

Mother tongue language as medium of instruction in Primary Schools of B/G/R/S: What are the Challenges and opportunities?

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ARTICLE DETAILS

Article History

Published Online: 25 May 2019

Keywords

Mother tongue, Primary School, population.

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ABSTRACT

The study attempted to examine challenges and opportunity in using mother tongue language as medium of instruction in primary schools of Benishangul Gumuz Regional state. The target population of the study was mother tongue languages teachers in the three zones of the region. Questionnaires, interview and Focus Group Discussion was employed for data collection. The quantitative data was analyzed using one sample T-test and percentages. Whereas, data obtained through interview and FGD was analyzed qualitatively. The study revealed that teachers were facing different challenges towards teaching mother tongue languages. Lack of trained teachers, shortage of instructional materials (text books, teachers' guide), problems of dialect and other morphological aspect of languages are few to makes mention. Finally, the researcher recommended some actions to be taken such as teachers should be trained and specialized in mother tongue subjects, enough budget should be allocated for publishing textbooks, teachers guide and textbooks should to be revised for teaching.

1. Introduction

In today's globalized world there are many reasons for using minority languages as medium of instruction in the formal education system. One of these reasons is the becoming of the world community as a smaller village and the existence of multicultural society next to the language diversity which could jeopardize minority language. Consequently, greater attention has been given to preserve those minority languages from disappearing together with biocultural heritages.

Achieving universal access toward primary education and for all citizens which is one of the global commitments in achieving Education for All (EFA) is another possible reason to mention. Research evidence today clearly shows that using learners' mother tongue is crucial to effective learning. Indeed, some educationists have argued that the only countries likely to achieve EFA are those where the language of instruction is the learners' mother tongue (UNESCO, 2003a). However, the prevalence of globalization and democratic ideals demonstrates that students must be proficient in international and regional languages to gain access to wider society and to participate meaningfully in their world. In response to these realities, UNESCO reaffirmed its commitment to the use of Multilanguage education in 2003 and emphasized the central role of mother-tongue instruction in achieving quality EFA (UNESCO, 2003).

Mother tongue-based bilingual schooling is seldom disputed on the basis of its pedagogical reasoning, and if decision-making were to be based solely on how to provide the highest quality education for the learner many more of the world's languages would be used in education today. Research findings from all over the world have confirmed the view that the learner's mother tongue is the best medium of instruction for young learners. The mother tongue of a student can be an important means for establishing an effective communication

between the student and the teacher. This, in turn, can considerably help such learners to acquire both basic literacy skills and also complex educational concepts with a comparative ease than the ones who are taught through a second or the dominant language. Such deliberations and findings all over the world have resulted in a rigorous effort at the international level to make arrangement for providing at least the primary education through the mother tongue of the young learners. Towards this end, a number of agreements have been signed and working framework has been formulated at the global level. Such initiatives have been led especially by the UNESCO. In this regard, different nations have taken up this task of providing education through the mother tongue of the young learners in their respective countries. But implementing this kind of education is not an easy task for multilingual society like Ethiopia.

Cognizant to the above, the Dakar Framework for Action (2000, p. 8) recognizes the need to adjust primary education to reach those belonging to ethnic minorities to make education contextually located and locally accessible. Learners who understand the language they are instructed in are more likely to engage meaningfully with content, question what they do not understand and even enjoy the challenge of new things. The Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) notes that people learn best when they are taught in a language they understand well (2006, p. 3). Moreover, the EFA 2010 report confirmed that students who learn in languages other than their mother tongue language enter school with poorer prospects of success and emerge with fewer years of education and lower levels of achievement" (p. 25).

2. Challenges of Mother Tongue-Based Education

Despite the many benefits outlined for MTBE, it also presents some drawbacks (S. Malone & Paraide, 2011; Oyzon & Fullmer, 2014; Wa-Mbaleka, 2014) that cannot be ignored in

this discussion. First, instructional materials are not readily available in the majority of local languages. Second, teachers are not trained in the local languages used for instruction where they teach. Third, primary school teachers may not have solid training on L1 or L2 learning research and theories. Fourth, some local languages may not be perceived as important for formal education. Last, parents may see MTBE as a disadvantage for future employability where English is highly valued. All these are major issues that any government promoting an MTBE policy must take into consideration. Ignoring any of them can certainly lead to certain failure.

Although a strong proponent of MTB-MLE and although optimistic about the success of this policy in the Philippines, Nolasco (2008) concluded that "the road to multi-literacy and multi-lingual education in the Philippines will be a difficult and tortuous one" (p. 13). Challenges listed above are easily seen in many places around the nation today.

3. Statement of the problem

As progress is made to achieve EFA goals, important attention is being given to mother tongue based education. It is believed that, the only country to achieve EFA is one where the language of instruction is the learners' mother tongue (L1). Pedagogically, there are many reasons to provide education with the learners' mother tongue language. Some of these reasons are discussed as follows, (1) it facilitates the transfer of knowledge between teacher and learners and among the learners by themselves. (2) "it is naturally quicker and easier to use the mother tongue to relate written symbols, to know sounds and concepts than to use those of unknown or foreign language. (3) it is used to empower the minority ethnic group in many parts of the world. (4) as argued by Kembo (2000), cognitive and affective development occurs more effectively in a language that the learner knows very well, (5), it is argued that learning in general (including second language learning) occurs more effectively if the required cognitive development has already taken place through the use of a first language as a language of learning. Cummins (1984) argues that optimal first language education provides a rich cognitive preparation for the acquisition of a second language (in Kembo, 2000, p. 289) and that the literacy and cognitive skills already acquired in the first language provide easy transition to second-language medium education.

As stated by (Alidou et al, 2006), the use of indigenous language for instruction promotes culture and identity of the people. It facilitates the integration of African culture into the school curriculum thus creating a culturally sensitive curriculum and develops a positive perception of culture. This will also ensure that the parents are involved in school activities hence making the school part of the community. It is through indigenous languages that education can best perform the role of cultural transmission. Alidou et al further note that use of imperial languages as the media of instruction leads to differential educational treatments and consequently to the maintenance of socio-economic inequalities. It excludes the common man from participating fully in development activities.

In line with above view, Ethiopian Education and Training policy of 1994 declares that the right of nations and

nationalities to make use of their mother tongue or nationality language as language of instruction in primary schools. Subsequent to this, the constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) also acknowledges that in Article 5 and 39 as follows: "All Ethiopian Languages shall enjoy equal state recognition". Beyond this, "Every nations, nationalities and people in Ethiopia has the right to speak, to write and to develop its own language: to express, to develop, and promote its culture: and to preserve its history" (MoE, 2005).

It is now well-established that children who receive schooling in their mother tongue in early grades tend to have better learning outcomes and significantly better literacy levels (Baker, (2006). Children's understanding of what is being taught and discussed in class significantly improves, leaving them to focus on learning core skills, rather than struggling to learn in a language they do not understand. Despite the increasingly overwhelming evidence of the value and benefits of early education in mother tongue, too few countries invest in it. Research conducted by Malone S (2012) revealed that learning with one's mother tongue language can enhance child's understanding and can facilitate teaching learning process.

In B/G/R/S teaching and learning in child's mother tongue language is the recent phenomena. Accordingly, teachers as implementers and students as learners' are facing different challenges in the course of using mother tongue language as medium of instruction in primary schools of the region. Thus, there is no study conducted so far on the challenges affecting teachers towards using mother tongue as language of teaching and learning. So, based on the above realities, this study aims in assessing the challenges and opportunity of using mother tongue languages in B/G/R/S mainly in three mother tongue languages namely, Berta, Gumuz and Shinasha languages.

4. Research Questions

- What are the challenges affecting teachers towards using mother tongue language as a medium of instruction in primary schools of B/G/R/S?
- What are the opportunities towards using mother tongue languages as medium of instruction in the region?

5. Objectives

General objective

Assessing challenges affecting teachers towards using mother tongue languages as a medium of instruction in Benishangul Gumuz regional State.

Specific objectives

- To assess challenges that affect teachers in using MTL as a medium of instruction
- To explore the opportunities towards using mother tongue languages as medium of instruction in the region.

6. Delimitation of the study

This study is delimited conceptually in assessing challenges and opportunities towards using mother tongue

languages as a medium of instruction. Geographically, the study is delimited to three zones of B/G/R/S. language wise, it's delimited to three mother tongue languages namely Berta, Gumuz and Shinsasha Languages.

7. Methods

The study employed both qualitative and quantitative approaches with an effort to obtain accurate outcomes and sufficient information from the respondents. The study used questionnaires, FGD and semi-structured interview as data gathering instruments. A five Likert scale type self administered questionnaires which ask teachers to rate the challenges they faced towards using mother tongue language as a medium of instruction in primary schools of Benishangul Gumuz region. Data analysis was accomplished using one sample t-Test for data obtained through questionnaires. Whereas, data gathered through FGD and semi-structured interview were analyzed through narration and description in order to triangulate quantitative data. To this end, ethical

consideration was maintained primarily with concerned authorities for permission and the subjects were clearly informed about the aims of the study and the issues of confidentiality were communicated.

8. Results and Discussion

The purpose of the study was to identify challenges and opportunities in using mother tongue languages as a medium of instruction in primary schools of Benishangul Gumuz regional State

1. Challenges of implementing mother tongue language as medium of instruction.

For effective use of mother tongue language as medium of instruction in Benishangul Gumuz regional State, a number of challenges need to be addressed. For the purposes of this study, these challenges are categorized into four parts as indicated below in table

Table 1. the result of one sample t-test on the Challenges that affect the implementation of mother tongue as medium of instruction

No	Items	N	Mean	t-value	Sig. (2 tailed)	Std. Deviation
1	Inputs Problems	134	3.69	11.759	.000	.676
2	Administration Problems	134	3.67	10.628	.000	.725
3	Interest Problems	134	3.01	.137	.891	1.049
4	Competence Problems	134	3.53	5.612	.000	1.093

Note: test value = 3 P < 0.05

Table No 1 shows that , all groups of participants responses computed using one sample t-test average mean score for the inputs problems (3.69) is significantly above the expected mean at t=11.759, df=133 and P=.000. This implies that, the impact of these problems is high on the implementation. That means; the majority of input related problems are negatively affecting the utilization of mother tongue language as medium of instruction. Specifically, Lack of reference books and other supportive materials, text book preparation problems related with dialect usage, inappropriate words and irrelevant exercises, Shortage of trained teachers in mother tongue language and Shortage of Teachers guide (teachers' book) were input related factors in using mother tongue language as a medium of instruction in primary schools Benishangul Gumuz regional state. Similar to the result of this study, the finding of Lerra Mulatu Dea and others (2013) also showed that , shortage of trained teachers, lack of general reading materials, lack of textbooks and other educational materials and inadequacy of vocabulary were problems for the use mother tongue as medium of instruction in Wolaita Zone.

Another study conducted by, UNESCO (2005,2007), as cited in Shamsdin (2015), stated that one of the most challenging tasks in designing and implementing any program for mother tongue literacy or bilingual education is that of developing suitable learning material. In the mainstream language, one would invariably find graded material for different categories of learners. However, for minority languages one has to start from scratch with no benchmarks on age- and grade-specific learning material. This was a challenge faced by the implementers of all the projects.

Therefore as Cooper (1989) cited in Heugh, (2008), concludes that a serious investment of time and resources, along with a commitment to establish collaboration between linguists, educators and community members are essential to prepare materials for bilingual programs, particularly if the first language is intended to be used over a period of years.

Table No 2 shows that, the responses of all participants observed mean score (3.67) for Administration related Problems is higher than the observed mean (3) which is statistically significant at t=10.628 at df=133 and p=0.000. This implies that, administration related Problems are highly influencing the use of mother tongue language as a medium of instruction. Consequently, Lack of sufficient on- job training, absence of sufficient academic support, Insufficient pre-service training and assigning teachers as mother tongue language without having necessary qualification were identified as hindering factors for utilization mother tongue language as medium of instruction .

Table No 4 shows that , all groups of participants responses computed using one sample t-test average mean score (3.53) for challenges related with competence is significantly above the expected mean at t=5.612 at df =133 and P=.000. This indicated that, competence related factors have negative impact on the use of mother tongue language as medium of instruction in primary schools of the region. Specifically, inadequate knowledge of teachers and limited skills of teachers are identified as impediments for the application of mother tongue language as medium of instruction.

2. Results obtained from interview and Focus Group discussion

The purpose of this interview was to assess challenges facing teachers towards using mother tongue language as a medium of instruction in primary schools of Benishangul Gumuz regional state. Thus, interview was conducted with the aim of gaining in depth information regarding the potential challenges faced by teachers in the course of teaching mother tongue languages.

As per the result of interview the majority of the teachers indicated different level of challenges they faced towards using mother tongue language as a medium of instruction. Some of these problems are attributable to lack of appropriate or sufficient training which enable them to teach in mother tongue language. Lack of adequate support from management bodies and low staff collaboration, insufficient instructional materials or resource books are few of these challenges. In view of the fact that, they have taken little course during their pre-service training and little or no in-service training they are facing challenge of knowledge gap. They were not prepared enough to teach mother tongue language. For the betterment of the discussion I have tried to quote some of the interviewee's word directly as follows....

"I graduated from Gilgel beles College of teachers education in 2015 with biology and now I am teaching mother tongue language. During my pre-service training I have taken only one mother tongue course. Because of the lack of teachers who are trained in mother tongue language willingly or unwillingly I was forced to teach mother tongue subject. For the past three years I have been teaching mother tongue but I have never received on job training as a result I became demotivated towards teaching in mother tongue."

Another group of respondents interviewed has mentioned that the text book that they are currently using to teach were not revised and it lacks clarity. In addition to that, lack of reference books, teachers' guide and supervisors who provide them with support. As one of the interviewee stated....

"I have been teaching mother tongue language for the past five years but still now I haven't taken any in-service training. I graduated in mother tongue language but I am teaching biology and mathematics in my mother tongue language." I learnt to teach through experience and repeated exposure to mother tongue textbooks. We are too much loaded that means we teach all subjects for a given class.

From the above statement we can understand that there are shortages of trained teachers in mother tongue language. As a result they are assigned to teach courses out of their specialization and they haven't received capacity building trainings. Hence, this implies that teachers need to be extensively trained and specialized with specific subjects so that they can effectively shoulder their responsibilities. Due attention is inevitable in training mother tongue languages teachers as they are the key implementers of the language.

As one of the principal interviewed stated,,,

"Good progresses are being made recently towards developing mother tongue language. There has been change in teachers' perception and attitude towards using mother language as a medium of instruction regardless of the

challenges. Teachers are eager to teach in their mother tongue languages as it's a matter of celebrating one's identity. As he stated teachers turnover was one of the major challenge followed by lack of students and teachers' textbooks and reference materials".

Generally speaking, it is possible to infer from the above discussion that teachers are confronted with different challenges like lack of adequate training in mother tongue courses, shortage of instructional materials, teaching load resulted from lack of appropriate teachers who are qualified and equipped with mother tongue languages, insufficient support and motivation from the political appointees and related issues. The interesting thing is that the majority of the mother tongue language teachers were found to react humbly and systematically towards the aforementioned challenges with believe that, they contribute their level best in developing their own mother tongue language as it is a matter of identity of their ethnic belongings.

9. Major findings

As it is noted earlier, the main concern of the current study was to assess the challenges affecting teachers in using mother tongue language as medium of instruction particularly in Benishangul Gumuz regional state. In order to meet the objective a number of steps were taken to mention few. Survey questionnaires were prepared originally in English and translated into Amharic language to avoid miscommunication. Data were collected from 153 participants 144 of which were mother tongue language teachers whereas 9 of which were school principals. Having fully analyzed and interpreted the collected data the following results were found.

- The study discovered a number of challenges that affect the use of mother tongue language as medium of instruction by teachers. These challenges are attributable to different factors such as;
- Input related factors like lack of students' text books, teachers' guide, teachers who are trained in mother tongue languages and other reference materials.
- Administrative related factors are attributed to lack of administrative support, encouragement and motivation from political officials and
- Knowledge and skill related factors. This has to do with inadequate pre-service and in-service trainings

Specifically, Lack of reference books and other supportive materials, text book preparation problems related with dialect usage, inappropriate words and irrelevant exercises, Shortage of trained teachers in mother tongue language and Shortage of Teachers guide (teachers' book) were input related factors in using mother tongue language as a medium of instruction in primary schools Benishangul Gumuz regional state. Similar to the result of this study, the finding of Lerra Mulatu Dea and others

10. Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study the following conclusions were drawn;

- *Teachers' use of mother tongue language as medium of instruction in primary schools of Benishangul*

Gumuz regional state were highly affected by various factors like input related factors (text books, reference materials, shortage of teachers)....

- Teachers were lacking adequate administrators support, encouragement and motivations.
- Teachers were lacking interest towards teaching in mother tongue languages

11. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study and the conclusions made, the following recommendations were forwarded.

- Regarding Challenges affecting the use mother tongue as medium of instruction many issues are related to inputs and administrative problems. Since the implementation of these languages as medium of instruction has begun a few years ago and has enormous pedagogical value for the children of primary schools; all the concerned bodies should pay attention and support the implementation. Consequently, it is recommended that Regional Education Bureau collaboratively with Gilgel Beles teachers Education College and Mother tongue

language experts at different levels of education sector in the region ought to revise the existing text books by considering the relevance of words and Exercises and the use of dialects across zones and Woredas. And also Regional Education Bureau has to prepare additional reference or reading materials which support teachers and students in the teaching-learning process. Making teachers' guide accessible in all subjects and at all grade levels is also the part of this activity.

- It is also suggested that Regional Education Bureau has to provide sufficient pre- service trainings and on-job training to teachers of mother tongue language in order to fill teachers Skills and Knowledge gaps.
- It is recommended that Regional Education Bureau, Zonal Education department, Woreda education office and mother tongue language supervisors create and maintain properly scheduled and organized formal supervision to provide professional support to teachers at school level for effectiveness of mother tongue language implementation.

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