Interdisciplinary Journal of Linguistics
Volume [17] 2024, Pp. 229-238

POTENTIALITY OF LINGO IN SEX EDUCATION: A SURVEY ANALYSIS

Anupama. T*

ABSTRACT

The paper is a survey analysis to acknowledge the significance of language in constructing a school curriculum involving sex education. The incorporation of sex education as a study subject in school is a need of the hour. However, little attention has been given to language used in formulating this curriculum as it is addressing the school children and with the advancement of technology children have access to everything at their fingertips. Everything enclosed in the internet world might not be in the ethical form, notably language. A survey study was conducted online which was circulated through various social media platforms. Responses were marked from people of various age categories and from both Keralites and non-Keralites, to understand the need of introspecting the potentiality of language in designing the school syllabus for sex education. As the Government of Kerala has moved forward with the decision to bring gender-inclusive school educational programs, this study would lead a pathway to understand, whether language plays any crucial role in this social learning and to look into the need for having a curriculum committee that includes language experts while drafting the modules of sex education. Drawing insights from the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, the results of the survey are probed, to understand the current language dynamics within society revolving around the concepts of sex education, and the missing links in the system, are evaluated.

Keywords: Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, Sex Education, School Curriculum, Language Potentiality, Social Learning, Curriculum Committee, Language Experts.

1. Introduction

The paper investigates the emphasis of language involved in defining the sex education curriculum within the school syllabus. Based on the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, how the language probing around the context of sex and sexuality in the Malayalam language determines the worldview of the Malayali community and how the inclusion of sex and gender-friendly terms in the language can modify the perspective has

* The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad

been investigated. A survey was conducted associated with sex education on the various social media platforms among Keralites and non-Keralites and conclusions were speculated to discern the language prospects in sex education. Sex education comprises guidance and learning on a wide range of subjects connected to sex and sexuality. It digs into the values and beliefs around these subjects and their use in the development of skills required for connecting relationships with oneself, others, and the community as well as managing one's sexual health. Sex education eventuates in classrooms, at home, in public places, or online.

The Education Minister of Kerala, V Sivankutty, on 30th July 2022 mentioned the inclusion of sex education in the school curriculum after two years. Sex education appears to remain taboo in Kerala, a state with the highest literacy rate. The Government's decision to introduce a manual on sex education for students in grades IX and XI was criticised as nothing more than pure pornography. The introduction of the Adolescent Education Program (AEP) in schools has drawn reapproval from quite a lot of student groups and organizations as well as from a few parents and teachers. The State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) had developed an initial curricular module that allowed students to freely discuss numerous elements of adolescent sexuality while focussing on advice about how to engage in safe sex. The manual is divided into three sections: sex and adolescence, HIV, and human skills. It was said that the HIV component erodes pre-existing ideas of modesty and encourages acceptance of behaviours like premarital sex, which according to the Keralan societal view is unethical. According to several pedagogues, the content is too embarrassing for educators to use and severely lacks cultural, psychological, and moral viewpoints.

It is at this juncture the gravity of language involved in the curriculum needs to be analysed. One needs to understand whether any lexicon in the existing Malayalam vocabulary has any terms that can audaciously be used to introduce the topics of sex and sexuality. It is also important to understand that in many languages, the words analogous to sex, sexuality, third gender, etc. are used to portray vulgarity and often as curse words. This paper addresses whether Malayalam vocabulary is exhaustive enough to label and mark the language of sex education to communicate with high school children.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Research on Sex Education at Different Levels of Education Curricular, Social, And Ethical Contexts

A research paper was published by Karolina Czerwiec and Marta Kopańska in April 2012 in the journal, Journal of Turkish Science Education in Volume 9. The research's objectives were to discover the factors influencing changes in sex education approaches over the past 50 years, pinpoint the best ways to educate about human sexuality from 1960 to 2010, and establish a connection between teaching biology and the ideas of human sexuality. To determine the importance of topics

relating to human health and hygiene at the primary school level and to examine biology and hygiene curricula from 1960 to 2010, an analysis of 135 papers was conducted. Science programs in elementary schools, as well as biology classes in lower secondary and secondary schools, teach lessons on sex education, ethical issues, and the problems with AIDS and HIV. The study's findings supported the research hypothesis and were reviewed in light of relevant and methodological literature. They will make it possible to identify the educational needs in the area of human sexuality and design a teaching strategy for gender-related aspects of human biology at various educational levels.

2.2. Language, Sexuality, and Education

A chapter is written by Helen Sauntson in the book, Discourse, and Education in the year 2015. Studies that look at the connections between language, sexuality, and education are scarce, and this discipline is still arguably in its infancy. With a few notable exceptions, a lot of the work that has been done recently on sexuality and education hasn't explicitly focused on how language shapes sexuality discourses in schools. Even though research in the area of language and sexuality has looked at the various ways in which sexual identity can be expressed linguistically, not much of this work has yet been applied to educational settings. There is some research on language, sexuality, and education, but the majority of the significant contributions fall into two categories: those that examine homophobic language specifically and those that look more widely at how sexuality is constructed in educational contexts. The use of homophobic language in schools and other educational settings has been the subject of several research in the first category. Some studies have looked at how homophobia isn't always obvious and is more frequently perceived as the discursive result of silence and invisibility. Narrative and classroom interaction analysis has been used in research exploring the discursive formation of sexuality in educational situations. A summary of the work done in these two major areas is given in this chapter. A significant corpus of research is being done that particularly explores the discursive formation of sexual identities within language instruction in addition to work that focuses on schools (especially English language education). The work that looks at language and sexuality in these various educational settings is also summarised in this chapter.

2.3. A Study of Adolescence Education Awareness among Secondary School Students in Kerala

This study aims to ascertain Keralan secondary school students' attitudes and knowledge regarding adolescent education. The study's sample population is the stage. In this stage, 500 students are chosen as a sample using a stratified random sampling technique, with consideration given to variables like rural and urban secondary school students. Secondary school students' baseline adolescent education awareness was subpar, as observed. Adolescents have a poor baseline knowledge about changes that occur as they grow up, but a health education intervention program improves their knowledge and attitude. The literature

demonstrates that teenagers of today have incorrect knowledge about growing up, the knowledge that they primarily learn from uninformed friends, the internet, or movies. The majority of research on teenagers focuses on girls' sexuality or their understanding of HIV/STDs.

3. Methodology

The research paper concludes the survey conducted on various social media platforms. Responses were collected from Keralites, firstly, and further expanded towards non-Keralites to be cognizant of their ideas and views in the backdrop of sex education. Judging from the survey's outcomes, the society's language worldview has been interpreted.

The survey data for the study was collected using the convenience sampling method by sending the survey to various people via various social media platforms. A total of 96 responses were received, of which 76 were Keralites and 20 were non-Keralites. Of the 96, 67 were females, 28 were males, one respondent didn't wish to reveal their gender, and zero responses were from the transgender community. In the different age categories included in the survey, in the below 18+ section, there was no response, in 18-29, there were 87 responses, in 30-49, there were seven responses, and in the 50+ category, there were two responses. The survey questionnaire was distributed within the society via various social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram. The survey had multiple choices, multiple select, short answer types, and long answer types. The survey questions were in English. The questions included in the survey explored the awareness, attitudes, and language perceptions regarding sex education and its vocabulary.

3.1. Research Questions

a) Does the language influence the designing of sex education curricula, particularly in Kerala?

b) What is the importance of inclusive and culturally sensitive terminology in the school curricula?

c) Should language experts be included in curriculum committees for sex education?

4. Data Analysis

4.1. Awareness and Support for Sex Education

In the analysis of the survey, it was found that the majority of the respondents were aware of the Kerala Government's proposal to introduce sex education into the school curriculum for grades IX and XI. This indicates a growing public engagement about the introduction of sex education in school curricula, possibly influenced by increased media and governmental focus on adolescent education. Most of the respondents supported the inclusion of sex education in schools. However, there were divided opinions about the age group to which this

education should be introduced. Some of them suggested an earlier exposure, emphasising the importance of timely guidance.

4.2. Negative Connotations in Language

The results of the survey revealed that most Malayalam words associated with sex, sexuality, and gender identity are perceived negatively or used as derogatory terms, sometimes as a taboo in Keralan society. Words for sex organs and acts are often treated as vulgar or used as insults. Thus, this linguistic stigma reflects deeper societal taboos surrounding discussions about sex and sexuality. This negative perception of language can create barriers to effective communication and education, reinforcing shame and misinformation among the students.

4.3. Gender Perspective

Respondents were predominantly female (67 out of 96), with limited male participation and zero responses from the transgender community. This suggests a greater willingness among women to engage in discussions about sex education and a missed opportunity to gather diverse gender-based insights, particularly from non-binary or transgender individuals.

4.4. Importance of Language in Curriculum Design

The majority of the survey participants emphasised that language plays a crucial role in shaping perceptions of sex education. The current lack of neutral or positive terms in Malayalam for discussing sex and gender was highlighted as a significant gap by the respondents. Many respondents called for either the creation of a new, inclusive lexicon or the neutralisation of existing terms.

4.5. Attitudes Toward Change

A significant portion of the survey respondents believed that both language and societal attitudes must evolve to facilitate the effectiveness of sex education. According to the respondents, without addressing the linguistic and cultural stigma, any curriculum, regardless of its scientific accuracy, might face resistance or fail to achieve its objectives.

4.6. Need for Awareness

From the survey, there was near-unanimous agreement on the necessity of raising awareness about sex education, not only among the students but also across all age groups. Participants pointed out that public misconceptions and prejudices often originate from a lack of proper knowledge and dialogue.

4.7. Limitations in Current Implementation

Both teachers, as well as educators, reportedly find it uncomfortable to discuss these topics due to societal expectations and stigmatised vocabulary. It was pointed out by the participants that this discomfort

could undermine the effectiveness of the curriculum. Concerns were raised by the respondents about the cultural appropriateness of existing educational materials. The introduction of non-judgmental and culturally sensitive resources was strongly recommended by them.

5. Conclusion

The study strongly supports the involvement of linguists and cultural experts in designing sex education curricula. The use of age-appropriate, neutral, and positive language could transform how students perceive and engage with the subject. Teachers should have introduction workshops and training sessions to build confidence and reduce discomfort when addressing sensitive topics in the classrooms. An engagement should be facilitated with broader community groups to address societal stigma around sex education. The findings suggest an urgent need for campaigns to normalise conversations around sex and sexuality, focusing on reducing the stigma embedded within language. This research paper's lack of inclusivity, particularly the absence of responses from transgender individuals and those under 18, limits its scope. The language used in the survey English and the data being collected from online Google forms also limits participation in the survey. Hence this research suggests future research in the area of sex education ensuring that participation, particularly by capturing perspectives from younger age groups, men, and transgender individuals, provides a holistic understanding of societal attitudes.

This research paper looked into the possible impact of the introduction of sex education curriculum in schools and whether our society and the schools are ready to embrace this change. A social survey questionnaire was circulated online via various social media platforms to understand the importance of language in adolescent education programs in the context that the Government of Kerala intends to introduce the program among the class IX and XI students of Kerala. Most words related to sex are associated with negative meanings and are used as abuses or improper. Using proper words in proper instances can lead to a lot of positive change. However, the first step towards this change would be sex education in schools. Sex, the organs, and the act of pleasure are seen as something shameful and unspoken. It is distasteful to speak of that sort and most Malayalam curses are related and referred to as an insult. Instead of degenerating sex organs as an insulting linguistic element, it's necessary to educate the importance of these organs and their proper function in the human body. Acknowledging such linguistic terms is acknowledging one's own body, sexuality, identity, the self. The political correctness of certain words is deeply rooted in the supremacy of certain classes, eventually, they listed the language of the laymen as derogatory and politically incorrect. Thus, the words need to be neutralized or a new lexicon should be replaced if corrections are impossible. What needs to be changed is also the formality associated with those words. They must be used in more naturalized environments, increasing their usability in different domains such as houses, offices, and public places and not just sex education

classes. This is a limited survey with a large scope for improvement and further study. The survey wasn't inclusive though the maximum effort was put in to reach the survey to a wider audience lack of responses from a certain category is a huge limitation to it. Some other means are to be looked into to inculcate the viewpoints of the people who were left out.

References

Ponath Abhimanyu Maya, Wayne Bottiger & G. D. Singh. (2016). A Study of Adolescence Education Awareness among Secondary School Students in Kerala. *Journal of Advances and Scholarly Researches in Allied Education [JASRAE]* (Vol:11/ Issue: 22). DOI: 10.29070/JASRAE. pp. 46 – 52. http://ignited.in/p/4660

Allen, J.P., & Hauser, S.T. (1996). Autonomy and Relatedness in Adolescent-Family Interactions as Predictors of Young Adults' States of Mind Regarding Attachment. *Development and Psychopathology*, 8, pp. 793-809.

Cooper, M.L., Shaver, P.R., & Collins, N.L. (1998). Attachment Styles, Emotion, Regulation, and Adjustment in Adolescence. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74, pp. 1380-1397

Czerwiec, Karolina & Kopańska, Marta. (2012). Research on Sex Education at Different Levels of Education Curricular, Social and Ethical Contexts. *Journal of Turkish Science Education*. Volume 9.

Florian, V., Mikulincer, M., & Bucholtz, I. (1995). Effects of Adult Attachment Style on the Perception and Search for Social Support. *Journal of Psychology*, 129, pp. 665-676.

Fonagy, P., Target, M., Steele, M., Steele, H., Leigh, T., Levinson, A., & Kennedy, R. (1997). Morality, Disruptive Behaviour, Borderline Personality Disorder, Crime, and Their Relationship to the Security of Attachment. In L. Atkinson & K. J. Zucker (Eds.*), Attachment and psychopathology*. New York. Guilford.

Kenny, M.E., & Donaldson, G.A. (1991). Contributions of Parental Attachment and Family Structure to the Social and Psychological Functioning of First-Year College Students. *Journal of Counselling Psychology*, 38, pp. 479-486.

Kerns, K.A., & Stevens, A.C. (1996). Parent-child Attachment in Late Adolescence: Links to Social Relations and Personality. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 25, pp. 323-342.

Lessard, J.C., & Moretti, M. M. (1998). Suicidal Ideation in an Adolescent Clinical Sample: Attachment Patterns and Clinical Implications. *Journal of Adolescence*, 21, pp. 383-395.

Nada-Raja, S., McGee, R., & Stanton, W.R. (1992). Perceived Attachments to Parents and Peers and Psychological Well-Being in Adolescence. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 21, pp. 471-485.

Pandav C. S., Anand K., Shamanna B. R., Chowdhury S., Nath L.M. (1997). Economic Consequences of HIV/AIDS in India. *Natl Med J India*; 10: p. 27-30.

Papini, D.R., & Roggman, L.A. (1992). Adolescent Perceived Attachment to Parents in Relation to Competence, Depression, and Anxiety: A longitudinal Study. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 12, pp. 420-440.

Rosenstein, D.S., & Horowitz, H.A. (1996). Adolescent Attachment and Psychopathology. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 64, pp. 244-253.

Satpathy SK, Shaukat M. (1997). HIV/AIDS in India-The Present Scenario. *New Delhi: National AIDS Control Organization (NACO), Ministry of Health and Family Welfare:* pp. 1-4.

Sauntson, Helen. (2019). Language, Sexuality, and Inclusive Pedagogy. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, Vol. 29, Issue. 3, p. 322.

APPENDIX

6. Survey Questionnaire

1) Age Category

- Below 18
- 18-29
- 30-49
- 50+

2) Gender

- Female
- Male
- Transgender
- Do not wish to reveal

3) Are you a Keralite?

- Yes
- No

4) Are you a student?

- Yes
- No

5) Highest educational qualification

- SSLC/ 10th

- Plus, two/ 12th / Pre-degree
- Degree
- PG and above

6) Are you aware of the decision of the Kerala government to incorporate sex education into the school syllabus?

- Yes
- No

7) Do you support the Kerala Government's decision to include sex education in the school syllabus?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

8) Could you explain your choice in the above question?

9) Do you agree to have sex education in the syllabus of class IX and XI students?

10) Do you suggest having the section introduced to any other class/class?

11) Have you come across any form of curse words in Malayalam that might fall into the following category?

- Sex organs
- Act of sex
- Terms directly/ indirectly related to any gender group/ identity
- I haven't come across any
- Any other
- Do not wish to reveal

12) Do you at present use (haven't used in the past) any of the curse words, in Malayalam, that relate to the above question?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe
- NA

13) Could you please explain the reason for the change? (please respond with NA if not applicable)

14) Do you at present use (also used in the past) any of the curse words, in Malayalam, relate to the previous question?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe
- NA

15) Do you at present use (also used in the past) any of the curse words, in Malayalam, relate to the previous question?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe
- NA

16)Could you please explain the reason for the change? (please respond with NA if not applicable)

17)Do you think that language is an important factor when deciding the curriculum of sex education? Please explain.

18)Do you think that there should be awareness among people about sex?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

19) Do you think that there needs to be a change in the Malayalam language used in the context of sex?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

20) Could you explain your choice to the above question?