

## LANGUAGE EDUCATION: THE FINER INTEGRATING LINK FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

By

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### Abstract

*Language, be it mother tongue or any other language, is the medium of expression of one's own inner, hidden and unuttered feelings, emotions, thoughts, likes and dislikes, interests, opinions, views, predilections, etc. Language education is quite neglected in India, because let alone students at different levels, even teachers are not quite articulate, eloquent and also conscious for developing the much-needed spirit for language teaching-learning due to grave inadequacies in faculty and infrastructure facilities in schools and training institutions. However, properly cultivated language education can serve as the finer integrating link for inclusive education, thereby eliminating the linguistic, inter-communicative and interpersonal hurdles on the path of the latter. Inner thoughts become creative, ameliorative and curative through transmissions of thought vibrations and waves on the part of those who develop linguistic abilities that enable the learner(s) and teacher(s) to be perceptive, inclusive and receptive and inspiring them to accept the "otherness of the others" in a sacred thread of interpenetrating, integrating and proactive social bond in home, school and work atmospheres.*

**Keywords:** *language education, teaching-learning, inner thoughts, creative, ameliorative and curative, transmissions of thought vibrations and waves; linguistic abilities; interpenetrating, integrating and proactive social bond; inclusive education; home, school and work atmosphere.*

### Introduction

Today, we live in a data-driven world and are prone to measure everything in mean value according to the central tendency. Many countries of the world are showing their achievements of many of the Millennium Development

Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA) targets in mean or average values. This is not at all the complete picture but only the good, glass half-full picture because many of these achievements have been the result of increases measured in nationally aggregated means or averages (for

example, in school enrolment, sex-ratio, child survival, etc.). But these achievements have really camouflaged the sharply *increased disparities within* nations (glass half-empty picture) by gender, ability, intelligence (above-average-below), location (rural-urban-remote), socio-economic status (lower versus upper quintile) and ethnic/linguistic status (dominant/majority versus non-dominant/minority). Thus, the world, along with the marginalized and disempowered ones is becoming both less inclusive and less sustainable, as many socio-economic, demographic and environmental trends are moving in the wrong direction. "The world's "now" is becoming ever less inclusive and its "then" ever less likely to be sustainable"(Sheldon Shaeffer, 2013). It is, therefore, essential and high time to address the reasons for these trends and to do the needful to fill the (half-empty) glass. Here, language and language education have an essential and timely role to play to fill the glass by making the world's "now" and "then" *inclusive* as well as *sustainable*.

Stainback (2005) considers 'inclusive education' as the process of allowing all children the opportunity to fully participate in regular classroom activities regardless of disabilities, race

or other characteristics. This shows that education policies that directly or indirectly narrow or bar the chances for certain citizens to acquire knowledge and skills provided in schools due to their racial, gender, religious, socio-economic, regional, or ethnic background are a disaster to education and human empowerment. Osokoya (2007) sees inclusive education as the provision of educational services for students with disabilities in schools where non-handicapped peers attend. Certainly, Osokoya's views that the provision of educational services to the disabled only, and in the presence of the normal learners is, itself, discriminatory and non-inclusive as normal learners too stand to benefit from educational services provided in schools. In a related perspective, Ajuwon (2012) reports that inclusive educators contend that special classes, separate schooling or other forms of removing children with disabilities from the regular environment should occur only when the nature or severity of disability of the learner is such that education in regular class cannot be accomplished.

Teachers have the responsibility to identify and address the "barriers" in their education system or school that

may prevent learners from accessing education, participating in the learning process and making achievements to the best of their individual abilities (UNESCO, 2013). Such barriers may include negative parental, family or community attitude towards girl-child education. Similarly, if a teacher has negative attitude about the potential of learners with learning disabilities/difficulties such as visual and/or hearing impairment, that teacher may not make efforts to include learners with such challenges in classroom activities.

Furthermore, barriers to education are often linked to wider structural and cyclical inequalities in the society (Mansur Saleh Kiyawa, 2015). For example, members of a poor family may not have access to qualitative education which, in turn, minimizes their chances to power and status in the society. In the light of this background, administrators and teachers in the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme shoulder the responsibility to address the various barriers to inclusive education. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2013: 5) observes that addressing barriers to inclusive

education requires a systematic and far-reaching approach.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural organization (UNESCO, 2013) has published certain important concepts used in the language of the curriculum and education. The significance of the choice of language is based on the fact that certain language and terminology used in the past didn't recognize the inherently exclusive nature of the concepts and words. While there has been a certain apparent shift to a more inclusive language, the world is still trying to learn from the process, and it seems as if more still has to be done in this regard. The question on the use of concepts "disability" and "special needs" raises many debates in the field of inclusive education. So, Mr. Narendra Modi, the Prime Minister of India, has chosen a better and more dignified Hindi/Sanskrit word/concept "*Divyanga*" [*Divya* (divine) + *Anga* (organ)] for "disability" and "disabled" or "persons with disability" (PWD) or "differently-abled-person". And it is now being circulated and accepted by all educational institutions and educators in India.

The implementation of 'inclusive education' focuses not only on changing pedagogical methods,

curriculum delivery, and schools' infrastructure (Ainscow, 2005) but also on how things are said and how language and terminology have to be used to change to include these transformations. The implementation of 'inclusive education' is globally driven by ideals that inclusion of students with diverse abilities and needs is a human right and a necessity to make education accessible to all (Slee, 2018). "The concept of disability is a social construct and its use is inherently exclusive, as it presupposes that people with a disability lack an ability" (Makoelle, 2015). Therefore, Tsediso Michael Makoelle suggested that the concept "differently abled" would be more appropriate to accommodate the diversity of 'ability' rather than 'disability'. Makoelle further indicated that the concept "special needs", which is used to classify certain students could also be problematic as all needs of the students in the classroom should be deemed "special". The debate about the appropriateness of language and terminology in the field of inclusive education remains *a bone of contention* for global conversation. As all countries and regions of the world have unique contexts and backgrounds dictating the direction of the debate, it is important to put the debate into

perspective, given the diversity of the contexts."

Foreign language teaching requires a dedicated catering for the needs of a diverse classroom comprised of individuals with a wide variety of skills, interests, intelligences, level of command of the language, attitudes to learning, family and ethnic background, culture, etc. (Blagovesta Troeva, 2016). Blagovesta Troeva is of the view that with the international call and legal requirements for inclusive education, however, an increasing number of students with special educational needs (SEN) are enrolled in mainstream schools. This is a relatively new phenomenon as until the late 20th century a large number of differently-abled students were mostly educated in segregated settings by special educational teachers.

Lewis and Bagree (2013) emphasize, "There is a global shortage of teachers, particularly of teachers who are sufficiently trained and motivated to include children with disabilities (and children from other marginalised groups) in regular schools'. While lack of training is often teachers' legitimate reason for their frequently expressed reluctance to teach learners with disabilities, it is the teachers' own awareness of the right of all individuals

to quality inclusive education that builds the foundation for inclusive education to take place.

B. Lindquist in 1999 noted that there is a 'dramatic difference in the educational opportunities provided for disabled children and those provided for non-disabled children' (Rieser, 2012, p. 311). Inclusion in mainstream schools was furthermore advanced by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006). Its article 24 endorses *inclusive, quality and free* primary & secondary education, reasonable accommodations, and support within the general education system. Inclusive preschool education has also been endorsed, however, Gupta et al. show that "programs have a long way to go in fully including young children with disabilities" (2014, p. 36).

In fact, in education, on the one hand language plays an important role as it cuts across curriculum and is basic to teaching learning process. On the other hand, in India, language also creates social differences and hierarchies, whereas inclusive education is about embracing all. So, it is quite relevant and timely in this paper to discuss the theme of importance of language and inclusive education.

## **Concept & Definitions of Language**

"Definitions and terms are important, especially in a contested field such as language education, not least, because they index the social status of languages and speech communities" (Skutnabb-Kangas & McCarty, 2008; Wiley, 2001).

## **Concept of Language**

Language is a science, and the term 'language' denotes a systematic means of communicating by the use of sounds or conventional symbols; it refers to the cognitive processes involved in producing and understanding linguistic communication; it is the medium of expression which expresses the power of mental faculty or power of speech or vocal communication as it expresses one's own inner, hidden and unuttered feelings, emotions, thoughts, ideas, likes and dislikes, interests, opinions, views, predilections, experiences, realizations, etc., and through it one also understands the same of others. Man is a social being and has inbuilt linguistic potential as a unique gift and possession given to him by the INCORPOREAL GOD FATHER. Language gets socio-culturally constructed and changes in our day-to-day interactions. He communicates

with others through language, which is the most distinctive human activity that distinguishes the linguistic and rational man from the un-linguistic and instinctive animals and birds whose communications have remained instinctive.

Language helps in developing one's personality, preserving and propagating one's culture and civilization. Language gives rise to society and society reshapes and remodels 'language' according to its needs and desires. Language is verbal as well as non-verbal.

According to R. N. Koley (2012), "The word 'language' simply denotes the method of human communication either spoken or written, consisting of the use of words in a structured and conventional way. It incorporates the vocabulary, rules for writing schemes or algorithms, a system of symbols, phraseology of a particular ethnic group. Thereby language determines the in-group and out-group among multi-language groups as a device of identity." *Dialect*, which is a regional form of a language spoken with regional variation of accents, pronunciation, and intonation, and *register*, which refers to a characteristic group of words

commonly spoken a particular class of professional people, give such identity.

### **Definitions of Language**

Linguists have defined language differently as follows:

Bloch and Trager stated, "A language is a system of arbitrary symbols by means of which a social group cooperates." Sweet stated, "Language is expression of ideas by means of which speech sounds are combined into words, words are combined into sentences and combinations of sentences gives answering to ideas and thoughts." O Jespersen defined language as "a set of human habits, the purpose of which is to give expression to thoughts and feelings." In the words of Edward Sapir, "Language is a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols."

The above definitions show that language and society, (along with people, their culture and literature), have a flesh-blood relationship, and language affects the society, people, values, lifestyle and their culture and literature in such a manner that the impact and impressions of their thoughts and opinions are revealed

in the broad framework of culture and literature of contemporary time that meticulously mirrors the then society.

### **Nature of Language**

A language has its linguistic principles which displays and explains its special characteristic nature, which are required for the desired results of language.

*Language is a system of systems:* Language is a complex system like that of the human body. Just as the human body is a complex interlinked and interconnected system of various organic systems like respiratory system and circulatory systems that functions through organs like lungs and heart, likewise the system of language functions through its constituents, e.g., the sounds, structures, words/vocabulary and meanings.

*Language is a skill subject and is learned:* Just as skills like dancing, singing, swimming are learned, a language, along with skills of listening, reading, speaking and writing, is also learned with efforts because it does not come naturally or automatically. The child picks up the language (the mother tongue) and gets the linguistic ability by listening initially to the utterances of parents and

relatives in family and society in their association; but he cannot do this if he is isolated or kept and brought up in the company of the deaf. Listening and reading are the receptive skills whereas speaking and writing are the productive skills of language. "Language involves a complex of sub-skills and it is in this complexity that language learning differs from other skills like dancing and singing. Whereas most other skills involve but a part of human being, the use of language calls for contribution of the whole personality" (Mowla, 2005).

*Language is a system of symbols:* Symbols being words stand for or represent things, objects, events, place, persons, etc. The word 'girl' is not a girl; it stands for a girl. Language functions best only when the speakers, listeners, readers and writers know the symbols.

*Symbols of language are arbitrary:* There is no necessary visual relationship between a particular symbol and the thing or object, event, place, person for which it stands or represents.. It is a matter of convention for language use, and once the convention is set the user follows and obeys without breaking it.

*Language is for communication:* Language functions as social behaviour as the community uses it to express and communicate thoughts and feelings, inform others or give directions. It also gives aesthetic satisfaction through creative pursuits and their expression and communication through various forms of literature. But all *these communications* should be accurate and intelligible to others when language is used correctly with good understanding of language, accurate pronunciation, proper stress, tone and intonation, etc.

*Language is related to culture:* Language is deeply and intimately related to society and culture in which it exists as it is a product of socio-cultural context and construction, and acquires its meaning from such context. The society and culture shape, reshape and remodel language according to needs and demands, socio-cultural growth and development.

*Language is unique:* Each language is *unique* as it has its own specialties in its own phonology (sound/phonetics), syntax (grammatical structure), morphology (words/vocabulary ) and semantics (word meanings), and has

its own style of functioning, and also differs from those of other languages.

*Language is ever changing:* Language is never static but is dynamic as it keeps changing during the passage of time as per the needs and demands and new discovery, new coinage, etc. Changes take place in all aspects of language, e.g., in words, sounds, structures, and meanings.

### **Need, Importance and Functions of Language in Human Life and Inclusive Education:**

*Language is linked with one's culture:* It is a product of socio-cultural context and construction, and acquires its meaning from such context.

*Importance of mother tongue (L1):* Proficiency in L1 is used as a foundation for learning a regional, national or international language based on the principle that children learn more easily in a language they already control.

*Language - the finer integrating link for inclusive education:* Properly cultivated language education can serve as the finer integrating link for inclusive education, thereby eliminating the linguistic, inter-communicative and interpersonal hurdles on the path of latter.

*Inner thoughts of linguistic developed people become creative, ameliorative and curative:* Inner thoughts become creative, ameliorative and curative through transmissions of thought vibrations and waves on the part of those who develop linguistic abilities that enable the learner(s) and teacher(s) to be perceptive, inclusive and receptive and inspiring them to accept the "otherness of the others" in a sacred thread of interpenetrating, integrating and proactive social bond in home, school and work atmospheres.

*Linguistic ability is eternal:* It is potentially and eternally in every human soul, and this ability never dies even after man's death because the ability lies in the immortal soul or consciousness that never dies but not in the outer body that dies.

*Language has a perceptive and persuasive role:* Linguistic ability enables the learner(s) and teacher(s) to be perceptive, inclusive and receptive and inspiring them to accept the "otherness of the others"

*Language helps and facilitates in implementing the Jacques Delores' four pillars of education: Learning to know, Learning to do, Learning to be, and Learning to live together:*

*Language develops intimate and integrating socio-personal relationship:* It thereby harnesses people in a sacred thread of interpenetrating, integrating and proactive social bond in home, school and work atmospheres and inspiring and attracting them 'to live together'.

*Love of Language and loquacity makes one inclusive and makes inclusive education possible:* Lovers and good speakers of language create an attractive and magnetic ambience and aura among their surroundings bringing people in their midst.

*Language is for development:* "Languages are living things; they need to develop, thrive, and be used effectively, including in education ...to benefit from development."

*"Education is that which liberates (Sa Vidya Ya Vimuktaye).":* Language makes education possible. True education liberates man, nations and the world from ignorance, sins and vices, taking from wrong to right path. "For an education system to be truly liberatory, it must deal with issues of domination, and must attempt to right some wrongs" (Ghosh, 2011).

## Functions of Language

Language effectively plays its influential transforming role in society through functions *expressive function, informative function, directive function, interactive function, communicative function, evolutionary function, preservative function.*

## Language Education in India

### *The Indian Language Scene:*

While in some countries language problem is almost non-existent, it exists in India because of its multi-linguistic nature where Hindi being the national language, people in different states speak their own language /mother tongues (MT) as everybody likes the his/her own MT/local/ language. While the interest of national language Hindi cannot be sacrificed, due to the presence many social and linguistic groups some people do not like or are not ready to accept Hindi. This gave rise to language problem which needed proper handling with due care and concern for its solution.

### *The Three Language Formula:*

English was the medium of instruction in secondary and higher education prior to independence and

immediately after it. But, gradually, the medium of instruction at all levels was changed from English to mother tongue or regional languages, and the problem of medium of instruction was solved officially at government level through the three language formula. The Central Advisory Board of Education had designed the three language formula in 1956 and recommended it for school education, which was later endorsed by the Chief Ministers' Conference in 1961. This formula, now followed in India, requires every child to study three languages: (i). Mother Tongue or Home Language (MT or HL) or regional language, known as L1; (ii). English, known as L2; and (iii). Hindi (known as L3) for non-Hindi speaking states or any Modern Indian Language (MIL), known as L3 for Hindi speaking states. Thus, if MT is Urdu, the child has to study Urdu, English and Hindi; or if MT is Hindi, the child has to study Hindi, English and one of the Modern Indian Languages (MIL).

But the hard fact of ground reality is that during last two decades a large number of English medium schools have cropped up, and due to the increasing demand for the Government more such schools are being opened not only in city areas

but also in rural areas as well, thereby leaving its impact on Government schools as a result of which some state Governments have already announced introducing Government from class I/first standard, and some others are considering the same. In fact, some states Governments have practically done the same, thereby making one and all to study English during the early stage of schooling period.

*“Bilingualism or multilingualism is the use of more than one language in daily life”*(UNESCO, 2003: 12), but it is also the purposeful use of two or more languages in educational policy and practice. With the three language formula, India is said to have Mother tongue-based bi/multilingual education, which is concerned with providing early instruction “in a language children will understand and then [adding] L2 for wider communication” (Dutcher, 2003, p. 4).

Again with the three language formula and introduction of English from class I/first standard, Multilingual Education (MLE) seem to have already started in India. "Formal use of more than two languages for literacy and instruction" (UNESCO, 2003a) MLE begins with developing L1 and gradually adding

other languages. Countries like India with multiple regional languages of wider communication (LWC) or more than one official language (India has Hindi & English as two official languages) may support *multilingual education* that includes children's mother tongues and the more widely spoken languages of the nation. Bilingual education and multilingual education refer to issues in language policy and/or to certain models or methodologies that are put in place to *make education more equitable and inclusive*.

Cummin's (1984) operational definition of 'cognitive academic language proficiency' (CALP) clarifies that 'learning a language' means being able to speak, read, and write fluently on academic (or complex) topics. UNESCO (2003a, 2008a) emphasizes 'the central role of mother tongue instruction in achieving quality Education for All' and cites research substantiating the fact that 'use of L1 is crucial to effective learning in school'. Again, UNESCO (2003a) has also 'a stated commitment' for using "multilingual education" to support full participation in the regional, national, and global economies and social worlds.

### ***Problems of Language Education in India***

Language Education is quite neglected in India: Imparting of language education should take place in proper atmosphere, but in India such atmosphere is utterly lacking as there are no language lab, no audio-visual aids, no expert language teachers, no comprehensive language syllabus, no language classrooms with proper linguistic atmospheres, etc. There is also need of proper cultivation of language as it is a skill subject: Language cannot be taught and caught overnight; it is a patient, time-taking process. There is also the need of talented language teacher - a patient nurturer who nourishes and motivates like a mother: it is a patient, time-taking process needing the care and nurture of effective and skilful language teachers.

There are also certain practical obstacles like too many languages, no orthographies (alphabetic script or writing), no teachers, no texts, and no funds.

### **Inclusive Education**

*Concept of inclusive education:*

*Inclusive education* means that all children, regardless of their ability

level, are included in a mainstream classroom, or in the most appropriate or least restrictive environment (LRE), that students of all ability levels are taught as equals, and that teachers must adjust their curriculum and teaching methodologies so that all students equally benefit. This also avoids wasting resources, and "shattered hopes," which often occurs in classrooms that are "one size fits all" (Kohama, 2012). It is "a process of strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to all learners," and "involves restructuring the culture, policies and practices in school so that they can respond to the diversity of students in their locality." A school can be truly *inclusive*, if the attitudes of everyone in the school, including administrators, teachers, and other students, become positive towards students with disabilities without any inkling and iota of discrimination.

"Regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all, moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and

ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system" (The Salamanca Statement and Framework of Action on Special Needs Education).

10% of the world's population lives with a disability, and 80% of them live in developing countries. Among the services available for them, education is very important, and the quality of services differs widely between developed and developing countries. Since the UN Convention on People with Disabilities, the International Community is becoming increasingly aware of the different models of special education.

### **'Inclusion' in Indian Context**

The evidences of *inclusive education* were perceptible in "Gurukula" system of education that existed in India for centuries before British rule. This system was "sensitive to the unique cultural, social, and economic needs of the students and their families and imparted life skills education recognizing the potential within each student." The Gurukula system ended as a result of British rule, and much of the education system in India was, and still is, "British style" with few special education services due to its inflexible nature. Macaulay's "Minute on Education, nicknamed the "Minute of

Macaulay," changed Indian education from traditional, "gurukula system," to British style education which aimed to create a "class of Indians...English in taste, in opinion, in morals and in intellect." The Minute which denounced Indian literature stated, "The entire native literature of India and Arabia" was not worth "a single shelf of a good European library." It had no mention regarding people with disabilities (PWD) because they often were not educated during this time period, and were not considered good enough to be moulded into British-style Indians.

After independence in 1947, from the constitution to the Kothari Commission in the early days of the republic, to the 2005 Action Plan for Children and Youth with Disabilities and the 2006 National Policy for People with Disabilities recently, the Indian government Policies have always moved towards inclusion but are not perfectly inclusive as they tend to discriminate against people with "severe" disabilities, or people with intellectual disabilities, especially in terms of mainstream versus special schooling. However, though the policies governing the education system are inclusive, the haunting problem lies with implementation, as

the implementation efforts have not resulted in an inclusive system of education, nor have they reached their goal of “education for all” across the country. India needs to bridge the gaps in her education system to build a strong system of inclusive education in India.

### **Role of Language in Inclusive Education**

Optimal development refers to children’s ability to acquire culturally relevant skills, language, and behaviours that allow them to function effectively in their current context and to adapt successfully to change (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

Language is the key to inclusion. Language is at the centre of human activity, self-expression and identity. Recognizing the primary importance that people place on their own language fosters the kind of true participation in development that achieves lasting results (Conference on “Language, Education and the Millennium Development Goals” was held in Bangkok, Thailand, from 9 to 11 November 2010). The conference particularly reflected evidences of how early education in the mother tongue improves the lives of children and their communities. The participants showed their conviction that language is a vital

tool for the achievement of the MDGs, and they reported how initiatives that promote local languages are making a real difference to people’s lives across the world. “Bringing their languages and cultures into the classroom is thus an important way to make education more inclusive and equitable (Benson and Kosonen, 2013) in particular and also to make society and world more inclusive, adjustable and sustainable in general.

Education, especially language education, has a vital and predominant role to rejuvenate and revitalize language and make it living and dynamic. In this way, language and education are complementary to, and inclusive, of each other. Language makes education (learning) possible, and education makes and/or keeps language living and saves it from dying out by being unused. But linguistic diversity, like cultural diversity and biological diversity, is under serious threat around the world, and unless education successfully plays its transforming, liberating and revitalizing role a large percentage of the several thousand languages currently spoken throughout the world is likely to die by the fag-end of the current century. The alarm for Indian linguists, policy makers, curriculum

framers, language teachers, government and language speakers is that many Indian tribal and ethno-centric languages are within the bracket of the threatened languages.

In fact, in education, on the one hand language plays an important role as it cuts across curriculum and is basic to teaching learning process. On the other hand, in India, language also creates social differences and hierarchies, whereas inclusive education is about embracing all.

Inclusive education requires the positive attitudes of many stakeholders who belong to different castes, colours, languages, religions, creeds, sexes, places of birth, etc. , but they need to develop spiritual consciousness through Rajayoga for creating self-identity for all children, especially for children with special needs (CWSN) in inclusive education.

## **Conclusion**

Language has a transforming and persuasive role to make it inclusive and meaningful in the sense it harnesses people of all variety in a sacred thread of immortal self-identity and self-relationship. It is said that God creates the first sound "OM" in the task of Creation.

When the post-2015 development and current agenda are giving more importance to socio-economic and environmental sustainability, especially climate change, thereby relegating language and culture to the background giving them lesser importance, the role and importance of language for making education inclusive and making people and society inclusive and sociable in a peaceful co-existence in a disintegrating world should be understood. "A dynamic, living language, in other words, is essential to the wellbeing and sustainability of any human society" (Benson and Kosonen, 2013).

There is also the imperative need to explore "current issues of language(s), culture(s) and power in education," to understand the "complex interplay between language policies and practices in education and the broader socio-political and economic forces that shape society as a whole," to recognize "the intimate connection of language and culture," to give adequate attention to "the language part of multilingual education" in any inclusive setting for incorporating "learners' languages in their educational experience".

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