



SOCIAL JUSTICE-ORIENTED ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING: A SURVEY BASED STUDY OF PAKISTANI MULTILINGUAL ELT CLASSROOMS

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Abstract

This research examines the practices of ELTs aimed at social justice in multilingual classrooms in Pakistan, specifically in the Hazara region. The main objectives of this study were to determine the understanding of teachers and students of linguistic inequality, to evaluate current classroom practices, and to examine how to promote equity and inclusion in the classroom. Structured questionnaires were administered to 392 respondents, comprising 80 teachers and 312 students, using a quantitative descriptive research design. Descriptive statistics were used in the analyses of the data. The results show that most of the participants are aware of the inequalities in languages. Likewise, many people are aware that low proficiency in English affects the confidence and participation of students. When using translanguaging, code-switching, flexible participation, etc. in reality the English-only practices still limit engagement and marginalize non-dominant language speakers. Participants believed that including multilingual resources, local languages and cultural content would enhance learning outcomes. The research indicates that social justice may be promoted through multilingual classrooms only if linguistic diversity is viewed as a resource. Nevertheless, to make classroom practices more equitable and inclusive, institutional support, curriculum reforms and teacher training will be necessary.

Keywords: *Inclusive Education, Linguistic Inequality, Multilingual Classrooms, Pakistan, Social Justice-Oriented ELT.*

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

English Language Teaching (ELT) is particularly important to the educational, social and economic growth of Pakistan (Coleman, 2010). English as a colonial language used in power, higher education, employment and international communication because of its colonial past (Rahman, 2002; Shamim, 2008). It has become popular in education and government in Pakistan and is commonly linked to social mobilisation and improved economic prospects (Coleman, 2010). Even though Pakistan is a multilingual country where there exist over 68 languages as reported by David M. Eberhard, Gary F. Simons, and Charles D. Fennig (2023).

(Ethnologue), English has emerged as the major medium of instruction in most educational institutions and state offices (Rahman, 2011). Such supremacy often leads to unequal access to learning, especially among students with low socio-economic status and those who have their mother-language other than either English or Urdu (Shamim & Rashid, 2019). Therefore, language and financial situation are powerful factors that shape the academic life of students.

This is particularly evident in the case of the Multilingual classrooms of Hazara region where students belong to diverse linguistic backgrounds and have their native languages as Hindko, Pashto, Urdu and other local languages. However, the ELT practices tend to favour English as the language of instruction and ignore the native languages of students (Canagarajah, 2011). Students who have a poor exposure to English are thus disadvantaged which may interfere with their participation in classrooms and academic confidence.

Such realities provoke serious issues regarding equity, inclusion, and justice concepts, which are the key principles of social justice in education (Nieto, 2010). It is necessary to consider ELT in the light of social justice approach in order to see how the nature of teaching practices can either promote or hinder equal access and equal learning opportunities to students of different language backgrounds (Hawkins, 2011). Since Pakistan is a multilingual country, it is evident that this has been widely manifested in its classrooms where most of the students learn regional languages at home before they come across English in schools and universities (Rahman, 2002). Social justice ELT approach recognises native languages of students as their assets and not barriers and promotes inclusive, culturally sensitive, and equitable language learning (García & Wei, 2014; Nieto, 2010).

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Since Pakistani classrooms are multilingual, ELT methods are frequently monolingual and uniform, emphasizing English proficiency at the expense of students varied linguistic and cultural identities. Unfair learning experiences may result from this

mismatch, especially for students from marginalized linguistic backgrounds. In Hazara region, there has been a scarcity of empirical research aimed at understanding the perceptions of teachers and learners regarding social justice-oriented English Language Teaching (ELT). Additionally, there is a lack of sufficient evidence to determine whether existing ELT practices effectively promote social justice principles or exacerbate linguistic and educational disparities. By examining attitudes, behaviours, and possible strategies for advancing social justice in multilingual ELT contexts, this study aims to address this gap.

1.3. Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

- To explore English language teachers' and learners' perceptions of social justice-oriented teaching in Pakistani multilingual ELT classrooms.
- To assess how current ELT practices support social justice-oriented ELT practices in Pakistani multilingual classrooms.
- To suggest practical strategies for promoting social justice-oriented ELT in Pakistani multilingual classrooms.

1.4. Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- What are English language teachers' and learners' perceptions of social justice-oriented teaching in Pakistani multilingual ELT classrooms?
- To what extent do current ELT practices in multilingual classrooms support social justice principles?
- What practical strategies can be implemented to promote social justice-oriented teaching in Pakistani multilingual ELT classrooms?

1.5. Significance of the Study

This study is important because it adds to the limited research on social justice-oriented ELT in Pakistan, especially in the Hazara region. The study sheds light on actual classroom experiences in multilingual settings by emphasizing teachers' and students' perspectives. The results of this study will encourage ELT practitioners to reassess their teaching methods and implement more inclusive strategies. The study may also inform teacher educators, curriculum designers, and policy makers on the significance of including social justice concepts into ELT programs. The main aim of this study is to advance inclusive, socially just and equitable language instruction in multilingual Pakistani classrooms.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Social Justice in English Language Teaching

The concept of social justice in education refers to equal distribution of opportunities, resources and access to learning to all learners regardless of their social, cultural or linguistic backgrounds also the academic literature argues that social justice does not only require equality in education but equity and acknowledging diversity and eradicating structural forms of inequality that undermine the disadvantaged groups (Adams et al., 2016; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

In ELT, this implies the encouragement of fair participation, appreciation of linguistic diversity, and incorporation of inclusive pedagogical policies, which favours linguistically diverse learners.

In this view, the socially fair ELT paradigm challenges linguistic inequalities and asserts the linguistic and cultural capital of students. The principles of recognition, redistribution, and representation introduced by Fraser (2009) also contribute to inclusive ELT because they also address the problem of discrimination and create more equal learning conditions.

2.2. Theoretical Perspectives on Social Justice in Language Education

The socially just approach to language teaching is supported by a number of theories. Critical pedagogy is one of the strongest schools of thought that envisages education as a means of empowerment, where learners can critically analyse social inequalities and challenge oppressive systems (Freire, 1970). This in language classrooms promotes dialogue, critical thought, and learning in groups rather than rote learning.

Critical Applied Linguistics (CAL) is the other central school of thought exploring the influence of political, ideological, and economic powers on language policy, pedagogical practise and assessment systems (Pennycook, 2001). According to the scholars of this school of thought, the spread of English worldwide tends to replicate inequalities of power and linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992). Postcolonial and decolonial views build on this point and emphasise the way English language education remains reflective of colonial inequalities (Kumaravadivelu, 2016; Pennycook, 1998). These approaches therefore promote the use of local knowledge, multilingualism and culturally responsive pedagogy especially when dealing with a postcolonial environment like in Pakistan.

2.3. Multilingualism and English Language Teaching in Pakistan

Pakistan is one of the most multilingual countries where there are 68 living indigenous languages used in different regions (Eberhard et al., 2023). Although it has this linguistic plurality, English takes a preeminent place in education, administration and in the working life (Rahman, 2002). English is often linked with standard, prestige and social mobility and thus has helped in its spread in schools and higher institutions of learning (Coleman, 2010). However, English prevalence has caused serious imbalance in

education access and participation. Students of urban and elite origins tend to be better exposed to the English language, and have better resources, and students of rural and multilingual origin tend to face barriers in English classrooms (Shamim & Rashid, 2019). Thus, English language reflects, not language ability, but socioeconomic privilege. The existing literature suggests that non-native English-speaking students in Pakistan continuously undergo problems with understanding, engagement, self-confidence, and self-esteem (Mahboob, 2017). English-only practises only enhance these difficulties, and the superiority of English to regional languages strengthens greater inequities in education and social domains (Ali & Rehman, 2024).

2.4. Social Justice–Oriented Practices in Multilingual ELT Classrooms

Recent scholarships in language education highlights the importance of pedagogical practices that recognize linguistic diversity. One major approach is translanguaging, which allows learners to draw on their full linguistic repertoire to construct meaning and communicate ideas (García & Wei, 2014). This approach challenges traditional language separation in education and views multilingualism as a valuable cognitive and educational resource. Empirical research shows that translanguaging improves comprehension, reduces language anxiety, and increases student participation in multilingual classrooms (Canagarajah, 2011). By allowing students to use their native languages alongside English, teachers can create more inclusive learning environments that affirm learners' linguistic identities (García & Li, 2014; Auerbach, 1993). Social justice–oriented ELT therefore also stresses teachers' ethical responsibility to value linguistic diversity, promote inclusion, and challenge language-based discrimination. Recent empirical research conducted in Pakistan reinforces these findings, highlighting that translanguaging notably enhances learners' strategic competence, strengthens communication skills, and alleviates language anxiety by enabling them to draw on their first language as a cognitive aid (Hussain et al., 2024). This evidence underscores the importance of multilingual teaching approaches in fostering effective language acquisition and encouraging inclusive participation in the classroom.

2.5. Research Gap

Despite the increased international interest in social justice in language education, there is still little research discussing this issue specifically in the context of Pakistan. The existing research is mostly focused on language attitudes, language policy or the challenges faced by multilingual learners, but relatively limited studies evaluate how social justice principles are implemented in ELT classroom. In particular, empirical research investigating what teachers and students think about linguistic inequality and inclusive pedagogy in multilingual ELT classrooms is scarce. This study aims to fill the identified gap as it explores the concept of social justice-oriented ELT in multilingual

classrooms in Hazara region of Pakistan. The analysis of the perceptions of the participants, the classroom activities as well as the future recommendations on promoting equity will aim at adding to a more thorough comprehension of the ways in which the principles of social justice can be implemented in the context of multilingual ELT settings.

3. Research Methodology

A quantitative descriptive research design was used in this study. This approach was suitable for analysing participants' attitudes, experiences, and perceptions of social justice-oriented ELT in Pakistani ELT classrooms. The descriptive element of the design provides an unbiased statistical summary of current practices, whereas the use of proportionate random sampling ensures representation of diverse linguistic groups. Quantitative approach was used to ensure unbiased results, measurability and generalizability of the findings gathered through surveys.

3.1. Population and Sample

The participants in this research were English language instructors and students who were engaged in ELT courses within multilingual environments at specific universities located in Hazara Division of Pakistan. These universities encompass Hazara University (main campus), Hazara University (Batagram Campus), COMSATS University Islamabad (Abbottabad Campus), Abbottabad University of Science and Technology, Pak-Austria Fachhochschule Institute of Applied Sciences and Technology, and University of Haripur,. The reason for choosing these particular institutions lies in the fact that their student bodies exhibit considerable linguistic variety.

Table 1 Population of present study

S No.	University Name	Student	Faculty
1	Abbottabad University of Science & Technology	350	22
2	Hazara University, Mansehra	500	25
3	Haripur University, Haripur	400	20
4	Comsats University (Abbottabad Campus)	170	20
5	Pak-Austria	40	8
6	Hazara University (Battagram Campus)	190	5
	Total Number	1650	100

To guarantee equal representation and minimize sampling bias, participants were chosen from the target community using a straightforward random selection procedure. The Raosoft Sample Size Calculator was used to determine a sample size that could be applied to the target population.

The following standard characteristics were used to determine the sample size:

Level of confidence: 95%

Error margin: 5%

The suggested sample size, which is thought to be statistically sufficient for generalization in quantitative research, was 392 participants based on these criteria. As a result, 312 students and 80 English language instructors from the chosen universities made up the final sample of 392 respondents. The Raosoft Sample Size Calculator improved the sample's statistical validity and representativeness, guaranteeing that the study's conclusions could be fairly applied to the larger population of multilingual ELT classrooms in Hazara Division.

Table 2 Sample size calculated by Raosoft sample size calculator

Population (n)	Sample Size
Lecturers: 100	80
Students: 1650	312

3.2. Research Instrument

The research tools used in this study were structured survey questionnaires, which were designed to collect quantitative data from English language teachers and students who were working in multilingual ELT classrooms in Pakistan. There were two questionnaires, one for teachers and one for students. The questionnaires were close ended and used five-points Likert scale. The questionnaires were formulated following the aims of the research and were focused on how the respondents perceived social justice issues, current ELT practises and how they could promote equity in multilingual learning setting. The items were related to key dimensions such as linguistic equality, inclusion, cultural representation, classroom participation and equity in pedagogical practices. The questionnaire was administered online using Google Forms thus making it easier to gather information.

3.3. Data Collection Procedure

The data were gathered through an online survey using Google Forms, which was chosen due to its efficiency in covering the respondents across all universities in limited time. English language teachers and students were provided with separate questionnaires. The participation was voluntary; the respondents were made aware of the aim of the study. They were asked to answer freely, provided with enough time to do so and their answers were automatically recorded then downloaded for analysis.

3.4. Data Analysis Techniques

The gathered data were examined using quantitative analysis. Responses obtained from Google Forms were downloaded in Excel sheet for analysis. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics i.e. Percentage and mean scores. These methods supported the

identification of general tendencies in perceptions on what teachers and learners considered to be social justice and the extent to which present ELT practices were aligned with social justice principles in multilingual classrooms. To make the results understandable, they were displayed as tables and graphs.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

Throughout the research procedure, ethical considerations were closely monitored to guarantee the protection of participants' rights. Before completing the survey, each participant was made aware of the nature and goal of the study. Participation was on voluntary basis, and informed consent was obtained from all participants. The identities of participants were maintained in anonymity, and no personal or identifying data was gathered. Responses received through questionnaires used for academic and research purposes only and held confidential.

4. Data Analysis and Findings

The section presents the analysis of the data collected through survey questionnaire from both teachers and students. It was a quantitative descriptive study, which sought the perceptions of teachers and students regarding social justice-oriented ELT, existing classroom practises, and practical strategies for the promotion of social justice-oriented ELT. A total of 312 students and 80 teachers were sampled. The analysis are presented below:

4.1. Descriptive Statistical Analysis

Data gathered via Google Forms were encoded and examined using Microsoft Excel. Percentages were computed to identify trends in perceptions and practices concerning linguistic diversity, equality, participation, and fairness.

The findings are outlined below in accordance with the research objectives.

Table 3 Students' Perception of Linguistic Diversity

Statement	SD %	D %	N %	A %	SA %
Representation of diverse linguistic background	5.2	12.1	24.1	38.8	19.8
Disadvantage because of not speaking English	5.2	14.7	25.0	43.1	12.1
Privileges for dominant language speakers	10.3	29.3	22.4	26.7	11.2
Regional languages are valued in ELT classrooms	7.8	21.6	19.8	42.2	8.6
Existence of language-based Discrimination	6.0	12.9	27.6	36.2	17.2
English is considered prestigious than local languages	4.3	0.9	21.6	39.7	33.6

Multilingual students feel confident participating	3.4	7.8	25.9	44.8	18.1
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Most of the respondents were aware of the linguistic diversity that exists in ESL classrooms with 58.6% agreeing with the fact that students and teachers have different language backgrounds. Only a little over half 55.2% considered the fact that limited English proficiency puts learners at a disadvantage. The attitudes towards such privileges given to the speakers of the dominant language were mixed. About 50.8% said that regional languages are appreciated, but not equally appreciated. Over 53.4% of them mentioned cases of discrimination on the basis of language. Almost three quarters of the respondents (73.3%) pledged that English is more prestigious than local languages. Despite these discrepancies, 62.9% affirmed that the multilingual learners engage in classroom activities with a lot of confidence.

Table 4: Current ELT Practices

Statement	SD %	D %	N %	A %	SA %
Reflection of cultural diversity	4.3	17.2	31.9	41.4	5.2
Use of Translanguaging	6.9	4.3	13.8	47.4	27.6
Use of Native(indigenous) Languages	6.9	17.2	21.6	44.8	9.5
Code-switching	4.3	6.9	21.6	44.8	22.4
Air classroom participation rules	5.2	11.2	23.3	45.7	14.7
Equal participation opportunities	3.4	12.1	13.8	50.0	20.7
Students' identities are ignored	7.8	15.5	22.4	36.2	18.1
Linguistic diversity is essential for social justice	4.3	1.7	24.1	50.0	19.8
Language dominance acts as barrier to social justice	3.4	6.9	31.0	46.6	12.1

About 46.6% of the respondents held the view that the educational materials are culturally diverse, with the rest being neutral or in opposition. Three-quarters of the teachers (75%) said they use translanguaging, and 54.3% said they encouraged their students to use their own languages. Code switching was also generally embraced by 67.2%. Most of the respondents believed that the classroom participation was inclusive and just. Still, 54.3% agreed that English-only practises ignore the identity of students. Additionally, 69.8% of them thought that linguistic diversity leads to social justice and 58.7% thought that language dominance is an impediment to equity.

Table 5: Suggested Strategies for Promoting Social Justice

Strategy	SD %	D %	N %	A %	SA %
Regional languages use	6.0	2.6	22.4	56.9	12.1
Integrating multilingual strategies	3.4	2.6	14.7	62.1	17.2

Including local culture	2.6	2.6	19.0	55.2	20.7
Use Bilingual/multilingual materials	1.7	3.4	20.7	54.3	19.8
Use of home languages	3.4	8.6	27.6	42.2	18.1
Linguistic diversity reduces inequality	2.6	7.8	22.4	48.3	19.0

The results prove strong evidence in favour of multilingual tactics. About 69% agreed that the promotion of local languages increases the results of the educational process, with only 8.6% of the respondents disagreed. An overwhelming majority (79.3%) supported the idea of using multilingual teaching method and 75.9% perceived that incorporation of local culture enhances student understanding. Similarly, 74.1% of them concurred that bilingual and multilingual resources promote social justice. Approximately, 60.3% were in favour of cooperative learning through the use of native languages by students. On the whole, 67.3% of people thought that linguistic diversity in classrooms can be increased to alleviate inequality and support social justice.

Table 6 : Teachers' Perception of Social Justice in ELT Classrooms

Statement	SD %	D %	N %	A %	SA %
Awareness of social justice issues	4.5	4.5	18.2	54.5	18.2
Linguistic and cultural background influences participation	9.1	0.0	9.1	50.0	31.8
Non-dominant language learners face challenges	4.5	0.0	9.1	54.5	31.8
English-only practices disadvantage learners	9.1	13.6	36.4	27.3	13.6
Social justice teaching improves motivation	0.0	0.0	13.6	72.7	13.6

The majority of the teachers showed the knowledge of social justice discussions in ELT classrooms, and 72.7% of them focused on the aspects of fairness, inclusion, and equality in language teaching. A huge majority (81.8%) was of the opinion that the language and cultural background of students affect their involvement at the classroom. Likewise, 86.3% of the sampled agreed that non-dominant language learners experience learning difficulties, and thus reflected on the realisation of linguistic inequality. The teachers showed ambivalent attitudes towards English only instruction with a relatively low level of agreement and low level of neutrality. All in all, 86.3% of respondents thought that teaching that is inclusive and addresses social justice issue in ELT enhances student motivation, participation and engagement in multilingual classrooms.

Table 7 : Current ELT Practices and Social Justice

Statement	SD %	D %	N %	A %	SA %
Use of students' first languages in ELT	0.0	13.6	27.3	40.9	18.2
Use of translanguaging /code-mixing	4.5	9.1	13.6	54.5	18.2
Equal opportunities for classroom participation	9.1	9.1	9.1	50.0	22.7
English-only pressure limits inclusive teaching	4.5	9.1	18.2	59.1	9.1
Teacher reflection for fairness and equity	4.5	0.0	13.6	54.5	27.3

More than half of the teachers (59.1%) said they had allowed students to use their native languages in the classroom, thus showing moderate support to the practise of multilingualism. A majority (72.7%) expressed the view that they use translanguaging as a way of achieving understanding. Moreover, 72.2% of them thought that every learner is given equal chances to engage, which implies that educators think that classroom activities are fair in general. However, 68.2% had concurred that pressure by institutions to emphasise on English limits inclusive teaching. Despite the existence of these limitations, many teachers focused on being fair in their teaching and classroom practices.

Table 8: Strategies for Promoting Social Justice

Statement	SD %	D %	N %	A %	SA %
Teacher training on social justice is necessary	4.5	0.0	9.1	45.5	40.9
Translanguaging should be encouraged	0.0	0.0	4.5	59.1	36.4
Curriculum should include local cultures	0.0	9.1	13.6	54.5	22.7
Students allowed to use home languages	0.0	31.8	18.2	36.4	13.6
Inclusive practices improve learning outcomes	4.5	0.0	9.1	45.5	40.9

There was a high support of the idea of professional development in inclusive education by a significant majority of educators, where 86.4% emphasized the importance of social-justice practices. There was also a high level of support for translanguaging, which showed that there was an agreement on the multilingual

pedagogical strategies. Most of the teachers (77.2%) believed that incorporation of local culture and culturally relevant materials improves learning. There were more divided opinions on the use of home languages, with a half-way representation of opinions having their support, but cautiously. All in all, 86.4% of them agreed that inclusive teaching policies enhance an outcome of learning, which is a good indication that the teachers strongly identify equity with academic achievement.

5. Discussion

The results show that the phenomenon of multilingualism is a normative characteristic of ELT classrooms in Pakistan; however, linguistic diversity does not always contribute to equity. It aligns with the studies that show that the education system of Pakistan is hierarchically structured in policy, although it is multilingual in practise, and English has the highest symbolic position (Ashraf et al., 2021; Coleman, 2010). In these environments, learners with a lower level of English proficiency have a higher chance of experiencing decreased engagement, confidence, and academic access since English is not only a course, but also an opportunity and prestige language (Shamim, 2008; Shamim & Rashid, 2019). The current observation that the English language is more prestigious than the local languages thus indicate a wider sociolinguistic stratification that is already established in Pakistani education (Mansoor, 2003; Shamim & Rashid, 2019).

The findings also indicate that the respondents are aware of linguistic inequality in multilingual classrooms. The same fact is supported by research that shows that language in Pakistan is associated with identity, power, and unequal life opportunities, especially in a classroom when English-based norms determine its legitimacy (Ashraf et al., 2021; Shamim & Rashid, 2019). At the same time, inclusion is not indicated by the fact that many learners indicated feeling comfortable participating, but it is partial and uneven. This appreciation of teachers that the linguistic and cultural background of students influence engagement also supports the previous literature that the classroom involvement depends on the medium-of-instruction pressures and the lack of familiarity with academic English (Shamim, 2008; Mahboob, 2017). Their different perspectives on English-only instruction represent a real pedagogical contradiction: English as an institutionally important language is often in opposition to the multilingual nature of instruction and education (Ashraf et al., 2021; Mahboob, 2017).

5.1. Social Justice Practices in Pakistani ELT Classrooms

The results also indicate that there are already inclusive practises in Pakistani multilingual ELT classrooms. Translanguaging, code switching and the use of first language is well-supported by the recent study carried out in Pakistan which showed that educators use the resources of multilingualism to improve comprehension, constructing an interactional meaning and lessening the communication barriers in the English-based

environment (Panezai et al., 2023; Saleem et al., 2023). Hussain et al. (2024) also discovered that translanguaging enhanced the strategic performance of ESL students in Pakistan, which indicates that multilingual pedagogies can empower instead of undermine English learning. These studies affirm the current discovery that native languages act as a learning tool, not necessarily a hindrance.

Nevertheless, the findings also show that this inclusion is still limited. The fact that respondents consider English-only classrooms to ignore the identities of students is not new when it comes to studies that assume that monolingual policies not only marginalise the linguistic repertoires of learners but also replicate unequal participation (Ashraf et al., 2021; Shamim & Rashid, 2019). The observation that teachers experience pressure to put priority on English also supports the argument that inclusive practises in Pakistan are more likely to be informal (Panezai et al., 2023; Saleem et al., 2023). This practise-policy gap is the key to the social justice problem.

6. Conclusions

According to the study's findings, social justice is partially present but not entirely realized in Pakistani ELT classroom. English still predominates in classroom instruction despite teachers' efforts to foster equitable conditions and students' active participation. Because students who are proficient in English are more confident and have more opportunities than others, this dominance leads to inequality.

It is evident that both educators and learners acknowledge linguistic disparities and think that learning is enhanced by multilingual instruction. Although there are already inclusive policies in place, they primarily rely on the individual efforts of teachers rather than institutional assistance. Pressure to speak just English continues to be a significant obstacle to equity. Therefore, in addition to classroom-level initiatives, structural improvements are necessary for true social justice.

Overall, the study demonstrates that if linguistic diversity is viewed as a resource for learning rather than an issue, multilingual classrooms can become fair. Students are more motivated, self-assured, and involved in their education when local languages and cultures are valued.

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