



Importance of mother tongue in primary education

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Abstract: This research indicates that having a strong foundation in mother tongue leads to a much better understanding of the curriculum as well as a more positive attitude towards school, so it's vital that children maintain their first language when they begin schooling in a different language. This paper also explains about the importance of Mother tongue the language which a child starts hearing after being born and thus, it also helps in providing a definite shape to our emotions and thoughts. Learning in your mother tongue also is crucial in enhancing other skills such as critical thinking, skills to learn a second language and literacy skills.

Keywords: Mother tongue, Language, Education, Holistic learning

If you talk to a man in a language he understands, it goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, it goes to his heart. -Nelson Mandela

Introduction

Language is defined as "a system of communication which consists of a set of sounds and written symbols which are used by the people of a particular country or region for talking or writing".

What is Mother Tongue?

Mother tongue is defined as the first language a child is exposed to from the time of birth. The first language thus plays a crucial role in our lives for a wide array of reasons. It actually is the language in which a child is spoken to before he begins to understand words. It also refers to a person's native language or home language. It is the dominant language which in fact defines a person's thoughts.

Another definition for mother tongue is that language which "denotes not only

the language one learns from one's mother, but also the speaker's dominant and home language, i.e. not only the first language according to the time of acquisition, but the first with regard to its importance and the speaker's ability to master its linguistic and communicative aspects. Mother tongue is closely associated with culture (W.Tulasiewicz and A Adams, 2005).

It is a common belief that as we move towards a society in which the medium of teaching is English, we tend to move away from our mother tongue. As the concept of "first-language-first" is the schooling done in a child's mother language, this paper analyzes the importance of mother tongue in primary education. This also provides the various advantages and how it gives a definite shape to a child's emotions and thoughts.



Purpose of this article

We are living in a time of unprecedented travel, with technological advances and globalization offering more and more people the opportunity to explore and live in cultures that are not their own. International schools have been established for decades now and are rapidly growing in popularity, particularly amongst urban populations as they offer easier access to higher education opportunities around the world. As a consequence, the number of children learning in a language other than their mother tongue is growing rapidly.

This article indicates that having a strong mother tongue foundation leads to a much better understanding of the curriculum as well as a more positive attitude towards school, so it's vital that children maintain their first language when they begin schooling in a different language.

Developing The Mother Tongue

When children develop their mother tongue, they are simultaneously fostering a whole host of other essential skills, such as critical thinking and literacy skills. It is this skill-set that they take with them into formal education, and research tells us that any skills and concepts gained in the learner's home language don't need to be re-taught when they transfer to a second language. For example, if a child has developed the ability to guess the meaning of a word through its context or to infer meaning by reading between the lines, these skills are easily transferred when they begin studying in a second language. It is much harder,

however, to teach these abstract skills directly through a second language.

It's also well known that a strong mother tongue foundation equips children with the skills they need to learn additional languages, allowing them to transfer their understanding of the structure of language to several new languages. The intuitive understanding of grammar that develops when children learn their first language can easily be passed on to other languages. With multilingualism becoming an increasingly sought-after attribute within the workplace, this advantage cannot be overstated. Globalization and increased co-operation between nations mean that, in that, in many organizations, it has become a requirement to have language skills in addition to being a specialist within a particular field.

Language and mother tongue also play a huge role in the development of personal, social and cultural identity. Children with a strong foundation in their first language often display a deeper understanding of themselves and their place within society, along with an increased sense of wellbeing and confidence. Naturally, this flows down into every aspect of their lives, including their academic achievement.

Diversity Of Languages In India

India is perhaps the richest language hub on the earth. Exhibiting a baffling range of linguistic diversity, India is a home to more than 350 languages that can be grouped under just five families. India can boast of being the home for a number of dominant languages of the world, and a large number of small languages that are in the brink of extinction. Seeing the language



plurality of India, We can say that no single state in India is homogeneous in terms of language. Also, the dominant language of a given region might be a case of linguistic minority another region.

Unity In Diversity

Described as the living tower of Babel, there are several linguistic communities in the country that share common culture and nationality thereby justifying the description of India as the land of 'Unity in Diversity'. The constitution of India has listed out 18 national languages. Each of them has its own unique history and richness. There are twenty two official languages in India including Assamese, Bodo, Bengali, Dogri, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Konkani, Kashmiri, Maithili, Meitei, Malayalam, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Sindhi, Santhali, Telugu, Tamil and Urdu. There are several hundreds of mother tongues in India. Since in several cases it is difficult to distinguish a dialect from a distinct language, arriving at an accurate number is not that easy.

The Mass Appeal Of A Language

Studies have brought to surface that about 29 languages in India are spoken by over million local communities, about fifty languages are spoken by over 1 lakh people and not less than 114 languages are used by about 10,000 natives. The demand for carving the states of India on linguistic basis was voiced since long in the past. Following India's independence, the states Reorganization Act of 1956 ventured to reform the boundaries of Indian states and union territories on a linguistic basis. Since then, despite a few insignificant clashes and disputes in

the name of languages, language diversity of the country was never a threat to national integration.

Script And Writing System

Most Indian languages have their own distinct alphabetical system except Kashmiri, Punjabi, Sindhi and Urdu which make use of the altered versions of the Arabic script. Taught Hindi and Urdu have originated from the same source, they make use of Devnagri and Persian-Arabic script respectively. Presenting a rich tradition of its own, each of the languages of India has immensely contributed to weave the fabric of the national culture in India.

INTERNATIONAL TONGUE DAY

MOTHER

**In a changing world, it's vital people
continue to use their mother tongue –
M J Warsi**

To promote awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity and to promote social and multilingual identity, International Mother Tongue Day has been celebrated every year on February 21 since 1990, after the declaration by the United Nations to recognize the sacrifices of people who lost their lives for the sake of their mother tongue in Bangladesh. To every one of us, mother language is one of the most precious gifts that we have in our lives. Each and every language spoken throughout the globe represents a unique and distinct cultural heritage, melodious songs, colorful environment, tasty food and a healthy society to live in, where people express their feelings and emotions without any hesitation. "Fifty per cent of the world's out-of-school children live in communities where the language of



schooling is rarely, if ever, used at home" (Malone).

This is perhaps one of the most astounding figures about second language education. Schools have tried to tackle the problem by going to the families of these children for help in having students gain comfort with a second language for their own learning. They ask the parents of students to use the second language at home so they are more comfortable with it in school. This does more harm than good for reasons other than a second language being much harder to learn in regardless of copious levels of effort put in to learn it. In the types of developing areas where this is a major problem, there frequently aren't the resources to prepare students on this level so their efforts are futile in that sense. They also cause a rift between families and their native languages in a wholly unnecessary way. Families feel alienated from their mother tongue simply because the school gives the impression they should feel this way. By propagating this attitude, these school systems are essentially destroying the diverse culture and background of human nature that makes our species so great.

Many different languages and dialects spoken throughout the globe reflect how history and culture have shaped the ways in which people speak, think and reflect today. The language or mother tongue that we learn since our childhood helps to link new generations to the past which is part of our cultural and plural-lingual heritage. It is a well known fact that everyone had a language that they grew up speaking,

and a good proportion of the world spoke more than one language, but the idea that someone would regularly have to be taught in a language that wasn't native to them had never occurred previously. "This was, undoubtedly, exacerbated by the fact that I never made significant strides towards becoming fluent in another language. The closest I had ever come was a "working proficiency" in Spanish during my junior year of high school. When I think back on my perspective on this subject in the context of my parents, their accents never bothered me because I had just always been so used to them", said a 21-year-old, one of my former students Tej at Washington University in St. Louis, USA.

As said by Leanne Hinton, a professor of linguistics at University of California at Berkeley, in Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education: "More broadly, the loss of language is part of the loss of whole cultures and knowledge systems, including philosophical systems, oral, literary and musical traditions, environmental knowledge systems, medical knowledge and important cultural practices and artistic skills. The world stands to lose an important part of the sum of human knowledge whenever a language stops being used. Just as the human species is putting itself in danger through the destruction of species diversity, so might we be in danger from the destruction of the diversity of knowledge systems". These problems are hard to fix. If one were to approach an educator and tell them to try to fix the problems themselves, the educator will frequently point to a lack of resources to be able to do this. Nevertheless, a greater effort must be made by educators to learn sympathy



for the mother tongue of their students if different than their own.

The beauty of academic education is that the majority of it comes from books that can be more easily produced in areas with greater resources. It's on many of the educators in these parts of the world who are multilingual to produce orthographical and instructional materials for use in these developing areas. Given the resource crisis in the developing world, this is likely to be one of the most practical solutions. Children in developing areas have the thirst for knowledge — we must do what we can to satiate it. When students leave the environment of a classroom where the objective is to learn a particular language to an environment where they are fully capable of including everyone in it. By speaking their mother tongue on campus, either by choice or subconsciously, they are including everyone else on campus into their conversation and essentially into their friends' circle. This attitude of speaking their mother tongue when they have the choice to speak in this universal language may be beneficial from the teaching standpoint, but also from the social and cultural point of view.

Language is the essence and identity of culture, and is a major tool for communication. It is a major tool for exchanging ideas, emotions and feelings. To know your language is the key way to keep and preserve your culture. In recent times, the idea of linguistic and cultural awareness has increased; thus allowing the mother tongue to be more culturally accepted.

Mother tongue refers to a person's native language, that is, a language learned from birth. It's clear we must strive to reform the systems that educate the youth to further the quality of learning in the first language or mother tongue and to inspire solidarity based on understanding, tolerance, dialogue and discussion. Maintaining and retaining the languages of ethnic and cultural groups is critical for the preservation of cultural heritage and identity. Using one's mother tongue at home will make it easier for speakers to be more comfortable with their own linguistic and cultural identity.

Education Is Holistic When In Mother Tongue

Education is holistic when in mother tongue, says Sonam Wangchuk, the founder of Students' Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh.

While some State governments in India, including Telangana, are converting regional language government schools to English medium schools, Sonam Wangchuk, well known for the school he runs in Ladakh and founder of Students' Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh stressed the need for mother tongue to be the medium of instruction not just in government schools, but also in private peers. Speaking to Express he said, "whether people will have the will and courage to do or not, I don't know but I think it is very important that children get education in their own language. Children have the right to have education to learn in their mother tongue.

Mother tongue is not just language, it is a tool that a child acquires even before being born. Education should be



in mother tongue rather than pushing children towards English. I would like to say that even private schools should run in regional language and have English as second language but never make it as a 'medium' because the transmission losses are very high.

If the best of schools in Hyderabad were in the local language and develop English side by side then the education in other schools that exist in villages will not be not much different than the schools in Hyderabad." On the importance of speaking up Wangchuk said, "Every person should participate in democracy, which is politics.

They should voice their opinion, form groups and make their thoughts heard, which is their duty as well. It is important to let people know in power what you do not like. There is nothing absolutely right or wrong in expressing one's thoughts."

Children Learn Better In Their Mother Tongue UNESCO has encouraged mother tongue instruction in primary education since 1953 (UNESCO, 1953) and UNESCO highlights the advantages of mother tongue education right from the start: children are more likely to enroll and succeed in school (Kosonen, 2005); parents are more likely to communicate with teachers and participate in their children's learning (Benson, 2002); girls and rural children with less exposure to a dominant language stay in school longer and repeat grades less often (Hovens, 2002; UNESCO Bangkok, 2005); and children in multilingual education tend to develop better thinking skills compared to their monolingual peers (e.g., Bialystok, 2001; Cummins, 2000; King & Mackey, 2007).

India: A Multitude of Problems of a Multilingual Nation

The recently constructed Bangalore metro garnered sufficient controversy a while back with its decision to have Hindi signage complementing that of English and Kannada, the vernacular language of the southern Indian state of Karnataka. Many people saw this as another attempt by the Modi government to "impose" Hindi on predominantly non-Hindi speaking regions. Social media, particularly Twitter, saw a number of people espouse this sentiment with the hashtag #NammaMetroHindiBeda, which translates as, "We don't want Hindi in our Metro" from Kannada. Bangalore, the capital of Karnataka, has long been heralded as one of the most progressive and cosmopolitan cities of India, thanks to its housing of major industries that have been crucial to the growth story of India since economic liberalization started in 1991. In spite of this, if local populations have strong objections to oppose the language native to more than four out of every 10 people of India, then society as a whole needs to explore where and how the current policies on language are going wrong.

The conflict between speakers of different languages is not new to India. Linguistic diversity has been a critical aspect of the multiculturalism that has been the defining characteristic of India through the ages. As of 2013, over 700 languages are spoken in the country.

The lack of a centralizing political union across South Asia throughout most of history meant that this wouldn't really produce any social distress, until the advent of British rule. It was only when the British tried to centralize their administration beyond the ambit of the English language in the mid-



19th century that they began to explore the divides in the linguistic identities of India as a means of imposing their domination.

True to the ancient policy of divide et impera, the British went about with their agenda conceitedly, starting with the Hindi-Urdu controversy in the late 19th century, an issue that is often cited as the beginning of the Hindu-Muslim divide in India. This was complemented by the now disproved, incomplete, imperialist and propagandist Indo-Aryan theory that implied an age-old socio-cultural divide between the Aryan-dominated north and the Dravidian-dominated south. Subsequent splits on the lines of caste-based precedents opened up very quickly, making way for several revanchist and radical movements to run parallel to the mainstream nationalist movements under the Indian National Congress party.

One movement that stood out was that for a Dravidian state. Spearheaded largely by middle-class Tamil intellectuals such as Periyar and C.N. Annadurai, its agitations steadily progressed from opposing Brahmanism and unilateral imposition of Hindi across southern Indian states to secession from independent India based on disagreements with the increasingly assertive demands of the Hindi-enthusiast mainstream right wing. While demands for secession receded after being outlawed in 1963, the movement did manage to indefinitely postpone the planned phasing out of English to make way for Hindi as the sole national language in 1965.

It also managed to consolidate a three-language formula, by which certain states would get to function and support education in one primary vernacular

language along with English and Hindi, the two official languages of India ever since. While many states such as Maharashtra and Odisha managed to implement this, it was disapproved of by the Tamil Nadu assembly later. Annadurai, the chief minister of Tamil Nadu at that time, had famously criticized the requirement of non-Hindi speakers to learn both Hindi and English to that of "boring a smaller hole in a wall for the kitten while there is a bigger one for the cat." Most anti-Hindi sentiments continue to thrive on this line of thought.

Beyond Regionalism

A simple video by the popular Indian comedy group All India Bakchod (AIB) that had gone viral explains how flawed it is to assume that what suits the cat will also suit the kitten. Every language has its own populations to appeal to, with its own strengths and shortcomings in expression. To reject the unilateral imposition of a language in a society as diverse as India is reasonable, but to restrict the exposure of populations to other languages of the country seems myopic. It limits opportunities in terms of work, education and everyday interactions for millions of people, thus restricting social mobility and depriving the country of much-needed growth and prosperity.

With chronic overpopulation, rampant communalism, corruption, unemployment, territorial distress and large-scale migrations, the states of northern India have seemingly endured greater hardships under successive administrations in independent India in comparison to the relatively more industrialized and prosperous states of southern India. This has left a large part of the so-called Hindi-speaking belt



of India with weak public institutions and a highly dysfunctional education system for the past seven decades. To expect this part of India to subset its usage of Hindi into a language that is still essentially foreign is both emotionally demanding and nearly impossible to carry out any time soon, given huge infrastructural shortages for imparting quality English education and implementing it across India in general.

It is somewhat reasonable for non-Hindi-speaking states to expect greater reciprocity from Hindi-speaking states from the perspective of the three-language formula, however. Instead of fancifully espousing European or East Asian languages, which are taught poorly and rarely used by the average Indian, Hindi-speaking states could do a world of good by promoting other modern Indian languages as much as other regional with their speakers could do by promoting Hindi.

Hindi, along with Urdu, developed as an amalgamation of many northern, eastern and western Indian languages over centuries of cultural intermixing due to political and social unrest. Limited social mobility arising from political constraints meant it wouldn't be able to incorporate as many aspects of languages from the southern and northeastern regions as a national language should have. The ascendancy of Hindi, however, didn't dilute regional identities. The uniqueness of Hindi-belt languages such as Bhojpuri, Haryanvi, Punjabi, Marwari, Chhattisgarhi and Bundelkhandi, along with those of other states with remarkable Hindi literacy such as Gujarati, Marathi and Odia, stands to testify this. Hindi largely linked its speakers to a common linguistic basis, which eventually paved

the way for broader, yet more inclusive, cultural identities. It is rather shortsighted to apprehend the expansion of demographic realms of Hindi, since it has mostly sought to expand the outlook of communities rather than subjugate them.

Identities in Modern India

Identities in modern India may have to be broader than what Hindi can encompass because of the very multiculturalism the world's largest democracy is in fact based on. To allow this, Indian society must strive to maintain openness in all of its languages. Retrospective measures, such as the promotion of unnecessary linguistic purism as performed by certain Hindi ideologues and forceful, politicized burdening of language education as attempted with Bengali, can be both bitterly divisive and incompatible with the times we currently live in. The recent unrest in North Bengal over the statehood demands for Gorkhaland exemplifies this. New avenues of learning and communicating are radically redefining interactions, both descriptively as well as prescriptively. This is evident particularly in India because of its vast youth population and burgeoning ICT industries. Even English has had to borrow heavily from Indian vocabulary every now and then to keep up with the times. A non-progressive approach to defining language roles in India will only serve to confuse people and build up an unhealthy reliance on English.

To judge the immiscibility of languages and associated cultures on the basis of an incomplete and controversial theory with imperialist roots is rather shallow. To allow a disproportionately influential



section of India's political class to exploit insecurities of those suffering from the perennial status quo of this language divide for staying in power is rather despicable. The role of languages in modern India could probably be best understood by their capacities to connect to various groups of people from disparate cultures. Judging languages by their artistic elements or rigid regional limits simply cannot do justice to the contemporary needs of people.

ADVANTAGES OF MOTHER TONGUE

Intellectual Development: Studies have shown that cognitive development as well as intellectual development is comparatively faster in those who are fluent in their mother tongue. It has also been noted that if a student is educated in his/her mother tongue, the rate of his or her educational success is higher than someone who is taught in a different medium other than their mother tongue.

Better connection with your culture

Languages are the most important way of keeping our culture alive. Often the direct translation of one language to another might not carry the same essence as it is in the source language. Thus, the best way to thoroughly know about a culture is to know the language. Mother tongue helps us stay connected to our culture and our roots.

Second language learning: If one has a firm grasp of their mother tongue, it is easier for him or her to master a new language. When a child reads out in their mother tongue since childhood, he

or she would have stronger literacy skills in other languages.

Commercial benefits: As the businesses go the local way, the importance of mother tongues has exponentially increased. Thus, in such a scenario, having a firm understanding of your mother tongue where you know how to read and write is immensely helpful if you are interested in becoming an entrepreneur. The opportunities related to monetizing with the help of one's mother tongue are vast in today's market scenario.

The Pride: Knowing your mother tongue well is a matter of pride. It boosts one's confidence and creates awareness in the individual's mind while also helping them connect with their cultural identity in a better manner.

Mother tongue has a huge positive influence in defining the personality of an individual; however, the medium of education which is usually English also encourages parents to speak to their children in their second language. Thus, this leads to confusion in the minds of the children and hence, they face difficulties in mastering both first and second language.

Mother tongue is the language which a child starts hearing after being born and thus, it also helps in providing a definite shape to our emotions and thoughts. Learning in your mother tongue also is crucial in enhancing other skills such as critical thinking, skills to learn a second language and literacy skills. Thus, we can say that the mother tongue can be used as an effective tool of learning.



Techniques To Promote Mother Tongue

- Parental motivation –children love mother tongue by finding ways
- Leave second language to the outside world and speak to children only in your mother tongue
- Devote time each day to reading and writing in mother tongue
- Tell stories and discuss interesting topics on your childhood, celebrations, develop both their oral and vocabulary skills.
- Provide a reward system and make learning mother language competitive among children.
- Watch TV series or favorite cartoons with them in the target language
- Listen to songs in mother tongue.
- Send children to centers that offer courses and other types of learning in your language.
- Keep journal in home written in mother language.
- Communicate your expectations about your home language to your child's teachers. As professionals, they can encourage and support your child in keeping and developing their home language in many ways.

CONCLUSION

Mother tongue has influence on every aspect of the decoding process of the second language including acoustics, phonetics, serial perception, phonological level, lexical access, and sentence and text comprehension. If a child has weaker decoding abilities in mother tongue, it will reflect low performance in second language acquisition as well. The main prerequisite for a successful learning of a second language is strong perception

and comprehension capabilities in the mother tongue.

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