

MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION IN SECONDARY TEACHER EDUCATION IN PUNJAB: A CRITICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Education is the cornerstone of societal progress, driving overall development. Consequently, every society establishes a school system to educate its children according to its socio-economic framework. Typically, school education is divided into three stages: primary, secondary, and higher secondary. To maintain high educational standards, teachers undergo professional training through teacher education programs. In India, these programs are regulated by the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE), directly impacting the quality of school education. Each stage of schooling plays a vital role in student development. The primary level focuses on building foundational skills in reading, writing, and arithmetic. At the secondary stage, subjects such as mathematics, science, social sciences, and languages are explored in greater depth to enhance students' knowledge, skills, critical thinking, conceptual clarity, and linguistic abilities. The effectiveness of higher education largely depends on the competencies developed during secondary education. Students select a language of instruction for subjects like science and mathematics, and their comprehension relies on their proficiency in that language. Equally important is the teacher's fluency in the same language to facilitate effective teaching and learning. To improve secondary education, enhancing teacher training programs is crucial. Previously, India offered a one-year secondary teacher education program, which was extended to two years in 2014, followed by the introduction of a Five-Year Integrated Program (FYIP). These programs cover subjects such as philosophy, psychology, pedagogy, and teaching methodologies. While philosophy defines knowledge and values, psychology helps teachers understand students' cognitive and social development. Pedagogical training equips educators with effective teaching strategies. However, many trainee teachers do not receive instruction in their native language or chosen medium of instruction, leading to difficulties in understanding key concepts. Additionally, many professors use a different language or a mixed-language approach, such as English and Punjabi or Hindi and English, creating a barrier to comprehension. Studies suggest that the quality of teacher education significantly influences the performance of secondary teachers. Furthermore, the appropriate use of language by teacher educators plays a crucial role in ensuring the effectiveness of training programs. This study gathered perspectives from 200 teacher trainees and 50 teacher educators through open-ended interview questions. Their responses were analyzed using content analysis to gain deeper insights into their experiences and viewpoints.

Key Words: Medium of Instruction, Secondary Teacher Education.

INTRODUCTION:

Teacher education encompasses policies and practices designed to equip educators with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for effective classroom management and broader educational contributions. It plays a critical role in ensuring high-quality education, fostering student success, and addressing societal challenges.

Teacher education enhances teaching competence by providing subject-specific knowledge and effective pedagogical strategies, enabling educators to meet the needs of diverse learners (Darling-

Hammond, 2006). It also promotes lifelong learning, encouraging educators to pursue continuous professional development and adapt to advancements in educational methods and technologies (Shulman, 1987).

The influence of teacher education on student outcomes is substantial. Research demonstrates a direct correlation between teacher quality and student achievement, emphasizing the necessity of formal pedagogical training (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2010). Furthermore, teacher education fosters inclusivity by preparing educators to address the complexities of diverse classrooms while acknowledging and respecting cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic differences (Banks & Banks, 2016).

Teacher education programs also prioritize ethics, reflective practice, and professionalism, shaping educators committed to integrity and critical thinking (Korthagen, 2004). Additionally, they foster innovation by integrating technology and creative teaching methods, ensuring that education systems remain dynamic and future-oriented (Mishra & Koehler, 2006).

Secondary teacher education is critical for preparing educators with comprehensive subject knowledge and effective pedagogical skills, enabling them to engage students and enhance academic performance (Darling-Hammond, 2006). These programs emphasize fostering critical thinking, equipping teachers to develop students' analytical and problem-solving abilities, which are essential for higher education and career readiness (Shulman, 1987). Beyond academics, teacher education addresses students' emotional, social, and moral development, providing vital support during their formative adolescent years (Pianta, 2016).

By modeling continuous learning, well-trained secondary educators inspire students to embrace lifelong learning and adapt to dynamic educational trends (Valli & Buese, 2007). Additionally, secondary teacher education ensures educators are equipped to address diverse cultural, linguistic, and learning needs, promoting equity and inclusivity in classrooms (Banks & Banks, 2016).

Secondary education plays a pivotal role in developing a skilled workforce and informed citizens capable of addressing societal and economic challenges. Teachers who receive appropriate training contribute significantly to national development by shaping the next generation (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2012). Therefore, comprehensive secondary teacher education programs are fundamental to achieving academic success, fostering personal growth, and advancing societal progress.

The medium of instruction in secondary teacher education refers to the language or method used to deliver training to aspiring teachers. It plays a significant role in shaping the effectiveness of teacher education programs and the competencies of educators, with both positive and negative impacts on the learning process.

Instruction in educators' native or regional language enhances comprehension and retention of concepts, making the learning process more effective and accessible (Brock-Utne, 2007). A culturally relevant medium helps teachers connect with the communities they serve, enabling them to address diverse student needs effectively (Canagarajah, 2005). Additionally, using a shared language between teachers and students improves communication, reduces barriers, and facilitates learning (Cummins, 2000). English as a medium of instruction also provides global competence, allowing access to international resources and best practices, which prepares educators to meet global educational standards (Crystal, 2003).

Using a non-native medium, such as English in non-English-speaking regions, can hinder comprehension of complex concepts and reduce training effectiveness (Brock-Utne, 2007). A foreign language may lead to cultural disconnect, limiting teachers' ability to address local needs (Canagarajah, 2005). Teachers from disadvantaged backgrounds may struggle with a second language,

exacerbating educational inequities (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). Overemphasizing English can also marginalize indigenous languages, potentially eroding cultural diversity in education (Phillipson, 1992).

In conclusion, balancing local relevance with global competence is crucial for optimizing the medium of instruction's effectiveness and equity in secondary teacher education.

In India, secondary teacher education is delivered in either English or regional languages, depending on the educational institution or state. English is commonly preferred in urban areas and prestigious institutions due to its association with better career prospects and access to global resources. In contrast, regional languages are emphasized in rural areas and specific regional states to meet the needs of local student populations (Govinda & Bandyopadhyay, 2011). Training in native or regional languages is believed to enhance comprehension, retention, and overall effectiveness in the classroom. This is especially crucial in rural areas, where teachers can establish better connections with students who speak the same language. Research indicates that native language instruction improves classroom management and deepens understanding of educational concepts (Brock-Utne, 2007).

While regional language instruction offers advantages, there is a growing shift toward English as the medium of instruction in teacher education programs across India. English is seen as crucial for global competitiveness, job opportunities, and access to international resources, making English-medium programs more prestigious (Mishra, 2019).

However, this shift presents challenges, particularly for teachers from rural or disadvantaged backgrounds with limited English proficiency, leading to comprehension difficulties and widening educational inequities (Brock-Utne, 2007). To promote equity and inclusion, balancing English with regional languages is essential (Canagarajah, 2005).

In Punjab, a dual-language approach using both Punjabi and English in secondary teacher education reflects efforts to preserve linguistic heritage while embracing global trends.

Traditionally, Punjabi has been the primary medium of instruction in government schools and teacher training institutions, fostering cultural relevance and inclusivity. Using Punjabi helps educators connect deeply with local students, improving comprehension and retention of educational concepts, particularly in rural areas (Government of Punjab Education Department, 2020; Brock-Utne, 2007).

However, there is a growing emphasis on English-medium instruction. In 2018, the Punjab government introduced English in over 2,750 schools to enhance global opportunities and career prospects (Hindustan Times, 2018). This shift presents challenges, particularly for rural and underprivileged teachers who may struggle with English proficiency, exacerbating inequities in education (Mishra, 2019; Canagarajah, 2005).

A bilingual approach and targeted teacher training programs aim to balance cultural relevance with global competence (Indian Express, 2020).

Secondary teachers in Punjab face significant challenges regarding the dual-language medium of instruction, which uses both Punjabi and English. Linguistic barriers are prominent, as teachers from Punjabi-medium backgrounds struggle with English proficiency, limiting their effectiveness and confidence in English-medium classrooms (Mishra, 2019). Teachers from economically disadvantaged areas often lack access to quality English training, further exacerbating disparities between rural and urban educators (Canagarajah, 2005).

Cultural disconnect is another issue, as English instruction can alienate teachers from local contexts, hindering their ability to engage Punjabi-speaking students effectively (Brock-Utne, 2007).

Additionally, inadequate bilingual resources, such as textbooks and teaching aids, make teaching in both languages difficult (Indian Express, 2020). The dual-medium policy also increases teacher workload, causing stress and dissatisfaction due to the need to prepare lessons in both languages (Govinda & Bandyopadhyay, 2011).

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY:

Teacher education is crucial for improving teaching quality and shaping the educational system. The medium of instruction significantly impacts teacher trainees' learning experiences and professional development, influencing their understanding of pedagogical concepts and their ability to apply them in diverse classrooms. Whether taught in a mother tongue, regional language, or global language, the medium presents both advantages and challenges. Some trainees benefit, while others struggle with language barriers, cultural differences, and resource limitations.

This study explores students' experiences in teacher education, identifying strengths and challenges related to instructional language. It also examines difficulties faced by teacher educators, such as language proficiency gaps and communication barriers, offering recommendations to enhance teacher training programs.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS OF THE STUDY:

1. What are the views and experiences of secondary teacher trainees regarding the medium of instruction in teacher education?
2. What kind of problems are faced by teacher educators regarding the medium of instruction in secondary teacher trainee education?

METHOD AND PROCEDURE:

This study adopted a qualitative research approach, using purposive sampling to select participants. The sample consists of 200 student teachers and 50 teacher educators, who were selected based on specific criteria that aligned with the study's objectives.

To explore the views and experiences of both teacher educators and student teachers regarding the medium of teacher education, interview schedules were developed. For student teachers, the interview schedule addressed the following topics:

- The medium used in their previous classes
- The medium used in their teacher education program
- The teaching medium employed by teacher educators in the classroom
- The challenges faced when reading in a second language compared to their native language
- The availability and quality of reading materials in the language of instruction used in their teacher education program

For teacher educators, the interview schedule focused on:

- The medium of instruction used by the educators
- Issues arising in classrooms with students from multiple language backgrounds
- The difficulties encountered when teaching in a medium different from their own language of instruction

The interview schedules were developed with input from subject matter experts and language specialists to ensure validity and reliability.

The data collected were analyzed using content analysis and percentage analysis methods. Content analysis was used to identify common themes and patterns in the responses, while percentage analysis quantified the prevalence of particular views or experiences among the participants. This combination of methods provided a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and experiences associated with the medium of instruction in teacher education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

I. Response of the teacher trainees:

When asked whether the medium of instruction in their teacher education program matched that of their bachelor's degree, 90% of students confirmed consistency, while 10% reported a difference. Probyn (2009) highlights similar challenges in South Africa, where students struggle when transitioning to teacher education in a different language, leading to reduced engagement and confidence. Likewise, Crystal (2003) explores the global rise of English as a teaching medium, noting that students who previously studied in their native language often face difficulties, including alienation and lower academic performance. Canagarajah (2005) emphasizes the importance of linguistic continuity in education, as it enhances comprehension and learning outcomes. A shift in instructional language can create barriers such as unfamiliar terminology, reduced confidence, and limited access to resources (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). Maintaining alignment between instructional mediums is crucial for academic and professional success.

Another question explored whether students received their medium of education based on personal preference. Results showed that 70% of students believed their medium was chosen by their parents, while only 30% reported studying in their preferred medium. Research highlights that parental influence often drives such decisions, prioritizing societal or career benefits tied to certain languages, like English (Tollefson & Tsui, 2004). Misalignment with students' preferences can affect motivation, learning, and confidence (Cummins, 2001).

When asked about accessing reading materials for their teacher education, 63% of students reported difficulty obtaining such resources from libraries or markets, while 37% found them readily available. Research indicates that limited access to diverse and specialized educational materials can hinder learning, especially in teacher education programs (Altbach, 1998). Furthermore, insufficient resources, language barriers, and outdated collections in some regions can negatively affect students' academic progress (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions [IFLA], 2011).

When asked if their teacher uses the same language as their medium of instruction, 57% of students reported that the teacher does not, while 43% confirmed the language used by the teacher aligns with their medium. Research shows that mismatches between the teaching language and students' primary language can create learning barriers, particularly in multilingual settings (Cummins, 2001). Such discrepancies can affect comprehension and engagement, while aligning the teaching language with students' language proficiency promotes better learning outcomes (García, 2009).

Next asked about difficulties in understanding concepts taught through a medium of instruction in a language other than their own, 73% of students reported struggling, while 27% felt no challenges. Research shows that language barriers can hinder comprehension, especially when the medium is not the student's native language (Cummins, 2001). Higher proficiency in a second language may alleviate some difficulties (De Jong & Harper, 2005), and bilingual education strategies can enhance learning outcomes (Escamilla et al., 2014).

When asked if the medium of their question paper matches their medium of education, 95% of students confirmed alignment, while 5% reported a mismatch. Research underscores the importance of aligning assessment methods with the language of instruction to avoid cognitive overload and improve student performance, especially in multilingual contexts (García, 2009; Cummins, 2001).

Does the use of mixed language by teachers in the classroom facilitate or obstruct students' understanding of concepts? According to student responses, 51% believe it aids comprehension, while 49% felt it obstructs understanding. Research presents both perspectives. Crystal (2003) argues that bilingual or mixed language instruction improves comprehension, particularly for students from diverse linguistic backgrounds. In contrast, Brock-Utne (2007) and Canagarajah (2005) contend that the use of non-native languages can hinder understanding, especially when complex concepts are involved. Additionally, Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) warns that over-relying on mixed language teaching may exacerbate educational inequalities, particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Which language should be the medium of teacher education for effective concept comprehension? Responses to the above question indicate that 73% of students prefer their mother tongue, while 27% believe teacher education can be delivered in any language. Research supports mother tongue instruction, as it enhances cognitive development and understanding of complex concepts, particularly in multilingual contexts (Heugh, 2000). Bilingual education is beneficial, promoting cognitive flexibility and linguistic skills (García, 2009). Additionally, proficiency in a global language like English allows students to access broader educational resources and opportunities while preserving their native language (Fishman, 2001).

Teacher education faces several challenges related to the medium of instruction. A key issue is the lack of quality educational materials in students' first language, which hinders comprehension and engagement (Piller, 2016). Additionally, available resources are often substandard, further limiting understanding (Hawkins, 2010). Another difficulty arises from using a single language for diverse subjects like science and mathematics, which may not align with students' linguistic needs. Jhingran (2005) notes that subject-specific vocabulary in these disciplines can be difficult for students when taught in a second or foreign language. Moreover, in multilingual classrooms, teachers often rely on a single language, making it challenging for students from different linguistic backgrounds to fully grasp concepts. Cummins (2000) emphasizes that this approach can reduce cognitive engagement, as it fails to accommodate linguistic diversity. Addressing these issues requires improving instructional materials and adopting multilingual teaching strategies to enhance student learning.

II. Response of teacher educators:

The survey asked participants whether the medium of instruction for students in their college aligns with the medium they experienced during their own education. Results showed that 66% of teacher educators teach in the same medium of instruction they were taught in, while 34% reported teaching in a different medium. Research underscores the significance of alignment between instructional mediums and teaching effectiveness. Ferguson (2008) found that teaching in a familiar medium improves educators' confidence and enhances the clarity of concept delivery. Similarly, Brock-Utne and Alidou (2007) noted that inconsistencies in instructional mediums can create communication challenges and decrease teaching efficiency, highlighting the importance of linguistic continuity in teacher education.

Do you find it difficult to teach when students come from different language backgrounds? In response to the above question 65% of teacher educators find it challenging, while 35% do not experience difficulties. Research supports these views. García (2009) notes that linguistic barriers can affect comprehension, while Cummins (2000) suggests that teaching in a non-native language can create

academic challenges. Conversely, Baker (2011) argues that with proper training, educators can effectively teach multilingual classrooms. Piller (2016) emphasizes the need for inclusive teaching strategies to manage linguistic diversity, helping teachers navigate the challenges of teaching students from varying language backgrounds.

Is the language of instruction in your teacher education the same as the one you used during your secondary education? In response to this question, 87% of teacher educators answered "yes," indicating that the medium of instruction in their teacher education was the same as during their secondary education. However, 13% of teacher educators reported that the medium of instruction during their teacher education differed from the language used in their secondary education. Research supports these findings. According to Heugh (2000), consistent use of a language in both secondary and higher education helps in reducing cognitive load and enhances learning outcomes. García (2009) suggests that when students are taught in different languages at various educational levels, it can lead to confusion and hinder academic progress. Additionally, the work of Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) emphasizes the importance of continuity in language use across educational stages to support linguistic development and improve student retention.

Are you comfortable teaching in a language different from the one you were educated in? When asked this question, 71% of teacher educators reported discomfort, citing challenges in instruction. Conversely, 29% felt confident teaching in a different language without major difficulties. Research aligns with these findings. Lotherington (2017) highlights that teaching in an unfamiliar language can create communication barriers and lower student engagement. Téllez and Waxman (2006) found that teachers' confidence and proficiency in a second language significantly impact their effectiveness, with less proficient educators struggling in multilingual classrooms. However, Norton (2000) suggests that exposure to diverse linguistic environments helps teachers develop multilingual teaching skills. Additionally, Gándara and Hopkins (2010) emphasize the importance of professional development in overcoming language barriers, enabling educators to teach more effectively in a second language. These findings underscore the need for targeted training to enhance teachers' linguistic adaptability and instructional effectiveness.

Do you think the medium of student teachers affects the quality of teacher education? In response to this question, 74% of teacher educators believe that the medium of student teachers plays a significant role in determining the quality of secondary teacher education. However, 26% of teacher educators believe that the medium of instruction does not have an impact on the quality of secondary teacher education. Research supports these perspectives. According to Brock-Utne (2007), the medium of instruction in teacher education directly influences how well prospective teachers are able to engage with and understand pedagogical concepts, which ultimately affects the quality of their education. Furthermore, studies by Canagarajah (2005) indicate that when teacher education programs use a language unfamiliar to students, it can hinder their ability to critically engage with the material and develop effective teaching strategies. On the other hand, García (2009) suggests that when a multilingual approach is used in teacher education, it can enhance teachers' ability to connect with diverse student populations. However, according to Téllez and Waxman (2006), some educators believe that the medium of instruction should not significantly impact teacher education quality as long as teachers possess strong pedagogical skills, emphasizing the importance of teaching quality over linguistic factors.

CONCLUSION:

The study reveals that most students receive teacher education in the same medium they used in previous classes, though this choice is often made by their parents. Many students from different

language backgrounds struggle to find reading materials in their medium, and the available resources are often of poor quality, negatively affecting their education. Additionally, teacher educators frequently do not use the primary language spoken by most students, making it difficult for them to grasp concepts. Some educators adopt a mixed-language approach, yet many students still struggle to understand teacher education content.

When asked about the most effective language for learning, most teacher trainees preferred their mother tongue, believing it fosters a deeper understanding of concepts. Several challenges related to the medium of instruction were identified: lack of quality reading materials, a single medium for multiple subjects, and difficulties when teacher educators teach in a language different from their own. Furthermore, teaching students from diverse linguistic backgrounds in the same classroom presents additional barriers.

Teacher educators agree that the medium of instruction directly affects the quality of secondary education. To improve teacher education, students must be taught in their own language and provided with high-quality resources in their preferred medium.

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