
Reports

1. First Eurasian Congress of Linguists

The First Eurasian Congress of Linguists, organized by the Russian Academy of Sciences and supported by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation, took place in Moscow to celebrate the 300th anniversary of the Russian Academy of Sciences. This global event aimed to foster collaboration among linguists and share cutting-edge research in the field of linguistics. It brought together over 1,000 scholars, with numerous plenary sessions, oral presentations, round table discussions, and poster sessions focusing on various linguistic topics.

Overview of the Congress

The Congress covered diverse linguistic disciplines, including sociolinguistics, psycho- and neurolinguistics, computational linguistics, language typology, and studies on numerous language families worldwide. Its objectives included:

- Addressing significant linguistic problems globally.
- Introducing young researchers to recent advancements in linguistic studies.
- Facilitating public discussions on linguistic diversity and socially significant topics.

Prominent scholars like Alexey A. Gippius, Ayesha Kidwai, and Johanna Nichols were among the plenary speakers, and presentations were conducted in both Russian and other foreign languages.

Dr. Mishra's Contribution

Dr. Mahendra Kumar Mishra, a trustee and National Advisor of the Language and Learning Foundation (LLF), represented India with his presentation titled, "**Overcoming Linguistic Challenges in Multilingual Societies: The Case of Odisha's MLE Initiative.**" His session highlighted the transformative role of Multilingual Education (MLE) in overcoming linguistic challenges in diverse societies, using Odisha as a successful case study.

Key Points from Dr. Mishra's Presentation:**1. Challenges in Multilingual Societies:**

- Language barriers in education often lead to high dropout rates, cultural marginalization, and a decline in linguistic diversity.
- Tribal children in India, especially in regions like Odisha, face significant challenges when their home languages are not used in classrooms.

2. MLE as a Transformative Approach:

- MLE involves initiating instruction in a child's mother tongue before transitioning to other languages. This methodology fosters better understanding and improves educational outcomes.
- It empowers marginalized communities by preserving linguistic and cultural heritage.

3. The Odisha Model:

- Dr. Mishra showcased the success of MLE in Odisha, where it led to increased enrollment and retention rates, revitalized tribal languages, and enhanced the self-esteem of tribal children.
- Odisha's MLE initiative exemplifies how integrating local languages into education can yield tangible benefits for both individuals and communities.

4. Broader Implications:

- The Odisha model serves as an inspiration for similar multilingual regions worldwide. It demonstrates how MLE can address systemic challenges in education while preserving cultural identities.

Broader Impact and Recognition

Dr. Mishra's insights have significant implications for global education systems facing similar linguistic and cultural challenges. The Indian government, with LLF's support, has expanded MLE initiatives to seven states, showcasing its commitment to promoting equitable and inclusive education.

Conclusion

The Congress provided a platform for experts like Dr. Mishra to share innovative approaches to complex linguistic challenges. The Odisha

MLE initiative, presented as a case study, highlighted the importance of linguistic inclusivity in education, inspiring potential adoption in other multilingual regions globally. This aligns with the broader goals of the Congress to address pressing linguistic problems and celebrate the diversity of languages as a vital component of human heritage.

2. Writing Centre Initiative Report

University of Delhi, 2023-2024

The Writing Centre was established at the Institute of Life Long Learning (ILL), University of Delhi, through the collaborative efforts of Professors Veena Kapur, Minakshi Lahkar, and Tasneem Shahnaaz. The initiative, fully funded by ONGCF, conducted two rounds of 8-week Academic Writing Programmes in both English and Hindi for University undergraduates during February 2023 and February 2024. The innovative writing skills development program emerged as a groundbreaking educational initiative that strategically addressed critical gaps in public education, seamlessly aligning with both National Education Policy 2020 and UN Sustainable Development Goal 4. By leveraging an accessible online delivery model and implementing nuanced multilingual approaches, the program successfully transcended traditional educational barriers, empowering marginalized students across diverse caste and gender demographics throughout the National Capital Region.

Multiple online meetings and an offline orientation session were conducted to train tutors on Writing Centre concepts and tutoring methodologies. Forty students (in two batches) joined the course. They were supported by 24 tutors. The weekly schedule included two interactive online classes (Monday and Wednesday) along with individual half-hour tutoring sessions for each student. There were weekly assignments for the participants with detailed feedback by the dedicated tutors. The feedback mechanism comprising of one-on-one tutoring after each session proved to be highly successful. The flexible scheduling and the small classroom size accommodated diverse student needs.

This 'Beyond the Classroom' initiative, holistically enhanced students' writing capabilities, critical thinking skills, and scholarly competencies,

ultimately fostering enhanced job-readiness and creating pathways for academic growth. At least three students published papers in different journals after completing this course. The program's profound impact and success was eloquently celebrated through valedictory functions at the Institute of Life Long Learning (ILLL), University of Delhi in April 2023 and April 2024, marking a significant milestone in inclusive and transformative education.

3. A Talk by Dr Anita Charles

The Writing Centre, in partnership with FORTELL, hosted an online talk titled "What's a teacher to Do? The Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Teaching and Learning Language" on May 23, 2024. The speaker was Professor Anita Charles, Director of Teacher Education at Bates College, Maine, USA. Her presentation was a thought-provoking exploration of the various dimensions of artificial intelligence's transformative impact on language education.

Professor Charles's presentation addressed the ongoing debate surrounding AI technologies like ChatGPT, Cognil, and OpenAI in education. She emphasized the crucial role teachers play in guiding students toward ethical and judicious use of AI tools in their academic pursuits. Professor Charles illuminated the delicate balance between embracing technological innovations, while preserving the human elements of teaching and not becoming overly dependent on these tools. The speaker masterfully navigated the complex terrain of AI integration, offering nuanced pedagogical recommendations that emphasize ethical tool usage, strategic implementation, and the critical importance of maintaining students' independent learning and critical thinking skills.

The event attracted an audience of 80 English language and literature teachers of schools and colleges, who are mostly members of FORTELL. The session was moderated by distinguished professors Tasneem Shahnaaz, Veena Kapur, and Minakshi Lahkar. It underscored the urgent need for educators to proactively shape AI's role in academic settings, ensuring that technology empowers rather than replaces the fundamental art of teaching. The presentation concluded with an engaging question-and-answer session, allowing participants to delve deeper into this timely and relevant topic.