



**ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER**

**Education**

**NEED TO PROMOTE LANGUAGE ACROSS CURRICULUM IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT.**

**KEY WORDS:** Language, curriculum

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**ABSTRACT**

Language is the expression of ideas by means of speech sounds which are combined into words, words are combined into sentences and combination of sentences gives answering to ideas and thoughts. Language makes a person do some activity, a purposeful activity. The individual speaks and expresses his emotions, feelings and desires and concepts which he has formulated while living in the society. When every individual expresses to the other, the social action and interaction takes place. That is why we say language is a social phenomenon. Language helps in the development of skills namely listening, speaking, reading writing. There is a common misconception that language should only be taught and developed only within the language classrooms. Language is taught and practiced only in the language classes in the Indian schools. This leads to a loss in the awareness of proper language usage outside the classrooms. Very few students are able to transfer the knowledge of the learnt language in other situations and outside the language classroom. Since language is the vehicle of thought only its proper usage in different curricular areas can lead to improvement, modification and enrichment of ideas. Language is a complex and many sided reality. It changes and grows with human experience and needs. It has various uses and forms which the diverse members of society use for personal, social and professional communication. Therefore, the ultimate aim of teaching a language should be to help learners acquire the many sided skills of using proper and accurate language across the different subjects in the curriculum. Language teaching across the curriculum improves the level of competence which a student is expected to attain. In the Indian classrooms language has a very narrow viewpoint. Therefore it is necessary to give due importance to the teaching of language across curriculum.

**Introduction**

Language is ever changing. It is a living phenomenon. Like every living thing it changes. Change in language does not reflect individual variability, but seems to be a massive, uniform and gradual alteration. Prof. Blomfield said, "as language is ever changing the language of today is different from that of language of yesterday. What we say about a language today may not be true about it tomorrow. The structures and vocabulary of old English are different from those of middle and modern English. It is very important for a language teacher to know nature of language and the way it is learnt. Effective teaching of language depends on proper understanding of the nature of language and how it is learnt. Learning a language is one thing and learning about a language is quite another.

**Need for Language across curriculum in India**

In India language teaching is only the concern of the language teacher. The concept of 'Language across Curriculum' is something we often read about and appreciate. It is hardly practiced in the Indian classroom partly due to the pressure of completing the syllabus on time and partly due to our inability to break out of the rigid boundaries of the various subjects. Language is taught in a compartmentalized language classroom. Language is a forgotten story the minute students step out of the language classrooms and their minds get tuned to the other pedagogy lessons without any consciousness of the different components of language. Neither do the teachers of the other pedagogy classes make the students aware of language corrections. The teachers lack the competency to use the language across the subjects. Oral work has to be given due importance to develop language competence across the subjects. Drill helps in this context. The teachers think that it is only the responsibility of the language teachers to develop in the students this kind of proficiency. Language plays a central role in the learning experience of the child. It enables the child to form concepts, explore symbols, analyze a given problem and to solve it, organize information and interact with his or her environment. Therefore, irrespective of the subjects they teach, all teachers should give due weightage to the centrality of language in the learning process of the child and any pedagogic intervention should recognize the role of language in the transaction of the curriculum. The concept of Language across Curriculum acknowledges the fact that language education does not take place in the language class alone, it takes place in each and every subject. While discussing the goal of language curriculum, the National Curriculum Framework of India also advocated a language across curriculum perspective. "A language across curriculum perspective particular relevance to primary

education. Language is best acquired through different meaning making contexts, and hence all teaching is in a sense language teaching" (NCERT, 2006:4). Language across curriculum is based on three basic tenets: (a) language is more than surface structure, (b) the entire school as an environment influences the learners' language development and (c) language plays a key role in virtually all school learning. (Fillion, 1979: 48). Irrespective of the subject area, learners assimilate new concepts largely through language. When they listen and talk, read and write about what they are learning in non-language classes, they use language as language and consequently, while increasing their concepts in non-linguistic fields, they enhance their linguistic skills as well. Therefore, all the stakeholders of education in India need a broad language perspective that integrates language and content learning (Mohan, B.A.: 1986:18). The centrality of language in the transaction of the school curriculum leads us to content-related instruction that provides cognitively engaging contexts for language practice and integrates language development with content learning (Curtain, H and Dahlberg, A., 2010:281).

In order to understand the importance of language in school education, for all subjects and across the whole curriculum, we have to identify and summarise the basic tenets on which LAC rests. These are (cf. Corson 1990, 74):

- i. Language *develops* mainly through its purposeful use (domains to be broadened)
- ii. Learning (often) *involves* talking, writing, shaping and moving (normally in reaction to perceptions)
- iii. Learning often *occurs* through speaking or writing as much as through shaping and moving
- iv. Language use *contributes to /is* a pre-requisite for cognitive development
- v. Language is the *medium* for reflecting on learning, for improving it, for becoming (more or less) autonomous as learners.

Therefore the goals of LAC are – in simple terms - to support language development in each and every child, in all domains of language use, in each learning activity in school, and to give children feedback about their progress (through appropriate assessment and evaluation). LAC is no longer narrowly seen as the exclusive domain of L1/LS education nor is it confined solely to the conventional four modes of language: Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking; all non-verbal means of representation and expression are rightly seen as part of the overall semiotic systems that we have at hand and that we use when communicating. The

whole scope of semiotics comes into focus including images or graphs, movements and, generally speaking, all visual forms of representation and expression (cf. Corson 1990: 72). Thus, we can distinguish eight modes of human activities involving language, namely:

- Listening: comprehending oral input/intake
- Speaking: constructing meaningful utterances
- Reading: understanding written texts
- Writing: producing written texts/coherent discourse
- Viewing: attending to visual signs/information
- Shaping: using visual means of expression
- Watching: attending to physical movements
- Moving: using the whole body, the whole person for self-expression.

The concept of LAC also claims that language and learning as well as language and thinking are deeply linked. Therefore, wishing to acknowledge and further develop childrens' existing mental and linguistic capacities, LAC focuses on active, constructive, potentially autonomous learning (more than on teaching):

"Language plays a central role in learning. No matter what the subject area, students assimilate new concepts largely through language, that is when they listen to and talk, read and write about what they are learning and relate this to what they already know. Through speaking and writing, language is linked to the thinking process and is a manifestation of the thinking that is taking place. Thus, by explaining and expressing personal interpretations of new learnings in the various subject fields, students clarify and increase both their knowledge of the concepts in those fields and their understanding of the ways in which language is used in each." (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1984; quoted in Corson 1990, 75)

Consequently, all teachers are encouraged to participate in developing language skills and competences within their fields of responsibility and thus contribute to a school learning policy as a whole. In summary one can state the following beliefs:

- Language is more than communication skills
- Language is also linked to the thinking process
- Language is a tool for conceptualising, for thinking, for networking
- Language supports mental activity and cognitive precision
- Language for academic purposes helps to express thoughts more clearly (this is especially true for writing)
- Language helps to structure discourse and practise discourse functions

#### Language across curriculum approach

An LAC approach is one that integrates language learning and content learning. Language cannot be effectively learnt without a context. Language and content are closely interrelated. In fact, content subjects provide a context for language while effective language development facilitates the learning of content subjects. It is therefore necessary to integrate language and content. English teachers introduce and teach the skills, reinforcing them from time to time in English lessons. Content subject teachers re-teach those skills or introduce related skills/concepts in their lesson, integrating language and content.

#### Example:

The idea of suffixes has been introduced in English lessons. The History teacher can introduce the new suffix '-ism' and give examples such as 'communism' or 'colonialism', or consolidate familiar suffixes, like 'ion' in 'rebellion'. It is important for English teachers and content subject teachers to each know what the other is doing. For instance, the English teacher can teach students how to do a vocabulary log. The content subject teachers then ask students to keep a vocabulary log for their own subject. The English teacher can collect the vocabulary logs and check from time to time to make sure that students are on the right track. As every subject has to contribute to the language development of students, a balance between an emphasis on English and an emphasis on content is recommended. Since more time and effort

has to be spent on the development of students' language proficiency, the subject content may have to be reduced, especially at the initial stages. LAC aims to facilitate the use of languages in a variety of meaningful contexts and to motivate and reward students for using their multilingual skills in every class they take at each level in the university curriculum, thus preparing them for the cross-cultural and multilingual demands and opportunities of a global society (Consortium for Languages Across the Curriculum, 1996). LAC also draws upon the content-based language instruction movement of the 1990s (Brinton, Snow, & Wesche, 1989; Krueger & Ryan, 1993). Instruction that emphasizes purposeful comprehension and communicative production yields superior receptive and expressive accuracy, complexity, and fluency. In brief, students who learn language for a purpose learn it better.

#### LAC challenges and opportunities in India

- **LAC Learning Materials.** The identification and preparation of materials for use by LAC-participating students typically take considerable time and effort. Unless participants have a very high level of proficiency, they usually need background materials or specific references to other assigned course materials in order to understand the context in which the assigned material was created and how to apply course-specific ideas to it. At a minimum, they need a set of study questions and a brief glossary to help them deal effectively with the material. To the students and teachers in India LAC is still a new approach and still at the 'knowing' stage.
- **Faculty Roles.** Because of the long-standing separation of the study and use of languages from the rest of the postsecondary curriculum, LAC makes unfamiliar demands on departments and on individual faculty (Straight & Fichera in Shoenberg & Turlington, 1998). Non-language faculty may fear that the educational purposes of their courses will suffer with the addition of an LAC component. Language faculty may fear that the inculcation of high-level language skills will suffer when LAC puts languages into the service of specialized study outside of the literary, cultural, and linguistic domains long associated with languages in the general-education and language-specialist curricula. In India a coordination between teachers is required to develop LAC ability.
- **Student Motivation.** It seldom fulfills any general-education or major requirement, and it bears no widely trumpeted connection to career opportunities.
- **Curricular Placement.** The requirement-filling value of LAC arguably depends upon the emergence of new curricular components in which LAC plays an integral component. Similarly, career planning and placement offices could highlight careers in which high-level bilinguality would open up exciting employment opportunities.

#### Conclusion

Language is a major tool for a child to decode the world around her, it is also a tool for her to learn about the world. For a child, a language is not limited to the domain of social interaction, it is also a resource for her thinking and reasoning. Therefore, do not make the child a victim of the compartmentalization of the curriculum, design the curriculum in such a way that the cognitive development and the linguistic development of the child go hand in hand. All the teachers are equally responsible for presenting the language with its panoramic view before the inquisitive mind of the child. Language across curriculum has to be given due importance through different meaningful activities and it should develop as a natural habit in the schools.

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