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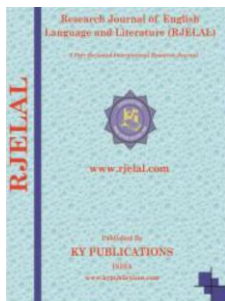
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## MULTILINGUALISM AND EDUCATION IN MOTHER TONGUE: A CASE OF INDIA'S NORTH- EAST

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### ABSTRACT

India's North East has about 100 languages which fall under three linguistic families. Almost all the schools in North East has a reflection of this multilingualism in terms of the numbers of languages coming into a class. The country set mother tongue based multilingual education as a goal of school education (NCF 2005) the stand has been re-affirmed through RTE Act 2009. As a response to these initiatives as well as from the recent trend of identity assertion phenomena in North East India, many tribal/minority languages are emerging in the school education curriculum. However, the question to ask at this point is – are the tribal/minority languages are well planned and prepared for the challenges to be faced by the minority languages in the globalised world and the demand for English. The paper intends to look into problems faced by the smaller languages in education system.

**Key words:** education, minority/tribal language, three language formula

### Introduction

Indian linguistic diversity is very clearly visible in India's North East; in this very small region more than 100 languages are spoken. More than 98% of the languages spoken in this region are minor tribal languages which are still unwritten with lots of dialectal differences within the community<sup>1</sup>. These smaller languages are excluded from the educational process in terms of medium of instruction as well as in the development of Teaching Learning materials, the obvious reason for this being the globalised economy and fast changing world. Despite India's stand to promote minority languages with all the policies and constitutional

mandate the Seventh All Indian Educational Survey (7 AISE, NCERT, 2006) shows that in India only 47 languages are currently used either as the subject of instruction or as the medium of instruction, though the figure has a mere improvement from the Sixth Survey which has 41. It is heartening to see that India's North East shows consciousness in this issue by giving a place to the minority languages in the school curriculum, following is the status of languages of North East in the school education:

#### Languages Used as Mediums of Instruction:

Elementary: 12 (Assamese, Bengali, Bodo/Boro, Chakma, Kokborok, English, Hindi, Nepali, Khasi, Garo, Manipuri, Mizo)

Secondary: 10 (Assamese, Bengali, Bodo/Boro, English, Hindi, Nepali, Khasi, Garo, Manipuri, Mizo)

<sup>1</sup> For example, the Mishmi tribe of Arunachal has Idu, Miju and Digaro Mishmi tribe and their languages are different Miju Mishmi has 10% similarity with Digaru Mishmi and 7% similarity with Idu Mishmi.

**Languages Used as Subjects and Mediums of Instruction:**

**States**

**Languages**

Arunachal Pradesh:	English, Hindi, Sanskrit, Adi, Apatani, Galo, Khampati, Monpa, Idu Mishmi, Singpho, Tangsa (8 minority/tribal languages)
Assam	Assamese, Bengali, English, Manipuri, Hindi, Nepali, Bodo, Deori, Garo, Hmar, Karbi, Mishing, Tai, Tiwa (10 minority /tribal languages)
Manipur	Assamese, Bengali, English, Hindi, Manipuri/Meitei, Nepali, Anal, Gangte, Hmar, Kom, Liangmei, Mao, Maram, Maring, Mizo, Paite, Poumei, Kabui (Rongmei), Simte, Tangkhul, Thado-kuki, Vaiphei, Zeme, Zou (18Tribal languages)
Meghalaya	Assamese, Bengali, English, Hindi, Nepali, Garo, Khasi (2 minority/tribal languages)
Mizoram	English, Hindi, Chakma, Lai, Lakher (Mara), Mizo (4 Minority/tribal languages)
Nagaland	English, Angami, Ao, Chang, Chokri, Khezha, Khiemnungan, Kuki, Konyak, Liangmei, Lotha, Phom, Pochury, Rengma, Sangtam, Sema, Yimchungre, Zeme (17 minority/tribal languages)
Sikkim	English, Hindi, Nepali, Bhutia, English, Gurung, Lepcha, Limbu, Mangar, Newari, Rai, Sherpa, Sunuwar, Tamang (10 minority/tribal languages)
Tripura	English, Bengali, Bishnupriya Manipuri, Manipuri Chakma, Mizo, Kokborok (5 minority/tribal languages)

In Indian schools three languages are taught in ideal situations as we follow formula (TLF)

which is an outcome of the requirement of learning the global language, the need for Hindi and at the same time the desire and requirement of protecting and promoting the minority languages. Three language formula though is not a language policy of the country (as is stated by D.P.Pattanayak, 2005 , three language formula has adapted in few aspects from its initial version of 1957. According to the modified version of three language formula the languages to be included in the school education should be:

- (a) Mother Tongue or Regional Language
- (b) The Official Language (Hindi) or the Associate Official Language (English)
- (c) A Modern Indian or Foreign Language not covered under (a) and (b) and other than the language used as medium of instruction.

With regard to the tribal children the Commission recommended:

- (a) Use of Tribal Language as medium for the first two years and oral instruction in the Regional Language
- (b) Use of Regional Language as medium from the third year onwards. (Recommendations of Kothari Commission-1964)

The Three-Language Formula emphasized that at the school stage at least three languages should be taught and the provision for teaching should ensure that a student passing out of the secondary school has an adequate knowledge of these languages. The teaching of a language should be provided for not less than three years in a continuous course. Time and again educational policies reflect the importance to follow three language formula in letter and spirit (NPE-1986, NCFSE- 2000, NCF- 2005). NCF-2005 and its accompanying document Position Paper on Teaching of Indian Languages stressed the need of TLF in school education it says, "The three-language formula helps in fostering bilingualism and multilingualism, traits that improve "cognitive growth, social tolerance, divergent thinking and scholastic achievement". It is also need to be emphasized here that learning of three languages

should not only be for a conformity to the rule rather it is the responsibility of all the educational stakeholders that children are benefited from learning all three languages and all the languages s/he had learn will serve as a resource for acquiring knowledge. However, the formula is never followed uniformly in the country.

North East India presents interesting phenomena in connection with the language usage in school education. This part of India's North East India took pride in successful implementation of three language formula, all the states adopted three language formula. Following is the state of implementation of this formula in this part of India:

**Three Language Formula in North East India:**

Sl. No	State	Stages of learning of three languages	Name of the language
1.	<b>Arunachal Pradesh</b>	L1 : class I-X L2: Class L3 : Class VI-X	<b>L1: English</b> L2: Hindi L3: Assamese/Sanskrit
2.	Assam	L1 : Class I-X L2: Class V-X L3: Class V-VII	L1: Assamese/Hindi/Bengali/Bodo/Manipuri L2: English L3: Hindi
3.	Manipur	L1 : Class I-X L2: Class I-X L3 : Class VI-VIII	L1: Manipuri/recognized tribal dialect L2: English L3: Hindi
4.	Meghalaya	L1 : Class I-X L2: Class V-X L 3 : Class V-VIII	L1: Mother Tongue L2: English L3: Hindi/Khasi/Garo/Assamese/ Bengali
5.	<b>Mizoram</b>	L1 : Class I-X L2: Class V-X L3 : Class V-VIII	<b>L1: Mizo/ English</b> L2: English/ Mizo L3: Hindi
6.	<b>Nagaland</b>	L1 : Class I-X L2: Class I-X L3 : Class VII-VIII	<b>L1: Local Dialect/English</b> L2: English/ Local Dialect/Hindi L3: Hindi
7.	<b>Sikkim</b>	L1 : Class I-X L2: - L3 : -	<b>L1: Local Dialect/English</b> L2: English/ Local Dialect/Hindi L3: Hindi
8.	Tripura	L1 : Class I-X L2: Class III-X L3 : Class VI-X	L1 : Bengali/Kokborok/Lusahi L2: English L3 : Hindi

In the NE states no doubt in schools there are three language and even more<sup>2</sup>, showing the concern about the minority communities and are fulfilling the language needs of the country. The bigger question here is not about the acceptance or inclusion of at least three languages rather the adoption of a non-mother tongue (even foreign<sup>3</sup>) and ignoring the true spirit of the three language formula and at the same time ignoring the educational implications of recognizing mother tongue/L1 in the school education. To quote Sarajubala (2017) "In the states of Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh English is the first language! The question here is how can a foreign language (there are assertions that English no more remain as a foreign language) be somebody's L1 in India? And how somebody's mother tongue is called L2 and how English is given a place alternative to mother tongue? These are a few questions to be answered". One of the serious issue is the inability to make mother tongues visible in the real sense in school and other places<sup>4</sup>? Perhaps, because of the international concern at the same time the increased awareness and concern of the ethnic group might be the strong reason that education in mother tongue has become norm in North East, on the basis of the will of the communities the demand for mother tongue education proceed. Unfortunately, when it is recognised they either already have exhausted the resources or because of the dismal condition of mother tongue teaching in schools they lose interest to carry forward. This in turn undermines the educational benefits of mother tongue /L1 education. In the NE states. On the other hand, with the parent's aspirations and communities

<sup>2</sup> CBSE schools offer Sanskrit in many schools while there is Regional languages, English, Hindi; Sanskrit in many cases are offered in lieu of the regional language or mother tongues.

<sup>3</sup> English though accepted as global language in the Multilingual India is still a foreign language in many villages where there is no opportunity to even hear in day to day affairs.

<sup>4</sup> Manipur government recognized 6 languages as a subject of instruction in 1969, out of these 6 only Paite language has developed enough literature and TLMs others are yet to write proper Textbooks at Upper Primary Level. Khasi is recognized as medium of instruction way back in 1902 but related literature and TLM are still very limited.

demand a number of English medium schools are opening up in urban and semi urban areas and it attracts a lot of students with the promises to make them affluent English speakers. Thus, parent's choice is conditioned by India's language policy and the resultant caste like hierarchy of languages (Bijoykumar Kh.2003) or the hierarchical pecking order of language (Mohanty,2009), the value attached to the particular language became the criteria for choosing the medium of instruction or the subject of instruction. Minority of the smaller languages are devalued not only by the government but also by the community in terms of the usage in the education<sup>5</sup>. The phenomenon is the vicious circle whereby this educational neglect leads to further reason for neglect on the basis of underdevelopment. The consequence is in few states where there is no majority language all people could understood and in an effort to contain inter-tribal rivalry that may have followed efforts to promote one (Naga) language over the other, the people have chosen some other language(English) not belonging to the state as official language (Sachdeva, R. 2002) or L1 in education. But the question is, are we fulfilling the national goal of protecting minority languages? Are we doing justice to our small children who are just stepping into the school system? Are we able to develop quality in the teaching learning process of mother tongue like other subjects? Are the children of this region getting the benefit of mother tongue Education? The obvious answer lies in the fact that two states of NE, Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim adopt English as L1, despite the fact that Sikkim recognises 10 tribal languages in school education. Moreover, the states of Nagaland and Mizoram also kept English as an alternative to mother tongue for the reasons known to them only. In such cases school produce children who are neither proficient in L1 nor in L2. Because of the neglect in mother tongue in preliminary stage

<sup>5</sup> In Arunachal Pradesh when North East Regional Institute of Education (NERIE) conducted a programme related to Mother tongue education in 2007, one of the community members asked whether we(NERIE) are interested in keeping their children backward by learning mother tongue, instead they require either Hindi or English to prosper.

they count mother tongue lessons not purposeful and just a formality to learn. They neither develop literacy skills fully in the mother tongue nor they develop a positive attitude towards so called minority language which are counted as L2 in such cases.

### Conclusion

Small communities residing in India's North east are quite aware and concern about their linguistic rights and are proud to call themselves by their ethnonym and are trying at their best level to get their respective languages recognised in the education system. Every community are putting all possible efforts to develop their culture and language in particular. As a result, languages got recognition in schools and are taught as a subject of instruction, once it is recognised along with the approval of a set of books to study, not much is done to revise and improve the teaching learning material and hardly anything assessed in the real teaching learning practices happening in the school. As a result, all the efforts to study the mother tongue and its associated benefits like respecting others, to live in harmony with other language speakers and also the cognitive advantage of learning mother tongue is defeated. Another reason for the situation is half hearted attempts to improve mother tongue education and lack of strong political will. It is high time for the policy makers as well as the community to look into the present situation and think for a more feasible way to improve the system.

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