

## **Multilingualism and its significance in teaching and learning process**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper is an attempt to draw attention towards multilingual education which refers to “first language first” education, that is schooling which begins in the mother tongue and transition takes place to other languages. Multilingual education programmes are best suited in developing countries where speakers of minority languages tend to be disadvantaged in the main stream educational system. Multicultural and multilingual society of India creates a complex challenges to the Government as it attempts to address the educational needs of its tribal communities. Researches show that children whose early education is, in the language of their home, tend to do better in the later years of their education. So MLE facilitates strong education among the children. An essential difference between MLE programmes and rural “mother tongue education” programmes is the inclusion of a guided transition from learning through the mother tongue to learning through another tongue. Many states of India have uniform test books and curriculum, which is not suitable for all tribal children, whose home language is different from the school language. Denying children from their mother tongue education leads to serious intellectual damage which blocks learning of the children. It is essential to sustain cultural and linguistic bio – diversities to promote human knowledge. Culture and language should be the foundation of education especially in ethnic minority and linguistic minority communities to make education context specific. Multilingual education is a resource and researches say that the mental development of multilingual children is better than the monolingual children.

**Key Words :** Multilingualism, Teaching, Learning process, Mother tongue education

### **INTRODUCTION**

In every corner of the world, young children are learning languages at home that differ from the dominant language used in their broader social world. For some, language is a road to upward mobility and for others it is a barrier to even the marginal life of choice and dignity. For millions of people, whose languages are rendered powerless in a society where only one or few languages are dominant, exclusion of mother tongues from social domains of significance has serious consequences for basic survival and well being. Educational failure of linguistic minorities all over the world is primarily related to the mismatch between the home language and the language of formal instruction. State policies in respect of languages in education often recognize but ignore in practice the problem of exclusion of languages. Forced submersion of minority children in dominant or majority language classrooms with subtractive effects on their mother tongues continues to be the most pressing

educational issue in multilingual settings.

Many state of India have a uniform language of instructions in government schools. In many instances, this prohibits children's learning in their mother tongue. It is believed that when a child is taught through a new subject as well as a new language.

In the case of tribal children, the content for learning as given in the curriculum and textbooks may not be suitable as the cultural context is varied and therefore, the examples and contextual knowledge critical to new learning is alien in the classrooms. Research studies reveal that children perform better when they are taught in their mother tongue and through familiar examples and objects in the first instance before they can intellectually move from the concrete to the abstract (Baker, 2001 and Heugh, 2003) children who are proficient in their mother tongue can adapt to other languages as well (Thomas and Collier, 1997).

Children are born with an ability to learn languages, and mother tongue is the first language the child comes in contact with. When the child is taught through her/his mother tongue she/he feels secure and understands the world around her/him in a better way. The socio-linguistic situation in India varies greatly. It is said that since time immemorial, every five miles, the culture and language differs in the country. Orissa, being a tribal dominated state, has the distinct feature of linguistic diversity. Articles 21 A, 29(1), 29(1), 46 and 350 of the constitution of India have also emphasized the benefits of imparting instructions in the mother tongue. The national curriculum framework (NCF, 2005) has also recommended that language teaching needs to be multilingual not only in terms of the number of languages offered to children but also in terms of evolving strategies that would use the multilingual classroom as a resource. It is advantageous to have home language/mother tongue of children as the medium of learning in schools. In addition, the Right to Education Act (2009) also emphasizes that the language of instructions should be the mother tongue whenever possible. This will enable the child to learn in her/his own socio-linguistic context.

### **Importance of mother tongue :**

The term 'mother tongue', though widely used, may refer to several different situations. Definitions often include the following elements: the language(s) that one has learnt first; the language(s) one identifies with or is identified as a native speaker of by others; the language(s) one knows best and the language(s) one uses most. 'Mother tongue' may also be referred to as 'primary' or 'first language'

To a person his mother tongue is "blessing in disguise". It is not merely a timetable subject in his education but is found upon him from all sides.

The origin of the term "mother tongue" harks back to the notion that linguistic skills of a child are honed by the mother and therefore the language spoken by the mother would be the primary language that the child would learn.

- Mother tongue is an indispensable instrument for development of the intellectual, moral and physical aspects of education.
- It is a subject thought and by which other subjects can be tackled, understood and communicated.
- Clarity of all thought and expression is only possible when one has certain command over the mother tongue.
- Weakness in any other subject means weakness in that particular subject, but weakness in mother tongue means paralysis of all thought and the power of expression.
- The mother tongue is a factor of unification and sympathy.

- The influence of the home on one's tongue begins during infancy

### **Concept of Multilingual Education :**

- Multilingual education typically refers to “first language first” education that is schooling which begins in the mother tongue and transition to additional language.
- Typically MLE programme suited in developing countries where speakers of minority languages tend to be disadvantaged in the mainstream educational system.
- Two or more language used as medium of instruction.
- Curriculum and instructional materials prepared on the basis of culture of the respective communities.
- Teachers from tribal community tap their community resource and shape the curriculum.

### **Component of Multilingual Education :**

#### ***Strong education :***

Research shows that children whose early education is in the language of their home tend to do better in the later years of their education. So MLE facilitates strong education among the children.

#### ***Strong bridge :***

A essential difference between MLE programs and rural “mother tongue education” programs is the inclusion of a guided transition from learning through the mother tongue to learning through another tongue.

#### ***Rational of MLE :***

- Many states of India uniform curriculum and textbook which is not suitable for all tribal children whose home language is different from the school language.
- Denying children from their mother tongue education lead to serious intellectual damage which block learning of the children.
- It is essential to sustain cultural and linguistic bio-diversities, to promote human knowledge which is a part of the intellectual property.
- Culture and language should be the foundation education especially in ethnic minority and linguistic minority communities to make education context specific.
- Increase and learners access to education in the majority language.
- Develop self esteem, confidence and cultural identity among the tribal students.

### **How MLE Functionalize Education for all :**

The eighty third constitutional Amendment recognize education as a fundamental right of all Indian citizens and the focus on tribal education through MLE can be seen as part of the wider framework of government of India's *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)* for the achievement of Universal Elementary Education.

Consequently around half of the funds designed for scheduled tribes are spent on educational provision. Government measures in the field of education for tribes aims to; Improve educational infrastructure in schedule tribe areas, Increase admission in educational institution through reservation of seats and other measures, provide financial support at various level of education. Including scholarship and fellowships, focus on tribal girls education.

**Increasing enrollment in school :**

The ultimate aim of MLE is to provide the education in their local language, which suitable to their culture. By providing education to their local language the students more enrolled in school and MLE functionalize.

**Emphasis to local culture :**

By omitting the gap between the cultural and lingual customs of the tribal people, and emphasis to their own culture MLE also functionalize.

**Develop awareness on education :**

Some educational awareness programme should be organize in MLE school. The students know about the needs of education in their daily life situation. By organizing such type of programme students aware about education.

**Bridge the gap between home language and school language :**

Most of the tribal community has their own dialects, most of them without script. They are less influenced by other languages, who hardly can understand the language of non-tribal population. This is the main reason for which they are mostly disadvantaged groups in terms of educational development. MLE makes provision for teaching should be made in their home language and then transacted to their second language. MLE gives importance on mother tongue, prepare the instructional material in their own languages specific.

**Innovation of community participation :**

Community participation is a major innovation in current educational development strategy. Community participation is dependent on community mobilization, therefore adequate measures are taken to motivate the community and mobilize it in participating and involving in school activity. Community plays major role in school management and developing curriculum. The local knowledge of the community is shared and discussed. The community shares the knowledge in the classroom.

**Bringing improvement in curriculum designing :**

The MLE programme was necessities by the low tribal literacy, high rate of dropout and non-enrollment low achievement of the tribal children at the primary and pre primary level. The irrelevant curriculum, un-satisfactory language reasons for the poor performance and early dropout of such scheduled children. For this need and culture specific contents are included in the curriculum design and transacted through their familiar language.

**Why MLE :**

- Many states of India have uniform curriculum and text books which is not suitable for all tribal children whose home language is different from the school language.
- Denying children from their mother tongue education lead to serious intellectual damage which block learning of the children.
- Research has shown that children do better when they are taught in their mother tongue (Thomas and Collier, 1997) children competent in mother tongue can do better in other tongues.
- It is essential to sustain cultural and linguistic bio-diversities to promote human knowledge which is a part of intellectual property. Culture and language should be the foundation of education

especially in ethnic minority and linguistic minority communities to make education context specific.

– Multilingual education is a reality and it is a resource. Research says that the mental development of multilingual children is better than the monolingual children.

### **Objectives of MLE :**

The broad objectives of MLE are to :

- Ensure equity and quality education to tribal children.
- Teach tribal children reading and writing skills so that they can acquire knowledge and information in their mother tongue as well as in state/national and international language;
- Develop socio-economic status through literacy;
- Develop self-respect in/for their language and culture; and

### **How to Implement MLE ?**

#### ***Creating a favorable environment :***

Prior to the actual implementation of a multilingual education project, upstream work is needed. This includes inter alia the following:

- Conducting an analysis of the sociolinguistic situation in consultation with concerned stakeholders such as learners, parents and school officials in order to ascertain which languages are used by whom and for what purposes.
- Defining the educational objective of MLE
- Ensuring that the concerned population adhere to the project from the start
- Launching information and communication campaigns which are helpful notably when implemented through traditional and electronic media.
- Formulating a language policy addressing all levels of education and integrating it in a national plan of education
- Ensuring sustainable technical and financial support, with government involvement regarding challenges related to human and financial resources.

### **Materials :**

- Teaching/learning materials should be developed in local languages so as to entirely reflect local culture
- The use of available computer programs and local publishing facilities should be envisaged for the production of appropriate teaching/learning materials at reasonable costs.
- Universities, academic centers and institutions should invest in language development (standardization of the writing system, lexical development and grammatical description) to support the development of materials in local languages.

### **Teacher/Education Training :**

- Educators and teachers must be trained to teach in a multilingual/ multicultural environment
- Educator and teachers should receive relevant training to enable them to teach in the learner's mother tongue (L1) as well as in the second Language (L2) should this not be their own language
- Educators and teachers should be provided with methodology and pedagogy adapted to teaching in the mother tongue.
- Educators and teachers must fully master the learners languages and know their socio-

cultural backgrounds.

**Learners :**

- School curriculum should be based on local cultures and themes should deal with the daily life and activities familiar to the learners.
- Learner's knowledge base should be taken into account when implementing MLE
- MLE can be set up provided that children have a good command of their mother tongue(s) and know their values and cultures well
- Learners should be encouraged to use L1 at home as the mother tongue is generally transmitted in the domestic environment
- L2 should become the language of instruction and L1 a subject only when the children have achieved literacy in L1
- Both L1 and L2 can be used at school: it is not a question of using one or the other language, but of using both languages.

**How MLE help for inclusive education :**

- MLE is just one method by which socially inclusive services can be delivered to linguist minority community members. While many measures for promoting inclusion incur costs, in learner's mother tongue (L1) as well as in the second Language (L2) should this not be their own language
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### **An overview of MLE programmes in India :**

- 1) MLE programmes are being implemented by state governments in the following states-
  - Andhra Pradesh
  - Odisha
  - Chhattisgarh
- 2) MLE projects are being done by the following NGOs –
  - a) Asha Kiran Society, Odisha
  - b) ULLASH, Odisha
  - c) Mitra education programme, Odisha
  - d) The good Samaritan, Chhattisgarh
  - e) Aadharshila Learning Center, M.P.
  - f) Pallikodam High School, Kerala
  - g) Adivasi Sahitya Sabha in collaboration with PAJHRA, Assam
  - h) Amrikarbi Literature Society, Assam
  - i) Rabha literacy mission, Meghalaya/Assam
  - j) Bodo, NIJURS community development society (NCDS) pilot project, Assam
- 3) Research /Evaluation projects
  - a) JNU Odisha research project
  - b) NCERT evaluation on APSSA/RGM project

### **Conclusion :**

The MLE programmes in India are only just at the beginning, but even in a short time in many places there has already been positive progress and an improved situation for the tribal children. A further test of the programme will come when the children transfer into secondary school where the medium of instruction will be the second language. If, as the research suggest, it requires between 5 and 7 years to know the second language well enough in order to be able to use it as a medium of instruction, support right through pre- and primary and on into secondary school will be essential for mother tongue speakers of minority languages to succeed in the current system.

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*Internat. J. Appl. Soc. Sci.* | Oct., 2018 | 5 (10) (1795)

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