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Language Crisis, Majority, and Minority Language in Classroom Practices: A Chance for Multilingual Education

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Abstract:

This paper aims to explicate the polemic status of majority and minority languages in classroom practices in tribal schools and how few languages dominate the language of marginalized groups and tribal communities. However, tribal people have their mother tongue and native culture that are vanished in the classroom practices. As we know, the growth and development of a nation depend on the quality of education of children, so without considering the tribal children in the inclusion of education (primary education through mother tongue but no other tongue), it is impossible to say about the nation's growth and development. This paper addresses two research questions: first research question is what happens if the language of instruction in the classroom transactions through the majority language instead of the mother tongue? The second research question is, does MLE bridge the gap between a majority and a minority language in classroom practices? And also, it is questionable how tribal children will improve their better communicative skills and competency with other communities only through their mother tongue. For these conundrum circumstances, mother tongue-based multilingual education is the only remedy and potency. This study is based on some reviews of literature such as articles, magazines, and newspapers.

Keywords: Majority Language, Minority Language, Classroom Practices, and Multilingual Education

Introduction:

India is a place of diversity both in the domain of material and non-material culture. Language, tradition, custom, and belief systems are all considered non-material cultures, whereas the way of lifestyle, dressing, and eating can be categorized under material culture. Language plays a vital role in the identity of one's community and also share our thought and emotion with others. Panda (2004, 2007) enunciated that language is the most imperative cultural tool for transmitting

mathematical and scientific knowledge systems among indigenous/ tribal people (Mohanty, Mishra, Reddy, and Ramesh, 2009: p.285). Linguistic diversity is expected in the Indian context, and more than a hundred languages exist. One's home language/mother-tongue recognizes his/her identity, freedom, and power. There are 104 million tribal people and around 8.6% of the total population in India; with reference to the 2011 census, there are several tribal languages (about 156 languages), and a few of them were dead, but three to four languages were placed in primary school. In Odisha, 62 tribes with 21 tribal languages have written scripts of five tribal languages: Ho, Soura, Santali, Munda, and Kui. Only the Santali language is included in the eighth schedule of the Indian constitution. It can be imagined that despite sufficient tribal languages, it is not practiced in the classroom of the tribal school, which means the majority languageⁱ (dominant) subdues the minority languageⁱⁱ (dominated) of a marginalized group of people (tribal community). Practicing other tongues in the primary school classroom in tribal regimes is facile.

It is openly mentioned in the Indian constitution (Article 350 A) that every state and local authority of the state should create an appropriate strategy for facilitating the mother tongue as a medium of instruction at the primary school. National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 states that young children learn and grasp more quickly nontrivial concepts through their home language/mother-tongue rather than other tongue. But it is bleak because it is still in written form but not practically implemented everywhere. Recently the state government including Andhra Pradesh, Delhi, and Karnataka, Kashmir transmuted many government-run regional medium schools into English medium schools either fully or partially (Panda, 2022) which is completely against the National Education Policy 2020 (See section 4.11-4.22). Children from tribal communities are always away from the right to mother tongue-based education. This kind of situation happened not only in most of the states of India but in most countries worldwide.

Conundrum situation of Linguistic diversity in India:

Language circumstances in India are very complex in nature, and even there is too much diversity within a small geographical space. It is posited that more than one-third of the district of India is heterogeneous in terms of language speaking, and even within blocks, there is an advent of a high level of linguistic diversity. For example, in the Raigarh district of the state of Chhattisgarh, a child having a Mundari-speaking household would speak Mundari with their parents, Chhattisgarhi with their neighbors and friends, and Hindi as the medium of instruction at school and endeavor to learn English from grade 3 onwards (Jhingran, 2009).

In the present motif of the education system in India, it is satirical that everyone orates about equal opportunities to learn. However, in reality, those mainly in the disadvantaged section (tribal children) are still deprived of the right to quality education. Because the child entered the school as a person where everything is unknown to him and confronted with an alien language in the classroom

of the school, psychologists and Educationists continuously say that child learning should start from the principle of known to unknown so that better learning will be possible. But it is the opposite in the present context of the discourse of education. Most children in India start their school careers in an unknown language. Due to this, they face several problems in the starting months of primary school because their mother tongue is different from the Standard language (school language). Any classroom is represented by a multiplicity of linguistic and cultural practices which is any educational enterprise consistently ignores these resources that disrupt basic principles of equality and justice (Agnihotri, 2014).

Research Question:

1. What happens if the language of instruction in the classroom of tribal school will practice through the majority language instead of the mother tongue? Is there any loss?
2. Does MLE bridge the gap between a majority and a minority language in classroom practices? Is there any benefit?

Analysis, Result, and Discussion of Research Question-1

There are diverse initiatives for improving the quality of primary education taken by India in the forms of committees and commissions (such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (Education for All), National Curriculum Framework, Right to Education Act, and National Council for Educational Research and Training, etc.). These initiatives include Activities based learning, child-centered learning, burden-free learning, joyful learning, etc. The constructivism approach is a highly demanded initiative, and everyone talks about it implemented in school. In the constructivism approach, the curriculum supports children in constructing knowledge based on prior/previous knowledge and experience. But it is ridiculed that everything is alien to them when a tribal child enters the school. Even children's language is also different from the school language. One of the disappointing and troubling initial experiences for minority students is being educated exclusively through the majority language of the dominant group is being unable to express their feelings, intelligence, and humor to peers and teachers. Under this conundrum circumstance, it is easy to underestimate what students are efficient at and what they endeavor to achieve in school and their lives. (Cummins, 2009: p.32). In this case, how is it possible to say that child constructs knowledge based on previous experience if they do not understand the teacher's language and textbook? So, this kind of bungle leads to the evanescent of native language in the mind of indigenous/tribal people and also loss of political, educational, and economic domain. This type of jeopardizes situation adversely affects the learning of the tribal child. Mohanty (2009) et al. stated that:

"Exclusion of languages from education shown in the case of the tribal language communities in India, has direct negative consequences for educational performance, socio-economic well-being and sense of identity and empowerment of the speaker of minority and indigenous languages,

severely restricted the chance of their development and survival" (Mohanty, Mishra, Reddy, and Ramesh, 2009: p.285-286).

So, from this statement, it is known that the exclusion of the mother tongue of tribal children from the tribal school is the result of poor academic performance and poverty, and loss of identity among the tribal community. Most of the schools in tribal villages do not follow the mother tongue-based instruction, and there is no provision for improvement of the local language and culture. Most of the teachers from that particular area are not aware of the tribal language and dialects. So, in this distorting situation, when a tribal child first enters the school, it is like a new environment with an unknown tongue, teacher, friends, and infrastructure.

Several research studies have shown that at least five years is required for linguistic minority students to catch up/understand grade expectations in the majority language (see Cummins [2001] for a review). So, the 'catch-up' time is extremely dissimilar in the case of both conversational fluency and discrete language skills. Most of the time parents of minority students support the majority language as the language of power and advancement in society and desire to ensure that their children master this dominant language (Cummins,2009: p.20). Jhingran (2009) mentioned that if the language of instruction in school is highly diverse from the language of children (mother tongue of children), there will be a severe problem for children to understand the language used by the teacher during teaching. So, the language of instruction used by the teacher should be the mother tongue of tribal children. As a result, it will be easy for children to comprehend the word used by the teacher in classroom practices, identify alphabets, and they able to read and write simple words in primary school. In many neo-colonial circumstances, linguicism has been captivated by racism as an ideology that legitimates an unequal division of power and resources (Philipson, 2009).

Analysis, Result, and Discussion of Research Question 2

In practice, only the dominant language/majority language in the classroom of primary school, the discourse between teacher and students is facile, leading to the expulsion of tribal children from social, political, economic, and educational domains. The quiddity of MLE in the classroom is a central concern to both linguistic and culturally diverse and maintains the education of majority and minority communities. And it is also a curator of indigenous/tribal culture and language and bridges the gap between the child's everyday and scientific discourse (Mohanty and Panda, 2009).

Research conducted by Mohanty, Panda, and Mishra (1999) revealed that children between seven to nine years of old internalize that some languages are more powerful, useful, and more prestigious than their native language; tribal children grasp that their language has no help to them (Mohanty,2009: p.4). From this research analysis and findings, it is easily said that few languages dominate the marginalized and indigenous languages. And the other reason is the disappearance of

the local language in school curriculum and classroom practices. English, Hindi, and Odia can be categorized under the dominant language (depending on the situation). So, this kind of circumstance creates bad faith among tribal children in their mother tongue.

The expulsion of a child's mother tongue in classroom practices in the tribal school of India is a common thing. There is always some peculiar language that dominates the mother tongues of marginalized children (i.e., English, Hindi, and Odia); we can call it another tongue/ dominated language. So, this kind of hegemony in linguistic practice leads to failure to fight against thwart and victory in academic performance. Mohanty (2009) stated that of the tribal children who join the school, 50% are unable to reach grade 5, and only 20% can take the high school examination, from which only about 8% pass. The 80% are regarded as Sarkari (government) as dropouts (Mohanty, 2009: p.3).

In a true multilingual society, every language has its freedom and identity, legitimate place, and equal credit given to the dominant and dominated language. But how is it possible? The answer is mother tongue-based multilingual education. With the proper implication of both mother tongue and other tongues, create a beautiful world of social justice, including equality in education, freedom, empowerment, autonomy, and own identity. Linguistic diversity is at the heart of any multilingual society (Canagarajah, 2007). The multilinguality cares about the multilinguality of each young child in the classroom as a resource and utilises it for ongoing cognitive and linguistic growth (Agnihotri, 2014). Multilingual young children develop a worldview that is constructed mainly on connection but not on separation (Panda, 2022)

Suggestions and Educational Implications:

1. The curriculum should form in the local/mother tongue of children in the primary school of the tribal village so that it will help to conserve their language and culture.
2. The teacher should not hesitate to use the local language (the language of tribal children), especially in the classroom, and should adopt the mother tongue-based multilingual education approach while teaching at the primary level.
3. Local teachers in school who know about the children's native language should be recruited.

Conclusion:

In the last section, I can say that the majority language always dominated the minority language in most cases of tribal schools. In most tribal schools where some teachers know about the local language but fear using it when teaching because they think it is not an official and standard language. The curriculum and language of instruction are not in the form of the mother tongue of the children of the tribal community. As a result, the tribal children suffer many problems such as Lower academic performance, Wastage, stagnation, passive classroom participation, etc. In the future, it will be advent as loss of social, political, economic, and education domains. So, to eradicate these

types of jeopardized situations, mother tongue-based multilingual education should be implemented in tribal schools. MLE will assist in bridging the gap between majority and minority languages in classroom transactions and make the children more competitive. It is also the curator of a marginalized group of people's native culture and local language. In some cases, it was already implemented, but it is not satisfactory. The government, including state and central govt., local authorities, and stakeholders of the tribal school, should be aware of Multilingual education and its practices in classrooms.

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Notes:

ⁱMajority language refers to the language spoken by a majority of people in a specific region. It can be regarded as the dominant language in some cases. This paper shows how the majority language dominates over the minority language.

ⁱⁱ Minority language is the language used by a smaller number of people in a specific region. Most of cases it is dominated by the majority language. People who belong to the minority language emulate the language of the majority people.