

Use of Mother Tongue In Classroom Teaching

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Abstract

“Mother tongue is the language that a child learns from his mother. The child begins the learning of this language in his infancy. The mother tongue is natural for the development of man’s mind as mother’s milk is for the development of the infant’s body. It is the mother tongue that helps the child understand the feelings and desires of others. “

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The National Education Policy 2020 advocates that "wherever possible, the medium of education will be the mother tongue/local language/regional language until at least Grade 5, but preferably until Grade 8 and beyond," both in public and private schools.¹ Mother tongue is the language that a child learns from his mother. The child begins the learning of this language in his infancy. The mother tongue is natural for the development of man’s mind as mother’s milk is for the development of the infant’s body. It is the mother tongue that helps the child understand the feelings and desires of others.

Mother tongue is the medium of one’s own inner thoughts and contemplations. Thought and language are interrelated. Hence for acquiring knowledge in a better and unambiguous way, the mother tongue is the best medium. It has been scientifically proved that assimilation of facts is easier through one’s own language.

This is the major reason why the builders of nations gave importance to mother tongues while they contemplated the idea of sovereign state after saving their nations from the clutches of colonisation. Eminent personalities like Lenin, Mao Tse Tung and M. K. Gandhi were vehement advocates of mother tongue. They put emphasis on the use of mother tongue for all communications, administration and education.

Every year, 21st February is celebrated as the International MOTHER TONGUE DAY all over the world. UNESCO have had made a resolution in 1952 that each country of the world must impart the primary education only in their mother tongue. Prof. Yashpal Committee had strongly recommended in the National Education Guidelines-2005 that Primary Education must be given in mother tongue only. Except those countries of Europe whose mother tongue is English i.e. England, America, Canada, Australia etc. the primary education in the rest of the countries of Europe is not given in English. For example; in Greece, Spain, France, Germany, Norway, Sweden and in Switzerland Swiss children are given pre-primary and primary education in their respective mother tongues. Similarly, in the countries other than Europe i.e. Russia, China, Japan, South Korea and Thailand the medium of instruction for primary education is their mother tongues and moreover the administration and business of these countries are run in their mother tongues and still they are the most advanced countries in the science and technology in this world.

According to **Robert Paul**, “When we learn first language, we face the universe directly and learn to clothe it with speech; when we learn a second language, we tend to filter the universe through the language already known.”² At the same time, some of the linguists are not in favour of using mother tongue as the medium of instruction. They think that the mother tongue creates a negative role in teaching a foreign language. However, the present paper establishes this fact that the role of mother-tongue facilitates the teaching of foreign language. Before debating the issue, let’s understand as to what some of the great thinkers, has to say about the issue:

The Indian scientist **Dr.Jayant Narlikar** observed that “Children can promptly understand and learn the complicated principles of science in their mother tongues. The grasping power of children become disrupt if in the

¹ NEP 2020

²Robert Paul, Understanding English p68

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starting years of schooling the subjects like science and math are learned in the language other than mother tongue”. Mathematician **P.C.Vaidh** says: “Thinking power of children properly develops if primary education is given in their mother tongue”. **Mahatama Gandhi** said: “As the mother-milk is natural for physical development of a child so do is mother tongue for its mental development. A child begins its learning from the mother. For mental development of a child, I consider it a fault against the mother land if a language other than mother tongue is loaded on a child”.

Saint Vinoba Bhave firmly says: “A language that a human heart can grasp is only mother tongue. Education must be given in mother tongue. He further said: If children are given education in languages other than their mother tongues, these children will become mentally weak; their grasping power becomes blunt”.

Shri Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya, the poet of “**Vande Mataram**” wrote having been proud of mother tongue: “Neither have I hated English nor English people. We must learn English as much as possible and study their literature but what is of us, what is in our blood will remain always of us. Our inner personality can’t be developed unless we learn and express our thoughts, feelings and emotions in our mother tongue”.

W. H. Ryburn: “Mother-tongue is the basis of all work. Any emphasis laid on the mother-tongue will have a good effect on the standard of English.”

Emerson says: - “When a mother tongue is finished, a culture is finished. In such circumstances, it is imperative to give primary education in mother tongue because mother tongue is only stream of culture”.

If the mother-tongue is well taught, the teaching of it will help the learning of a new language. And if a foreign language is taught on sound lines, the training that it gives the pupil will promote a better understanding and a better use of the mother-tongue.

Thus the purpose of communication through MT begins at the earliest stage of life. When we receive education through our own language, our relations with people at home will take on a different character. To-day, we cannot make our wives real life-companions. They have very little knowledge of what we do outside. In the same way, our parents have no idea of what we learn at school. If, however, we receive education through our mother-tongue, we can quite easily transmit all that we learn at the school to our servants—the washer man, barber, bhangi (sweeper) and others, and thus educate them. In England, we can discuss politics with the hair-dresser while he cuts our hair. Here, we cannot do so even with the members of our own families. It is not because they are ignorant. They also know about many things,—though, perhaps, different ones. We talk with them on the Mahabharata, the Ramayana and of sacred places of pilgrimage, because it is these things which our people hear and learn about. But the knowledge we get at school does not seep down to others, not even to the members of our families, because we cannot impart to them what we learn in English.³

When it comes to English Language Teaching (ELT), one needs to understand the relevance of English in the present times at national and international level. In India, computer, internet, e-commerce, most of the Govt. rules, administration, civil law, court procedures etc. are transacted in English. Therefore it is natural for the youth to be attracted towards English and there is nothing wrong in learning English. What the eminent thinkers say: there is a great difference between learning English and taking education in English. Those parents desire to give education in English medium to their children must very clearly know this difference. We must learn English language but not at the cost of our mother tongue.

Mahatma Gandhi rightly said that “English has become a language of the world. So, I recommend its education as other optional language at university level but not in primary schools. This way all the renowned thinkers have recommended learning English but not giving education in English”. Today the storm has so fast spread, specifically in our India for giving even pre-primary and primary education in English; this storm would bring time for close of schools giving education in mother tongues. Death of mother tongue is death of the Asmita (existence) of a nation. The culture of a country, of a region is closely connected with its mother tongue; it is in the blood of the people.

Recommendations by various commissions regarding the use of mother tongue:

The University Education Commission Report 1950:

³True Education: pp. 7-17

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The Commission suggested that the medium at the University stage at the elementary and the secondary will have to be the regional language. However, to ensure for Hindi the status of federal language, it clearly states:

"We should like to see the introduction of the federal language in all schools at the secondary stage, and the teaching should be continued at the university. This will ensure a general knowledge of the federal language of use for all practical needs. In addition, for those who desire to attain greater mastery over the federal language, facilities should be provided for intensive study."

The Commission also pointed out "that the Universities should have the option to use the federal language as medium of instruction either for some subjects or for all."

The Mudaliar Commission's Report 1952-53:

The Secondary Education Commission (1952-53) under the chairmanship of Dr Laxman swami Mudaliar made the following recommendations:

(i) The mother-tongue or the regional language should generally be the medium of instruction throughout the secondary school stage, subject to the provision that for linguistic minorities special facilities should be made available.

(ii) During the middle school stage every child should be taught at least two languages, English and Hindi should be introduced at the end of the Junior Basic stage, subject to the principle that no two languages should be introduced in the same year.

(iii) At the high and higher secondary stage at least two languages should be studied, one of which being the mother-tongue or the regional language.

The languages to be studied in the secondary stage should be:

- (i) Mother-tongue or regional language or a composite course of the mother-tongue and a classical language.
- (ii) One other language to be chosen from among the following: (a) Hindi (for those whose mother-tongue is not Hindi);
 - (b) Elementary English (for those who have not studied English at the earlier stage);
 - (c) Advanced English (for those who had studied English at the earlier stage);
 - (d) A modern Indian language (other than Hindi);
 - (e) A modern foreign language (other than English);
 - (f) A classical language.

Thus this Commission recommended two-language formula.

The Three-Language Formula:

In the year 1956 the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) introduced the Three-Language Formula. This formula was approved in 1961 in the Chief Ministers conference. According to this formula, the student is to learn his mother-tongue as the regional language, Hindi as the national language and English as the international language.

Recommendation of the Education Commission 1964-66:

The Indian Education Commission tried to cut the Gordian knot and present a workable and generally acceptable formula. It adhered broadly to the three-language formula devised by the CABE in 1956 but in a modified form based upon actual experience gained during the last ten years. The modified formula runs as follows:

- (i) The mother-tongue or the regional language;
- (ii) The official language of the Union or the associate official language of the union so long as it exists; and
- (iii) A modern Indian or foreign language not covered under (i) and (ii) and other than that used as the medium of instruction.

After discussing the recommendations made by different commissions and committees, it may be added here that the mother-tongue may be helpful in teaching second or foreign language in the following ways:

- In the formation of thoughts and ideas.
- In the oral and written expression
- In the formation of reading habits
- In the learning of lexical items
- In the learning of functional grammar
- In the use of contrast and composition
- For the comprehension and understanding of the passage
- For translating from FL or SL into the mother-tongue and vice-versa

In defence of mother-tongue as medium of instruction:

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1. Mother-tongue—the languages of the majority in the respective regions'. As the regional languages are the languages of an over whelming majority of the people in the respective regions, they will constitute the best medium of instruction.
2. The mother-tongue is the most natural medium of instruction.
3. The period of education can be curtailed through the use of mother-tongue as a medium of instruction, a lot of 'wastage' involved in learning a foreign language can be avoided and the period of education can be curtailed without an adverse effect upon the standard.
4. Languages will get a chance for development: All the regional languages shall get their due opportunity for development. They will become the vehicle of all branches of knowledge and thought.
5. No linguistic group will have a grudge against another and Inter-state relations would be smooth: Due to the absence of domination of any particular language, inter-state relations would be smooth. A situation like this in which all groups take equal pride in their linguistic inheritance, will be a more positive and forceful factor in preserving and strengthening national unity, than compelling unwilling people to use either English or Hindi.
6. The masses can afford to get enough liberal education and the curse of illiteracy and ignorance would be wiped out.
7. The use of mother-tongue—a great benefit to democracy: When the masses are educated in the regional language and the administration is also conducted in the same language, the common man shall be able to judge political things better and his opinion shall carry weight. This is a great benefit to democracy.
8. A positive communication can be established between the university graduates and the masses—its artisans and technicians: University graduates will be able to make their maximum possible contribution to the advancement of learning generally and science and technology particularly. Advanced knowledge will become as much the property of the common man as of the university man. Most of the time graduates in agriculture serving as extension officers and demonstrators, whose profession is to explain the latest methods in agriculture to the farmers in the villages, are seen to be ineffective simply because they do not know the language of the cultivators. Mother-tongue, thus, will provide a link between the university and the masses.
10. Regional languages in the interest of emotional integration:

The Emotional Integration Committee opines that the use of mother-tongue as medium of education from the lowest to the highest stage of education is a matter of profound importance for national integration.

How does the mother tongue help the learning of English?

Research has shown that many skills acquired in the first language can be transferred to the second language. So, for example, if your child has developed good reading skills in Korean, she is likely to be able to apply these skills when reading English. (One useful reading skill is the ability to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words from context. Another one is the ability to decide which new words in a text are important to look up in the dictionary and which words can safely be ignored.) For this reason it helps if you can encourage your child to read good fiction and non-fiction in her own language. Similarly, the skills of being able to plan out a piece of writing or develop an argument in a persuasive essay can be applied in the second language once they have been learned in the first.

What are the other reasons for maintaining and developing mother tongue proficiency?

Firstly, many children in international schools plan to return to their home country at some point to continue their education there. This is a strong reason to make sure they do not have gaps in mother tongue language or cognitive development. And secondly, ESL students who turn against or otherwise neglect their mother tongue can often suffer from problems of identity loss or alienation from their parents, and from their grandparents or other family members in their home country.

How can ESL student's best develop their mother tongue proficiency?

For some students, developing mother tongue proficiency is easier because they have lessons each week in their native language. For students who are not in this fortunate position, there is still much that can be done to maintain the mother tongue. For example, parents can make sure that they have good reference books or textbooks at home - in the native language. Students should be encouraged to read good literature and to discuss school work. Some of the long summer vacation could be devoted to mother-tongue learning and reading.

ARGUMENTS AGAINST MOTHER-TONGUE

1. Mother-tongue not well-developed: No doubt mother-tongues like Bengali, Hindi and Tamil have great literature, rich in classical work of prose and poetry—but as vehicles of modern knowledge in the field of science and technology, they present a sorry picture. With the full-fledged enthronement of the mother-tongue as the medium of instruction in universities, we would be bidding good-bye to our hope of catching up with the advanced countries

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in matters of science and technology in the immediate future. It is suggested that we can make up for this deficiency by translating standard works from foreign languages. The feasibility of this proposition is doubtful. Firstly, various branches of modern knowledge have become so highly specialised that they have developed not only a terminology but a language and symbolism of their own, which are almost untranslatable. It is very likely that such translations, even if they are accomplished, will be more difficult to understand than the original works themselves.

Again, we have examples which show that translations can never keep pace with the originals. As far back as 1916, Osmania University started for the first time with Urdu as the medium of instruction. Several cores of rupees were spent on translations. This took years and by the time a translation was ready, the original edition had become outmoded and the translation was already behind time.

2. Universities will become isolated islands: The deeper and fuller intercourse between the seats of learning will not be possible. We shall be compelled to draw students and professors from within the confines of the States and not from the whole country, let alone from abroad.

3. Universities will no more remain as international centres of learning: The introduction of mother-tongues as media would wipe out English from our system. Thus universities will no more remain the international centres of learning as they are today.

4. Our students will no more be in a position to go abroad in search of knowledge as confidently as they do at present.

5. If the mother-tongue be made the medium, it would be a great disadvantage to emigrants and immigrants.

6. Disadvantage to students who have to reside in cities like *Delhi, Bombay and Calcutta*. If all the schools and the universities teach in the mother-tongue, what will happen to the children of those from other States, who will have to reside in these big cities for professional reasons?

7. The interests of linguistic minorities will suffer.

8. The use of mother-tongue will precipitate national disintegration: Their introduction would foster the spirit of narrow provincialism and thus would harm the basic unity of India.

9. Lack of uniformity in different languages: If the languages are unequally developed, it would mean unequal opportunities in competitive examinations and as such it would be a matter of concern.

10. There is also the difficulty in finding teachers who could lecture to university students in the mother-tongue: A number of university professors of the present generation have done specialised studies in their respective subjects abroad—they would not be able to teach them in the mother-tongue.

The use of the mother tongue in the classroom has always been a controversial issue, due to the existence of diverse opinions. On the one hand there are the researchers who stand completely against the use of the foreign language in classroom; while on the other hand, there are those who consider it beneficial for the learners.

Keeping in view the debates involved in the use of mother-tongue in language classroom, there is need of a bold, clear, definite and final decision regarding our language policy. Besides, multilingualism has created a number of problems concerning the status of languages in our curriculum. There are some pertinent problems—which language should be the medium of instruction at various levels? Which language should be the official language of the Union? Which language should be the link language? What should be the place of English?

Conclusion

At the end, it may be concluded that the use of the mother tongue in the classroom has always been a controversial issue, due to the existence of diverse opinions. On the one hand there are the researchers who stand completely against the use of the foreign language in classroom; while on the other hand, there are those who consider it beneficial for the learners. What Education for All (EFA) means for people in developing countries is access to basic literacy and numeracy as well as other skills that will improve their lives. Mother tongue-based bilingual education not only increases access to skills but also raises the quality of basic education by facilitating classroom interaction and integration of prior knowledge and experiences with new learning. The National Knowledge Commission recommends that the teaching of English as a language should be introduced, along with the first language (either the mother-tongue or the regional language) of the child, starting from Class I in school. This phase of language learning should focus on using both languages to create meaningful learning experiences for the child without disproportionate emphasis on grammar and rules.⁴When we find that the judicious use of mother-tongue is going to

⁴NKC,2006

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help our pupils than by all means let us use it and let us get rid of this idea that mother-tongue is a taboo in English language teaching.

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