continues to occupy a privileged position due to its association with academic success, employability, and global communication.

17. The coexistence of multilingual policy objectives and English-dominated institutional practices reflects broader

sociolinguistic tensions within Indian higher education. Through the lenses of World Englishes, Translanguaging Theory, and Language and Symbolic Power, the study reveals how language policies simultaneously promote linguistic inclusivity and reinforce existing linguistic hierarchies. Ultimately, the analysis suggests that meaningful multilingual education requires not only supportive policy frameworks but also institutional strategies capable of translating policy ideals into educational practice. The challenge for higher education institutions lies in balancing the global value of English with the linguistic diversity that characterizes the Indian educational landscape.

Conclusion

18. This study explored the intersections of multilingualism, language policy, and English Language Teaching (ELT) within the broader context of higher education in Karnataka through qualitative document analysis and thematic analysis. The findings demonstrate that contemporary educational policies increasingly recognize multilingualism as a valuable educational and cultural resource. Policy documents, particularly the National Education Policy (NEP 2020), advocate linguistic diversity,

multilingual pedagogies, and the inclusion of regional languages within educational frameworks. At the same time, the analysis reveals the continued dominance of English as the primary language of academic communication, employability, and global engagement. English remains closely associated with educational success and socioeconomic mobility, reinforcing its position as a form of linguistic capital within higher education institutions. Consequently, a complex relationship emerges between policy aspirations for multilingualism and the institutional realities that continue to privilege English.

19. The study further highlights the significance of regional languages in shaping cultural identity, social inclusion, and local knowledge systems. However, the coexistence of multilingual policy objectives and English-dominated academic structures suggests that meaningful implementation of multilingual education requires more than policy commitments alone. Effective realization of multilingual goals depends on institutional support, curriculum innovation, and pedagogical approaches that acknowledge the linguistic diversity of learners.

20. By drawing upon the theoretical perspectives of World Englishes, Translanguaging, and Language and

Symbolic Power, this study contributes to ongoing discussions concerning language policy, multilingual communication, and equitable ELT practices in Indian higher education. The findings underscore the need for a balanced approach that recognizes both the global significance of English and the educational value of regional languages within multilingual societies.

Recommendations

21. Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Strengthening Multilingual Pedagogies

22. Higher education institutions should promote pedagogical approaches that recognize and utilize students' multilingual repertoires. Incorporating multilingual teaching strategies can foster greater participation, inclusivity, and academic engagement.

2. Aligning Policy and Institutional Practice

23. Universities should develop implementation mechanisms that translate multilingual policy objectives into classroom and curricular practices. Greater alignment between policy discourse and institutional

realities is essential for achieving the goals outlined in NEP 2020.

3. Enhancing Curriculum Inclusivity

24. Curriculum frameworks should provide greater space for regional languages and multilingual communication practices while maintaining the academic functions of English. Such an approach can contribute to linguistic equity and educational accessibility.

4. Promoting Linguistic Diversity in ELT

25. ELT programs should move beyond monolingual models of instruction and adopt context-sensitive approaches that acknowledge the multilingual realities of Indian learners. Recognizing the interaction between English and regional languages can enrich language learning experiences.

5. Encouraging Further Research

26. Future studies may investigate the implementation of multilingual policies through empirical research involving teachers, students, and administrators. Comparative studies across different states and higher education institutions would further enhance understanding of multilingual education in India.

Implications of the Study

The study has implications for language policymakers, curriculum developers, teacher educators, and higher education institutions. It demonstrates that multilingualism and English language education should not be viewed as competing agendas but as complementary dimensions of an inclusive educational system. A balanced language policy framework can support both linguistic diversity and global communication, thereby contributing to more equitable and contextually relevant ELT practices in India.

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