

Role of the Mother Tongue in the Comprehension of the Subject Matter at the Primary Level

Muhammad Idris*
Zoobia**
Erum Aslam Khan***

Abstract

Learning is all about understanding and comprehension. The explosion of knowledge, development of new theories and concepts made the nature of the educational system complex. The medium of instruction in classroom plays a pivotal role in the comprehension of the subject matters. Language is an integral feature of educational practice in the classroom. Teachers communicate contents and give instruction through language. Learners hear and interact through language in the process of learning. The focus of this study was to investigate the role and effect of the mother tongue in the comprehension of the subject matters at the primary level. All the students studying in primary schools of the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa constituted the population for the study. 40 students of grade 5th level at GPS Awal Dad Banda were selected as the sample of this study. A pretest posttest equivalent experimental design was used for the conduction of the study. The students were divided into two equal groups randomly, one was experimental and other the control group. The experimental group was taught by mother tongue and the control group by national language (i.e. Urdu). Results showed significant difference between the experimental and control groups. The group taught through the mother did better than the other group, which was taught through the second language. The children who were taught through mother tongue comprehended better and understanding increased.

Key words: Education, Mother Tongue, Primary Level, Comprehension

Introduction

The education sector, with all of its capabilities to provide knowledge and training, has an important role in the development and reconstruction process of any nation.

* Assistant Professor Department of Education: AWKUM: midrees@awkum.edu.pk

**Physical Education Teacher: Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, KP

*** Assistant Professor Department of Education, BZU Multan: erumkhan63@hotmail.com

Education is conceivably the most vital instrument for up lifting humanity from pity and darkness to peak and glory. It is the means to develop the philosophy of life, ideologies, knowledge and provide skills for every walk of life. Education a shield that protects the humans from disasters and calamities occur in their lives and provides base for a civic growth. Academies play a key role in uplifting the human from pity conditions to the splendor. It meets with factors such as social inequality, unfairness, groundless beliefs and ruthless customs which incite disputes and conflicts.

There are many aspects that play a key role in providing quality basic education. Among these factors language plays an important role. It's the language through which classroom interaction is held between teachers and students that provides basis for learning. There are many developing countries where there is societal multilingualism, but the education system is dominated by a single foreign language (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000). Education provided through a language that the learner does not speak is called submersion, because children are unable to swim? Language familiar to a child, along with locally appropriate learning and curriculum materials plays a critical and decisive role in the success of learning programs. Because it begins with what is known to him and develops new knowledge. It provides a smooth transition between the school and home environment and thus accelerates, promotes and increases participation. It promotes confidence and fluency in the mother tongue and in second language as well. Dutcher (2004) noted that in ethnic communities and minorities there are 221 million children who are getting a primary education that have no access an education in a language known to them. In African schools the achievements are of very low quality and language is one of the factors of low achievements. According to UNESCO as quoted by Ouane and Glanz (2010) that in the African countries most the children starts foreign language which the children unable to understand or speak at home.

Terminology

Some of the terminologies used about language are the following:

- a) *National Language*: Tabi-Manga (2000) stated that national language that a nation speaks and it is differentiated from an international language. A National language is the official language (Bamgbose, 1991).
- b) *Local language*: Local language is the language that spoken in homes, marketplaces and other community areas. It can be differentiated from the regional, national or internationally spoken languages.
- c) *Minority language*: This is the language spoken by a relatively numerically smaller population or the language which politically marginalized population speaks (UNESCO, 2003, p. 13). Lewis and Trudell, (2008) termed it the “Minorities language”.
- d) *Indigenous language*: According to Spolsky (2002), indigenous language is the unique language which spoken by the indigenous community with its genesis in the said community. The example of the first peoples communities of the American are usually given as indigenous language.
- e) *Vernacular language*: This is the language that is not recognized formally but used informally (in informal context only). In the Pacific, the vernacular education is used to refer mother tongue base education (Siegel, 1997; Litteral, 2004).
- f) *Mother tongue*: According to Murray (2007), the language a child speaks instinctively when he comes of the age of speaking in his life and the language in which a person shows his identity while he speaks as a native speaker, is called the mother tongue.

A Mother tongue is acquired by the children from the very surroundings, he/ she lives in and goes through the process of listening constantly during childhood. It is an unconscious process which starts from mother’s lap. Family, streets and playgrounds are the cradle where mother tongue nurtured. Naturally after proper listening, the child is able to gain mastery of the mother tongue. Consequently a child learns it first, speaks it well and comprehends it rapidly. He/ She develop a love and loyalty for mother tongue as this contributes to his / her identity and belongingness to a nation, he/she belongs. Bose (2004) stated that the language with which the children

communicate and use for the exchange of ideas after their birth in their family and commune is called mother tongue. People feel safe and comfortable in speaking in their mother tongues and it is the fact that children have an inherent mechanism for learning, that's why they learn mother tongue informally.

Medium of Instruction

The medium of instruction is the language that is used in classroom situations to impart knowledge or through which learning takes place in the classroom situation. The determination of the language to be used as a medium of instruction to teach the children in schools or classroom is the most crucial and vital step to be taken. The medium of instruction which the teacher or instructor uses in the learning process tremendously effects on the children. It not only facilitates but also strengthens the power of comprehension and the learning process to the maximum. This decision is a very cumbersome to be taken. Afton the objectives or learning outcomes are not carefully considered. According to the UNESCO (2007a), the Medium of instruction is meant that language used for instruction and communication in schools. It is the language used for classroom instruction and in the subject matter of the curriculum (Thirumalai, 2002). Iyamu and Ogiegeaen (2005) are of the opinion that the students' learning improved at primary level whenever education is provided in their first language. They get fluency in their first language very soon when they communicate and correspond in their community.

Some of the medium of instruction are the following:

- i. *Mother-tongue Instruction:* It is the type of instructions in which the mother tongue is used as medium of instruction, i.e. the learner's mother tongue (UNESCO, 2003).
- ii. *Bilingual Education:* According to (UNESCO, 2003), when two languages are used in the formal education system is called bilingual education. It is not necessary to included local language in education; though a widespread perception of this type of education is called mother tongue based bilingual education instruction, i.e. the use of mother tongue in the school's curriculum (Malone, 2008).

- iii. *Multilingual Education:* When more than two languages are used for instruction in the classroom is called multilingual education or multilingual instruction (UNESCO, 2003). Multilingual education exists mostly in countries where there are multiple regional languages and more than one official language.
- iv. *Transitional Bilingual Education:* According to Stroud (2002) when the education program moves from one language of instruction to another language at any level or is called transitional bilingual education. It is also called transitional multilingual education.
- v. *Maintenance Bilingual Education or Multilingual Education :* Corson (1999) says that when all the languages as selected language as medium of instruction for whole curriculum year is called maintenance of multilingual education and when two languages is maintained for the whole curriculum is called maintenance bilingual education. It is also called additive bilingual education, because a second language is added while the first one is also kept.
- vi. *Immersion Education:* According to Thomas and Collier (2004), immersion education is a type of education in which the medium of instruction is not mother language and learners are instructed in another language, i.e. the learner is immersed in another language. This type of education system is beneficial where most of the learners belong to the majority language community and when the learners belong to the minority language this type of education is ineffective.

Mother Tongue-based Education

Mother tongue-based education means when the mother tongue is used as the medium of instruction to instruct children in their first language in primary schools. The language which is used in instruction is the most familiar to the children. In such a situation the children are given a chance to learn the primary concepts in the mother tongues which is the most familiar language of the child and later they learn the vocabulary for those concepts in other languages. Mother tongue-based education is very productive in the early primary grades or initial stages of learning especially at

the starting point of the learning process. Ball (2010) stated that when one gain fluency and literacy in the mother tongue, it has a great effect on all language, academic achievements and cognitive development as well. Smit et al. (2008) stated that school regular attendance of the children depends on the understanding of the language and in such situations the drop out ratio is less. Children are comparatively more enrolled and attend the schools where they are instructed in their mother tongue. In other cases, the drop out ratio increases. Bender et al. (2005) are of the opinion that those children who are instructed in the mother tongue were five times less likely to repeat the year and dropout rate was three time less. Instruction based in a familiar language endorses indigenous cultures and knowledge and thus formal education is linked to the community and home environment.

According Butzkamm (2003), mother tongue can be subtracted from classroom situation and activities but it cannot be erased from the minds of learners. Linde and Lofgren (1988) stated that for successful education, it is necessary to use the first language for student's learning which is contributed and helped by a rich vocabulary which they have already learnt and attained since their birth. Learning in the first language, i.e. the mother tongue is of immense value for the children as it creates love and dedication for their way of life and traditions. Through to mother tongue, children form everlasting concepts in their minds and develop a strong understanding for their own identification. Children who are educated in their mother tongues do well in their schooling and in their future life as compared to those children who are not educated in their mother tongues or first language (Ball, 2010).

Significance of Supporting the First language or Mother tongue

Language is the grand gift for children. The mother tongue provides a solid basis to children for learning the language in future. Maintenance of first language is in the care of parents, relatives and those who are experts in child psychology, i.e. professionals. Research supports the point that the proper acquisition of mother tongue helps children in knowing the function of other languages. In the formation of a positive self-concept in children, the first language is very helpful. The children who are proficient in their mother tongues increase their thinking faculties enormously.

The level of excellence in the first language is directly proportional to the level of excellence in a foreign language. This means that the second/ foreign language is in correspondence with the level of excellence and competence in the first language, as a sound base in the mother tongue enables children to transfer any of their dexterities from one language to the another language. The role of the early childhood professionals is vital in the maintaining the mother tongue of the children. They can create situations where children talk in their native language. Furthermore these professionals can motivate parents to use the mother tongue with their children at home that they have a strong base for learning a foreign language, i.e. English. It is significant to inform parents that their children can best learn English only from native speakers (Clarke, 2009).

The grammar of the mother tongue provides a solid base for the grammars of all the languages one may want to learn. This is a significant part of one's treasure of knowledge which he/she uses for learning other languages. The mother tongue is key to the unlock doors to all the other language. The mother tongue provides a guarantee for learning the other language through mother language one can easily expand the horizons of knowledge. The mother tongue is automatically involved in learning because of the translation habits, i.e. concept formation of the other languages unless and until he gets mastery on the foreign language (Butzkamm, 2003). According to Ferrer (2002), the mother tongue facilitates learning and it is a proper tool and device for learning. The knowledge gained with the mastered skills of the mother tongue is life-long. Butzkamm (2003), said that we are in need of associating the present with past, if we erases the mother tongue, we remove the building blocks for cross linguistic networks. Lexical and syntactic equivalence between the mother tongue and the target language injects and inculcates the historical relation of both the languages deeply in the minds of the learners. The learners come close to the culture of the target knowledge.

Statement of the Problem

Learners listen and interact via language in the process of learning. The normal assumption is that the language for classroom instruction is either well-known to or quickly learned by students so that educational outcomes meet specified expectations.

The mother tongue enhances the understanding and comprehension of the subject matter in the classroom. This research suggests that the impacts of mother tongue instruction are substantial and are measurable both in the short term—specific measures of educational outcomes—and in the long term via more global measures such as access to higher education and to more advanced career opportunities.

Objectives of the Study

Objectives of the study were:

1. To discover the role of the mother tongue in the students' understanding of concepts in the classroom.
2. To explore the difference in achievement of the students via mother tongue and a 2nd language.

Hypothesis

H₀: There is no significance difference between the achievements of the control and experimental groups.

Significance of the Study

The study is very significant because it has far reaching effects on the educational environment. This study sought to quantitatively analyze the effect of the mother tongue on instructional strategies in integrated into classroom learning activities. Children begin their education in a language they understand, their mother tongue, and develop a strong foundation in their mother language. This study will be beneficial for teachers, students and other educational stakeholder.

Methods and Procedure

All the students 3003841 (EMIS,2015) studying General Science and Social Studies at primary level in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa constituted population for the study. All the 40 students in 5th grade studying General Science and Social Studies at GPS Awal Dad Banda were selected as the sample of the study. The study was conducted through a pretest posttest equivalent experimental design. On the basis of the pretest 40 students of the grade 5 studying General Science and Social Studies in

government primary school Awal Dad Banda were randomly divided into two equal groups' i.e. experimental and control groups. Each group was consisting of 20 subjects. Experimental group have the average of 24.95 and control group 25.20. Same instructor was applied for both groups to avoid the effects of extraneous variable. A teacher made test composed of written and structured oral sections, from the curriculum textbook and textbook exercises of the 5th classes of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was administered as pretest and posttest after the approval of the experts in the subjects and obtaining validity and reliability. Two chapters of the 5th grade in General Science and Social Study were selected from the curriculum textbook of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The experimental group was taught by mother tongue and control group were taught by national language i.e. Urdu. After the treatment of four weeks, the groups were given posttest. The scores of the post-tests of both groups were considered being the data to be analyzed for the rejection or acceptance of null hypothesis. To see the permanency of the achievement another test was conducted after 2 month to ascertain the retention of the achievements.

Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1 shows the result of the pre- test.

H₀: There is no significant difference between the two Groups.

Group	N	DF	Mean	Std. Dev	S.E_D	t-value	P value
Experimental	20		24.95	10.72			
Control	20	38	25.20	12.65	3.70	-.067	.500

Not significant Significant value= 2.086

A t-test for an independent sample was conducted to determine whether the two groups, i.e. the experimental and control group were equal or not. Table 1 shows the analysis of the result of the groups, i.e. the experimental and control groups. Both of the groups consisted of 20 students. The calculated value at 0.05 level of significant was found to be -.067, which was less than the table value (2.08). Hence the null hypothesis was accepted that there was no significant difference found between the experimental and control groups on the pretest.

Table 2 shows the results for post-tests of the Experimental and Control groups.

H₀: There is no significance difference between the achievements of the control and experimental groups.

Group	N	DF	Mean	Std. Dev	S.E _D	t-value	P value
Experimental	20		33.75	11.68			
Control	20	38	25.70	12.08	3.75	2.14	.645

Significant Significant value= 2.086

The collected data for both groups was treated statically. A t-test of significance was applied to find out the difference between groups. After applying the t-test, it was found out that the calculated t-value at the 0.05 level of significance was found to be 2.14, which was greater than the table value of 2.08, therefore the null hypothesis “There is no significance difference between the achievement of the control and experimental groups” was rejected. It was concluded that the children taught in the mother tongue did better than the students taught in the second language.

Table 3 shows the results for the retention test of the post-tests 1 and test 2.

H₀: There is no significance difference between the 1st achievement and 2nd achievement test.

Group	N	DF	Mean	Std. Dev	S.E _D	t-value	P value
1 st post test	20		25.20	12.65			
2 nd post test	20	38	25.95	12.49	3.97	-.189	.958

Significant Significant value= 2.086

Table 3 shows the retention test to see the permanency of the achievements.

A t-test for an independent sample was conducted to determine whether the two groups, i.e. 1st Post test and 2nd Post test were equal or not. Table 3 shows the analysis of the result of the groups, i.e. 1st Post test and 2nd Post test. Both of the groups consisted of 20 students. The calculated value at 0.05 level of significant was found to be -.189, which was less than the table value (2.08). Hence the null

hypothesis was accepted that there was no significant difference found between 1st Post test and 2nd Post test. Henceforth, the retention test shows that the teaching through mother tongue is more permanent effects on the learning of the students at primary level.

Findings

The study revealed from the calculation of t-value of the post test that the group which was instructed through the mother tongue performed better the group which was taught through second language. This shows that the children who are taught through mother tongue comprehend better and their power of understanding increased. Moreover, it was observed by the instructor that in verbal section of the test, the experimental group performed better than the control group. This indicated that the level of comprehension was high. The retention test also indicated that the children learn more permanently when they instructed in their mother tongue. It was also observed by the teacher that the frustration of the experimental group was reduced due to the interest as compared to the control group and they learn difficult concepts very quickly as predicted by Butzkamm (2003).

Discussion

The mother tongue is very useful and important for many reasons, such as a child always dreams in the mother tongue. Clarke (2009) stated that the strong base of the mother tongues provides lasting support in the making of self-concept, and strengthen the relations within and outside the family. It also provides a strong foundation for learning a second or foreign language. Supporting and representing the first language is equal to knowing the same feelings for the home language. Respecting and supporting the first language implies the creation of an environment conducive for learning the in the mother tongue. This generates importance and value of the mother tongue in the mind of the child. The mother tongue helps in the increase of the literacy rate (Clarke, 2009). According to Assefa (2002), a committee of UNESCO collected data from all over the world and recommended the mother tongue as medium of instruction. Tarhan (2003) stated that the aim of education is to instill creative and constructive reasoning skills in students and that these can be achieved

through mother tongue instruction easily. The innovative capacities of students are obstructed when English is used as medium of instruction and students act like machines in memorizing the lessons without comprehension.

The use of the mother tongue helps students use their previous experiences and knowledge and connect it to the new knowledge. The use of mother tongue enhances the association between the educational institution and the home. It also encourages the question answer environment in the classroom. Moreover, mother tongue develops self respect and a cultural identity of the learner. Children develop their thinking skills in the mother tongue as they interact in their own community in the first 12 year age of their life. It is advantageous that students to be instructed in their 1st language. After gaining the capability and self confidence, a second language can be learned (UNESCO, 2008).

Recommendations

1. In the light of these findings it is recommended that mother tongue instruction should be given space in the classroom instruction and learning process at the primary level. Ministry of education should come up to provide facilities in this connection. It should remove the obstacles in the induction of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction at the primary level.
2. Teachers should be given such training as to make them skillful in translating the learning material, i.e. content in to the mother tongue effectively and easily. Workshops and seminars should be conducted for this purpose.
3. In future, the curriculum changes or other such educational policy documentation, mother tongue instruction should be given priorities, especially at the primary level.
4. The ministry of education should take the necessary steps to translate or provide guides to the primary teachers as how to translate the technical terms or concepts of subjects into the mother tongue of the students to avoid the lapses or gaps. So, production of the highly trained teachers /instructors, learning materials, audio-visual aids and production of other relevant curriculum facilities should be ensured by the ministry of education.

References

- Assefa, A. (2002). *Student's Attitude Towards Mother Tongue Instruction as a Correlate of Academic Achievement: The Case of Sidama* (Unpublished M.A. Educational Psychology Thesis, Addis Ababa University).
- Ball, J. (2010). Enhancing learning of children from diverse language backgrounds: Mother tongue-based bilingual or multilingual education in the early years, UNESCO.
- Bamgbose, A. (1991). *Language and the Nation: The Language Question in sub-Saharan Africa*. Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press.)
- Bender, P., N. Dutcher, *et al.* (2005). In Their Own Language...Education for All. Education Notes, World Bank. http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EDUCATION/Resources/EducationNotes/EdNotes_Lang_of_Instruct.pdf.
- Bose, A. C. (2004). The Problems in Learning Modal Auxiliary Verbs in English at High School Level (M. Phil thesis, Madurai Kamaraj University, India). *Language in India, Vol. 5: 11 November, 2005*.
- Butzkamm, W., (2003). We only learn language once: The role of the mother tongue in EFL classrooms, *Death of a Dogma, Language Learning Journal*, 31.
- Clarke, P., (2009) Supporting children learning English as a second language in the early years (birth to six years).
- Thomas, W. and Collier, V. (2004). The astounding effectiveness of dual language education for all. *NABE Journal of Research and Practice*, Vol. 2 No. 1. <http://njrp.tamu.edu/2004/PDFs/Collier.pdf> (accessed 22 February 2008.)
- Corson, D. (1999). Community-based education for indigenous cultures. May (ed.), *Indigenous Community-Based Education*. Clevedon, UK, Multilingual Matters, pp. 8-19.
- Cummins, J. (2001) Bilingual children's mother tongue: Why Is It Important for Education? P.3-4
- Dutcher, N. (2004). Expanding Educational Opportunity in Linguistically Diverse Societies 2004:7 http://www.cal.org/resources/pubs/fordreport_040501.pdf
- Ferrer, V., (2002) Using the mother tongue to promote noticing: Translation as a Way of Scaffolding Learner Language. Oxford University Press.
- Iyamu, E. O. S. & Ogiegbaen, S. E. A. (2005). On the Mother-Tongue Medium of Instruction Policy-Curriculum Innovation and the Challenges of Implementation
in Nigeria. *Language in India, Vol. 5:1 January 2005*, p. 5-10, 99.
- Lewis, M. P. and Trudell, B. (2008). Language cultivation in contexts of multiple community languages. B. Spolsky and F. Hult (eds), *The Handbook of Educational Linguistics*. Oxford, Blackwell, pp. 266-79.
- Linde, S.G, and Lofgren, H. (1988). The Relationship between Medium of Instruction

- and School Achievement for Finnish Speaking Students in Sweden. *Language Culture and Curriculum, Routledge, England, Vol. 1: 2*, p. 133.
- Litteral, R. (1999). *Language Development in Papua New Guinea*. SIL Electronic Working Papers 1999-2002, February 2002, Summer Institute of Linguistics, <http://208.145.80.1/silewp/1999/002/SILEWP1999-002.html>. (accessed 15 October 2007.)
- Malone, D. (2008). *Mother-Tongue-based Multilingual Education in Multilingual Contexts: How Strong Must It Be?* International Conference on Multilingual Education, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India. 5-8 February 2008.)
- Murray, C. (2007). Reflections on the Question of Mother Tongue Instruction in Namibia. *NAWA Journal of Language and Communication, Namibia, Vol.1 Issue1(June, 2007)*, pp. 73, 75.
- Ouane, A., & Glanz, C. (2010). "Why and How Africa Should Invest in African Languages and Multilingual Education." UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning.
- Siegel, J. (1997). Formal vs. non-formal vernacular education: the education reform in Papua New Guinea. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, Vol. 18, No. 3, pp. 206-22.
- Smits, J., J. Huisman, et al. (2008). Home language and education in the developing world, UNESCO. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0017/001787/178702e.pdf>.
- Skutnabb-Kangas, T. (2000) *Linguistic Genocide in Education—or Worldwide Diversity and Human Rights?* Mahwah NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.)
- Stroud, C. (2002). *Towards a Policy for Bilingual Education in Developing Countries*. Stockholm, Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency.)
- Spolsky, B. (2002). Prospects for the survival of the Navajo language: A reconsideration. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No. 2, pp. 139-62.)
- Thirumalai, M. S. (2002). English Only, English Plus, And Reconstructing Ethnic Identity Via Language: Language Movements In The U. S. A. *Language in India, Vol. 2: 3 May 2002*.
- Tabi-Manga, J. (2000). *Les Politiques Linguistiques du Cameroun, Essai d'aménagement linguistique*. Paris, Karthala.
- UNESCO. (2003). *Education in a Multilingual World*. Paris, UNESCO. (UNESCO Education Position Paper.) <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001297/129728e.pdf> (accessed 1 July 2007.)
- UNESCO. (2007a). *Advocacy Kit for Promoting Multilingual Education: Including the Excluded*. UNESCO Asia Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, Bangkok, Thailand, pp. 3-7.

UNESCO. (2008). *Improving the Quality of Mother Tongue-Based Literacy and Learning: Case Studies from Asia, Africa and South America*, pp. 2, 3.