

# PRESERVATION OF REGIONAL LANGUAGES IN THE CONTEXT OF MODERN EDUCATION SYSTEM

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## **ABSTRACT**

*The present study was designed to examine the effect of medium of instruction on preserving the regional identity of a place as well as boosting confidence among the students. For this purpose, a sample of 80 children, 40 each from grade IV (aged 8-9 years) and grade VI (aged 10-11 years) were selected. In each age group, 20 children were studying in an English medium school and the other 20 in an Assamese (a regional language of India) medium school. All the children were administered two tests each of planning, attention, simultaneous, and successive processing. The data were statistically analyzed with the help of 2 (medium of instruction) X 2 (grade) Analyses of Variance.*

*The results revealed significant main effects of medium of instruction for almost all the measures of gradual processes suggesting higher performance level of the Assamese medium school children in comparison to their English medium counterparts. The successive progresses were found to be developmentally sensitive as evident from significant main effects of grade. The results were discussed within the framework of research methodology.*

**Key Words:** *Attention, Bilingual education, English medium education, Assamese medium education, Planning, education etc.*

## **I.INTRODUCTION**

There has been plenty of research on the effects of bilingual education that is education through a language other than the mother tongue of the child, the results of which reveal an important divide. Policy makers (UNESCO, 1953) as well as researchers (Mohanty, 1989; Mwamwenda,1996; Pattanayak, 1991) worry that learning and living in two languages will slow the cognitive development and consequently have long term negative effects on the educational achievements of children. Until early 80's, negative outcomes of bilingualism dominated the literature. Speaking two languages in general, and being exposed to bilingual education in particular, was viewed as a source of developmental problems or delays. Recent researchers working in a variety of disciplines including education, psycholinguistic, psychology, speech and hearing sciences as well as neurosciences, however, present a different view emphasizing the positive consequences of bilingualism.

Children who learn through their mother tongue (L) are at an advantage compared to the children who learn through a second language (Macnamara,1973; Miti,1995; Mwamwenda,1996; Ngara,1982; Pattanayak, 1991; Wallwork,1985). Chaudron (1998) holds that in a situation where the learner learns through a language other than the mother tongue (L2) faces problems because his task is three-fold. Firstly, the student has to make sense of the instructional tasks, which are presented in the second language.

Secondly, he has to attain linguistic competence that is required for effective learning to take place. And finally, he has to master the content itself. A poor grasp of L results in a feeling of incompetence and loss of confidence on the part of the student (Roy-Campbell, 1996).

In the context of benefits of mother tongue as the medium of education, Cummins' (1974, 79) views on cognitive academic language proficiency(CALP) is relevant. CALP requires sound literacy skills and a broad vocabulary in L in order to facilitate subject-matter mastery, concept development and skills in formal oral and written expression in the second language (L1). In fact, first language acquisition must develop strongly in the early years to achieve success in cognitive functioning.

On the other hand, more recent studies have found bilingual education to be a great asset to the child. It has been noted that the bilingual child has a better awareness of language differences, is better at learning new languages and possesses important advantages in intelligence and cognitive growth (Coneau, Geneasee & Mendelson, 2007; Diaz & Klinger, 1991; Diesendruck, 2004; Hawson,1997; Kirkici, 2004; Patra & Babu, 1999, Roseberry-Mackibbin & Brice,2000; Siegal, Iozzi & Surian,2009; Srivastava & Khatoun, 1980; Varkuti,2009). Researchers have also discovered that the cognitive systems of bilingually educated children differ from those of monolingually educated children (i.e., educated through mother tongue) in some remarkable ways. Learning , speaking and using two languages may affect fundamental aspects of cognitive and neural development, potentially influencing the way those systems learn and represent information (Bialystok,1999; Bialystok, Craik, Klein & Viswanathan, 2004; Bialystok & Martin,2004; Mechelli et al,2004; Yoshida,2008).

Peal and Lambert (1962) claimed that the bilingual child has the mental flexibility, a superiority in concept formation and a more diversified set of mental abilities. They are better able to dissociate concepts from the words with which they are verbalized. Since they have already developed a syntactic orientation to language, they are more aware of the dichotomy between form and meaning in language. Recent studies showing bilingual advantage in working memory (Feng, Bialystok & Diamond,2009) and executive functions (Yoshida,2008) suggest that bilingualism's demand on executive functions for constantly switching languages and exerting inhibitory control to suppress the mother tongue in class room context might be contributing to cognitive flexibilities.

In view of the conflicting issues relating to the effects of the bilingual educations, that is education through a medium other than the mother tongue, the present study is designed to ascertain the effects of mother tongue vis-à-vis other tongue as the medium of instruction on the cognitive development of children.

In the present study progressive development was examined within the framework of the research model.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

There has been several literature on this topic and this topic has been discussed extensively in the past.

Mahajan (2010:112), who writes extensively on politics states that “Unity in Diversity” is what India stands for. The underlying sentiment of its people is that „„India can be a strong and unified country while simultaneously affirming its cultural diversity““ (Mahajan, 2010: 112). Hence, cultural homogeneity is not considered to be prerequisite for a country such as India to forge a political identity as a nation state (Mahajan, 2010: 112). However, linguistic diversity is an ever-present challenge to the desired unity. She also points out, “The route India embarked upon at the time of independence has been a difficult and arduous journey” (Mahajan, 2010: 112). When India gained its Independence in 1947, the Government and the framers of the Constitution had a tremendous task to do, keeping in mind the existing diversity and formulating a desirable framework that would help build “a unified but culturally diverse nation state” (Mahajan, 2010: 111). Therefore, what we have today is a framework of democracy that tries to accommodate culturally and linguistically diverse people.

What lies at the core of Indian Constitution is that all communities should co-exist as equals despite cultural backgrounds. But, just by granting equality to people would by no means solve the problem. The minority communities needed special Constitutional rights to lead a life of liberty in order to follow and to protect their own cultural identity (Mahajan, 2010: 112). For instance, the minority religious communities and linguistic minority communities needed liberty and protection to follow their own religious practices and beliefs and to promote their identity through their respective languages. Therefore the Constitution linked “equality for the individual with equality for diverse communities” (Mahajan, 2010: 112).

However, a major cause of concern is even though the Indian Constitution provides many safeguards for linguistic minorities, a recent UNESCO report identifies 196 languages that are endangered in India. The list includes 84 languages that are “unsafe”, 62 languages that are “definitely endangered”, 6 languages that are “severely endangered”, 33 languages that are “critically endangered” respectively, and 9 languages have become “extinct” in India since the 1950's (UNESCO,1995-2010). This concludes that India officially has the highest number of endangered languages in the world, closely followed by the United States (192) and Brazil (190) respectively.

## III.OBJECTIVES

This Thesis aims to study the education policy of India in the context of various languages. It also tries to understand the impact of globalization on the regional languages. Moreover, it discusses the importance of preservation of regional identity by analysing the current situation in reference to Assamese language. Apart from this it also highlights the importance of 3-language formula.

## IV.RESEARCH METHODOLOGY & DESIGN

The data collection process for this thesis involves both Primary as well as Secondary data. We collected the secondary data from the Ministry of Education and Rural area development Department and Local Panchayats.

We gathered information on the central and state policies for the usage of regional languages, their utility in different arena of life and their outcome.

We visited the concerned work areas and collected the physical evidence. Personal interaction with the local people and the Govt. agencies helped us in getting into the skin of the issue and at the same time offered many solutions which has been collaborated in the appropriate chapters.

All survey instruments were scrutinized at the field level on a daily basis by the supervisor. Necessary rectification for detected inadequacies and inconsistencies was directly done at the site. Further, the check-lists / schedules were scrutinized by office editors and submitted for data entry. All open-ended questions have been coded and content been analyzed. In order to handle large amount of qualitative information, the database was prepared in Nudist software. Content analysis and subsequent tabulation was carried out with the help of this software.

## V.CONCLUSION

In spite of having a noble and ambitious education policy in place which is inclusive in nature and at the same time guarantees the right to education in the child's mother tongue, the policy is not always implemented and is consistently ignored in practice. As Ambedkar (the head of the Colossal Committee that formulated the Constitution) pointed out, the provisions impose "no burden upon the State" (Ambedkar in Austin, 2009: 69) to implement them, so states are unable or unwilling to formally recognise their internal diversity. One strategy to avoid recognising minority languages is simply to assimilate them to the majority when returning Census results or implementing the TLF in education.

The trends highlight the complexity in the phenomenon of medium of instruction across the four levels of education.

1) The statement that less number of languages are used as media for tertiary education is a simplification of a cauldron of complexities. The number of languages used for Higher Secondary education is no doubt reduced in comparison to Primary education. To get a more appropriate understanding of the situation diachronic perspective is also needed. The diachronic perspective shows that languages used as media of instruction have remained constant in many States, have decreased in a few States, and have increased in a few other States.

2) The findings in their totality indicate that in all the States / Union Territories except the States listed in Group 4, the Regional languages, Hindi and English are used as media of instruction for all the four stages of education. Usually when a State shares its border with another State speaking another language which is not Hindi, this language also finds place as a medium of Higher Secondary education.

3) English is the language that has been used by all the States and Union Territories for all the four stages of education. Hindi is the second most widely prevalent medium of instruction for all the stages of education.

4) In terms of number of schools, however, Hindi medium schools outnumber English medium schools for all the four levels of education.

5) With regard to the Tribal and non-Scheduled and non-Tribal languages, they are not used as a media of instruction for Higher Secondary education as indicated by the diachronic comparison. So extrapolating findings on the basis of synchronic comparison and concluding that these languages are being deleted as media of instruction is misleading. In case of these languages discussion on instructional media should focus on efforts to introduce them. One cannot talk about their discontinuation.

To sum up, the educational system within the country is not facing a reduction in the number of languages used as media of instruction. Contrary to the observations made by Srivastava and Gupta (1984), the educational system is not becoming mono-medial. Instead, it is becoming tri-medial and even quadri-medial at the Higher Secondary level of education. The regional languages are growing stronger and are being used widely for tertiary educational stages.

*A coordinated mechanism has to be created which needs to operate at the level of both the centre and states with clearly delineated roles for the two-tiers of government. The state governments also have to show greater initiative in evolving targeted and effective programs that encourage greater involvement of local governments in each state (Sengupta, 2010: 19).*

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