



Inclusive Education and Mother Tongue: An Overview on Challenges and Benefits of Mother Tongue-based Education

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Abstract:

This research delves into the confluence of education that embraces diversity and incorporates instruction in students' native languages within linguistically diverse communities. Against the backdrop of the National Education Policy 2020, which emphasizes mother tongue-based multilingual education, the study aims to examine the challenges and impact of adopting a linguistically inclusive methodology for educating individuals. Focusing on communities with linguistic diversity, the research seeks to reveal how mother tongue-based education can enhance inclusive practices by acknowledging the unique needs and strengths of learners from various linguistic backgrounds.

Keywords: mother tongue, English, challenges, MTB, multilingualism

Introduction:

After independence literacy of the county was very low. According to the Times of India, 2022, the literacy rate has increased from a mere 18.3% in 1951 to 74.4% in 2018. This is only quantitative data. What about the quality of education? When we talk about the quality of education it includes linguistically, and culturally, and along with it, many other aspects are dealt with which help in building and developing the nation. In 1835 Macaulay in his



minutes said one thing “Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect.” This is analyzed as Indians should learn the Western language have Western thoughts and work for the Western people. Because of that perception, till today people are learning English and parents are getting their children’s admission to schools that use English as the primary language of instruction. But do the children get proper knowledge or understanding of the concepts in a language in which they are not well versed yet?

When a child is born and gradually a year later when he/she starts mumbling they mumble in their primary language. They speak the language which their native speaks. It is a language which they are familiar with. But when they get their admission in an English medium school, they face linguistic barriers and are unable to cope with their studies which leads to slow development of cognitive skills. It also acts as a hindrance in language learning as English becomes the superior language. Many things get affected if the child does not get an education in his/her mother tongue. The psyche of the child will develop at a very slow pace. They might be distant from the culture. They do not properly understand concepts, leading to half and improper knowledge.

Literature Review:

Every year on 21st February, the world celebrates International Mother Language Day, which was established at the initiative of Bangladesh by UNESCO’s General Conference in 1999. The Day is an essential platform to promote the importance of cultural and linguistic diversity, and multilingualism for peaceful and sustainable societies (Serao, 2022). Languages Unlimited says “Research has shown that students who have a strong foundation in their mother tongue are more successful in learning a second language. This is because they have already developed the cognitive skills and language awareness that are necessary for language learning.” When students begin their learning, they enter the classroom with basic knowledge of communication in their mother tongue. If this continues then it will lead to development and exposure to them as their fundamentals are clear.



What is Mother Tongue-Based (MTB) Education?

Rutu Foundation writes that “Mother tongue education refers to any form of schooling which uses the language or languages that children are most familiar with, in order to help them learn.” As said earlier if fundamentals are clear then new language learning becomes easier. Even the Global Book Alliance, 2021 claims that “Children learn first in a familiar language and then gradually add a second language. When it is time to incorporate the second language, children who learn through MTB programs build on existing language skills to understand what they are reading, which, in turn, improves literacy rates. It is easier for children to read, write, and transfer words from their first language to their second language if they have a solid foundation in their mother tongue.”

MTB (Mother Tongue-Based) programs not only facilitate education but also provide a platform for children to unleash their full potential without the limitations of expressing themselves in a second language. This absence of a language barrier creates an enhanced opportunity for making valuable contributions to society (Global Book Alliance, 2021). When we look at various methods of teaching, we find that all methods focus on the target language. Be it the Grammar Translation Method, Direct Method, Audio Visual method, and many more. Communicative Language Teaching focuses more on cohesion and coherence. Mother tongue can be used as a pillar to learn the target language. NEP 2020 by the Government of India, emphasis on mother tongue education. Under the category of Multilingualism and the power of language in NEP, it states that,

“Wherever possible, the medium of instruction until at least Grade 5, but preferably till Grade 8 and beyond, will be the home language/mother tongue/local language/regional language. Thereafter, the home/local language shall continue to be taught as a language wherever possible. This will be followed by both public and private schools. High-quality textbooks, including in science, will be made available in the home language/mother tongue. All efforts will be made early on to ensure that any gaps that exist between the language spoken by the child and the medium of teaching are bridged. In cases where home language/mother tongue textbook material



is not available, the language of transaction between teachers and students will still remain the home language/mother tongue wherever possible. Teachers will be encouraged to use a bilingual approach, including bilingual teaching-learning materials, with those students whose home language may be different from the medium of instruction. All languages will be taught with high quality to all students; a language does not need to be the medium of instruction for it to be taught and learned well.”

Keeping the standard education and quality of literacy at centre such decisions are made. (PTI, 2018) claims, more than 19,500 languages or dialects are spoken in India as mother tongues. This clearly shows that India is a diverse country. Every region of the country has its language. Some people are unfortunate to not have proper access to English language learning. At that time mother tongue-based education functions as a saviour to help them build a foundation of English as their concepts will be made clear. And ultimate goal of this policy is to give a clear understanding of any subject so that new youth will have innovative and clear ideas.

Challenges:

Whenever someone discusses or brings some new notion in the field of education, keeping the teachers' role in focus is also important along with the students for whom decisions are made. So, when the discussion is made on mother tongue-based education teachers' knowledge of the mother tongue is very important. Fettes & Karamouzian, (2018) point out that “Teachers are considered to have a general responsibility to extend the boundaries of professional knowledge through reflective practice, research, and a systematic engagement in continuous professional development throughout their career. The inclusion agenda builds on this fundamental orientation, by insisting on teachers' need to enhance their ability to respond to a heterogeneous mix of students from different backgrounds and with different levels of disability and ability”.



When discussing challenges, the LSRW skills come to mind. If referred individually all skills have some or the other challenges faced by learners. Listening skills deal with the vocabulary learners are familiar with. When Alberto, Gabinete, and Ranola did their research relating to dilemmas and adversities related to MTB education in the Philippines, they mentioned that “the students’ major challenge was their unfamiliarity with profound Hiligaynon words. The students had difficulty understanding some Hiligaynon terms due to their limited vocabulary. The respondents cited some examples of Hiligaynon words that were difficult for the students to understand such as “durungawan” which means window, “edipisyo” which means building.” (Alberto et al., 2016). Likewise, if we look at the overall diversified India there could be many such cases where learners are not much more aware of their mother tongue.

Dealing with the speaking skills, the possibility could be that the teacher’s mother tongue might be different than the student’s mother tongue. So, for that first teachers’ responsibility increases to learn the student’s mother tongue and be fluent in it. According to Alberto et al., 2016, research “The key informants admitted that they find it hard to speak fluently in Hiligaynon since they lack adequate trainings and seminars for them to be equipped in teaching the subject. To add to that, most of the key informants were teaching other subjects which were mainly taught in the second language which is English.”

When talking about reading skills, students might not be aware of the terminologies of their mother tongue. Because nowadays proper usage of language is not found. People use code-switching and code mixing while communicating so they lack the knowledge of proper terminology of their mother tongue. Alberto et al., 2016 assert that “Writing is very essential to be taught since ignoring the skills to write means not only ignoring writing skills themselves but also ignoring the contribution of writing skills toward the development of other skills. Compared to the other three skills, writing is considered to be the most difficult skill to master.”

According to Philipson (1992) and Steiger (2017), as sited in (David, 2021), this system of education is not supported by students, parents, and teachers because there is a strong desire of learning English, and there is a belief that using English as a medium of instructions is the



most effective way to do it. The dominance of English after colonization has increased every year—the brainwashing of Britishers by bringing Western culture and literature to colonized countries. Macaulay wanted people who would act as a mediator between them and people of Indian origin. He is his minutes mention that,

“To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population.” (Macaulay, n.d.)

Even (Nishanthi, n.d.) mentions in his paper mentions the dominance of non-mother tongue education in developing countries in his paper. He too advocates, “Many education systems favor using national or ‘global’ languages instead of Mother-tongue teaching. Education is often carried out in the old colonial language, or an international language, such as English.”

Benefits of having mother tongue-based education:

Language is a source of communication. For better communication better understanding is necessary. If a person’s cognitive skills are developed, then the individual growth and development of a person improves instantaneously. Whenever an individual is thinking about something he/she will have thoughts in their mother tongue as they comprehend more effectively in that language. So, understanding the concepts acts as a drive to develop one's creative thinking. There are many benefits of getting an education in the mother tongue. They are

1. It helps to strengthen the cultural identity.
2. Helps to learn new languages quickly. As fundamentals of the mother tongue are clear.
3. Fluency in language boosts confidence.
4. Better understanding leads to vast knowledge which helps in getting job opportunities.
5. Helps in building better communication skills.



Opportunities to develop mother tongue-based education:

NEP 2020 is already discussing of providing material in mother tongue. Policy asserts that

“High-quality textbooks, including in science, will be made available in home languages/mother tongue. All efforts will be made early on to ensure that any gaps that exist between the language spoken by the child and the medium of teaching are bridged. In cases where home language/mother tongue textbook material is not available, the language of transaction between teachers and students will still remain the home language/mother tongue wherever possible. Teachers will be encouraged to use a bilingual approach, including bilingual teaching-learning materials, with those students whose home language may be different from the medium of instruction.”
(Government of India, n.d.)

Things which can be focused upon to advocate more opportunities for mother education can be:

1. Training and workshops for teachers for conducting bilingual approach in classrooms.
2. Implementing NEP 2020 thoroughly in every government as well as privately funded schools.
3. Classroom activities should be planned keeping bilingualism and multilingualism in mind.
4. Parental support is must for implementing such kind of educational approach in classrooms.

Conclusion:

The National Education Policy (NEP) of 2020 already addresses the application of Mother Tongue-Based Education in classrooms. The paper delves into the various challenges encountered in rolling out such programs, encompassing issues from allocating resources to providing adequate teacher training. Despite these hurdles, the paper underscores the significant advantages associated with incorporating mother tongue into inclusive education.



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Extensive documentation supports the cognitive, academic, and social benefits for students when they learn in their mother tongue. Moreover, the paper emphasizes that embracing linguistic diversity contributes to creating a more inclusive and culturally responsive educational atmosphere, fostering a sense of identity and belonging among students. Ultimately, the paper advocates for a fundamental shift in perspective towards acknowledging and appreciating linguistic diversity as a fundamental aspect of inclusive education.



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