# Mother Tongue Education as a Medium of Instruction - A Literature Review

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**Abstract**

This article presents a review of literature of various studies on mother tongue education (MTE) as a medium of instruction. The first objective of this review was to examine the role of mother tongue as first language (L1) as a medium of instruction for effective learning. The second objective was to study the challenges faced by native language learners studying through second language (L2) English. The third objective was to summarise the problems and challenges in implementation of mother tongue-based multi-lingual education (MTB-ML). The review was conducted through a literature search in various databases. The review of literature showed that the mother tongue-based education gives better understanding of the concepts and clear interpretation of the thoughts and gives emotional strength. Mother tongue learning was seen to act as a medium for the interaction within a community. However, the challenge of implementing mother tongue-based multilingual education in countries having multiple mother tongues was a reality. It was seen that learning through English (second language) was useful to learn for all the students in the context of globalization. However, the major challenge was of low levels of English proficiency amongst teachers and students, lack of resources, and limitations of a well defined pedagogical plan. The studies suggested that up to primary classes, the medium of instruction should be mother tongue/regional language. Students should however be given an opportunity to learn through English/second language so that they would be able to act as global citizens in future.

**Keywords:** First language(L1), mother tongue education (MTE), mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-ME), second language (L2), NEP 2020

**Introduction**

This article presents a review of literature on the significance of mother tongue education (MTE) as medium of instruction as it is the best way to teach the children for better comprehension and capacities of learning. Proficiency in mother tongue enhances greater learning abilities especially if used in schools (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). The Sustainable Development Goal 4 also promote learning in the mother tongue UN (Diba & Priyadarshini,2023). Mother tongue education as medium of instruction has its own pros and cons especially in current scenario where majority of the people want to learn one or another international language (mainly English) to move further in this competitive time.
there must be respect for linguistic diversity  and all  people

**Research objectives**

The main objectives of this literature review were as follows:

- To study the role of mother tongue as first language(L1) as a medium of instruction for effective learning.
- To study the challenges faced by native language learners studying through second language (L2) English.
- To know the problems and challenges in implication of mother tongue-based multilingual education.

**Methodology**

The growth of knowledge in every sphere has expanded with new theories being expounded and new areas of research being identified. It is therefore important that research done earlier and in the present be studied so that there is a greater understanding of the research area. According to Snyder (2019), literature review can be the best methodological tool that can provide answers for different research questions and it also helps to give an overview of a research problem.

In the present study, the research plan was designed with the aim of selecting articles that were available in the databases present in India as well as on international databases. As a part of the research plan, the search terms included 'mother tongue education', mother tongue-based multilingual education, native language(L1), second language (L2).

During the conduct of the literature review, a total of 120 articles were identified and reviewed. Based upon the research objectives and research questions, the search terms were narrowed down. The inclusion criteria included mother tongue education as first language(L1) and research studies that were conducted in which English was used as second language(L2). The exclusion criteria included removal of those studies that were repetitive and did not match the objectives of this study which focused on L1 and L2 relationships. Based upon this exclusion criteria, a total of 24 research articles, Government documents (2) as well as international documents (5) were selected for analysis for the study.

**1. The role of mother tongue as first language(L1) as a medium of instruction for effective learning**

The review of literature showed that most of the scholars, thinkers, educators (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000, p. 105, Benson 2004b, Trudell 2005; SIL 2006, Kosonen 2009, Young 2009), politicians, policy makers and organizations (UNESCO) favoured mother tongue-based education i.e., first language(L1). It is seen that children who are proficient in their mother tongue have greater learning abilities in a language that is used in elementary and primary levels (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). Şahin (2018) found that language is the major reason to tie the community to its tradition, faith and religion. Children may consequently find it very difficult to interpret and understand the written word, especially if they are learning to read in a second language (L2). This type of a situation was seen in many nations where children were enrolled in schools that offered English as a second language, and was used "to teach academic subjects in countries where the majority of the population does not speak English as their first language (L1)" (Dearden,2014). According to scholars, there is growing evidence that EMI (English medium instruction) teachers and students encounter similar issues. These include low proficiency in the English language amongst teachers and pupils, lack of suitable resources, and a lack of a defined educational plan for EMI. There a number of researches that have been done on the issue of additive and subtractive bilingualism. In a study done by Enstice (2017) on 'Latino Parent Perspective, it was found that Spanish speaking children who were in the age group of 6 or 7 preferred to speak English with their peers even when their family and school try to promote bilingualism.

Mother Tongue Education (MTE) is a means for equal access to education for all. Ozfidan (2017) emphasized on the importance of mother tongue education and said that language is a critical component for minority students to succeed academically. Speaking one's mother tongue in class promotes freedom of speech, boosts self-assurance, and improves thinking abilities. The right to learn one's mother tongue belongs to everyone because it is an essential component of their culture. A explanatory sequential mixed methodology was used in this research with the quantitative part being researched first and it was followed with the qualitative part. According to the findings, every person has the right to receive instruction in their mother tongue. In order for every student to reap the same benefits as others, mother tongue education is required. The promotion of mother language education was found essential for ensuring student attendance, enhancing educational standards, and integrating kids into society.

Mother tongue education was also seen to act as a medium for the interaction within a community. In order to interact in a community, the fluency of native tongue was essential (Cavallaro, 2005). In this context, language issues in the classroom become significant for individuals whose native language is not the official language. The importance of learning one's mother tongue helps in the transfer of native languages to the next generation. It also gives a positive feeling of equal existence in the community (Kaya, 2015). Therefore, the social role of language as a binding force across different communities was seen as very significant.

Diba & Priyadarshini (2023) conducted an international level survey about the significance of mother tongue. In their survey of 70 students from 32 countries, the researchers found mother tongue education being most helpful in better understanding and enhancement of deeper abilities of expression. The study found that alongwith the mother tongue learning, learning an additional language was seen as beneficial from a global perspective. The study suggested that besides mother tongue learning, there should also be a provision for teaching international languages at school level as a subject so that the learners would feel empowered with the skills of interacting and working in a global environment.

## 2. Challenges faced by native language learners studying through second language (L2) English

The study by Treffers-Daller et al. (2022) found that primary school children who begin their learning in a second language (L2) English medium instruction (EMI) have the great difficulty understanding the written word. There is evidence that EMI teachers and students face similar problems across a range of settings. The problems include low levels of English proficiency amongst teachers and students, lack of resources, and lack of a defined pedagogical plan for EMI, including instructions on additive bilingualism and the use of L1 in the classroom (Dearden 2014). It was seen that students faced identity crises with education in second language (L2). Language is a part of human identity and not being able to get education in mother tongue was perceived as damaging to this identity,

The use of technology in all speres has also raised the issue of language learning through second language English. According to Fitzpatrick (2004), it was warned about the dangers of the World Wide Web being dominated by one or a small number of world languages. The need for diversity on the internet was emphasised. The dominance of English in a digital environment was seen as a barrier for majority of people. Further the lack of training manuals and programmes available in different languages was also a challenge.

Academic and emotional challenges in changing the medium of instruction from mother tongue to second language (L2) is an issue which was discussed in various studies. George & Abdullah (2021) conducted a qualitative research on students who switched from Hindi to English for admission to a Hotel Management

and Hospitality programme. The study found that students struggled with listening, understanding, speaking, and writing, difficulty in expressing and hesitant to discussions with teachers and peers, slow learning which was leading to low exam scores.

**3. Problems and Challenges in implementation of** mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE)

There were many challenges noted through studies conducted on implementation of mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE). According to UNESCO (2014), the implementation of MTB-MLE involves using the mother tongue as a language of instruction in the classroom. It is not about restricting access to national and international languages. The aim of MTB-MLE is to prepare children to learn these languages as well. In India, the National Education Policy 2020(NEP) has emphasised till Grade 5, and ideally up to Grade 8 and beyond, the home language should be the main language of instruction. The native tongue should then continue to be taught after that where possible in both the public and private schools, providing the availability of the best science texts in native languages. The language barrier between the child's native language and the teaching language will be bridged as soon as possible. For learners whose home language may be different from the classroom language, teachers be encouraged to employ a bilingual approach, including multilingual teaching and learning resources. The NEP 2020 states that higher education institutions (HEIs) should provide multilingual programmes in both mother tongue and local languages to improve access and encourage the usage of Indian languages.

The review of studies done on this issue showed that there were challenges related to the issue of the readiness of the educational institutions towards provision/implementation of education in mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE). Şahin (2018) reviewed the use of mother tongue education in Turkey and found that educational institutions were not ready to provide education in all minority languages. Language is one of the primary sources that bind the community along with ethnicity and religion. Turkey is a country in which many ethnic groups including the Kurdish, Laz, Circassian, Arab, Greek, Armenian, and Jewish living alongside the Turkish majority, and thus, a variety of languages are spoken but for medium of instruction, it was seen that only Turkish language was available.

Şahin mentioned numerous human rights documents and Declaration by UN (1948,1960,1966, 1981, 2007 and 2015) which advocate the right to education for all and equal access especially in primary education. Şahin mentioned about the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) in 1999 (Art 13) where availability, accessibility, acceptability and adaptability were accepted as four basic principles that are basic right to education. In this qualitative study, the researcher found that non availability of native language education gave rise to the feeling of deprivation.

Problems related to accessibility and availability of resources were seen in many studies. Alberto, Gabinete & Rañola, (2016) discussed the issues and challenges in teaching mother tongue-based multilingual education in grades first, second and third in Philippines. The study mainly focused on the problems which teachers faced based upon four skill areas- reading, writing, speaking and listening in mother tongue. Through a qualitative approach (group discussions, interviews and observation), the results were gathered and showed that there is scarcity of resources which could be enhance students' abilities in above said areas. Unavailability of audio materials and writing materials was a big challenge. Although in

mother tongue, learners could express themselves in a better way and they participated in class discussions but lack of instructional materials in mother tongue and scarcity of trained teachers to teach in mother tongue made the situation worst. Thus, it was suggested that all the learning materials should be made available in the mother tongue.

The reviewed literature included the challenge of mother-tongue education in multilingual classrooms. Jami & Keturah (2022) explained the scope and challenges of introducing mother tongue language as a medium of instruction up to preparatory stage in the state of Nagaland, which has multiple languages and dialects. In their qualitative study, they found that majority of the respondents wanted mother tongue as a medium of instruction but since it is multi lingual state, the implementation was difficult. The study felt that the introduction of multiple mother tongues at school level would result in creating language barriers within the school.

Sibanda (2019) explained about the mother-tongue education and the challenges of multilingual classroom education. The study recognized the significance of mother tongue education and found it beneficial for literacy and understanding. In South Africa, mother tongue education is provided in the initial three years. Subsequently in multi- languages classrooms, pedagogical challenges are being faced as the mother tongue used in the class and in the home are different. The difference in the rural-and urban migrants' language and dialects makes the situation more critical. The study found that regional language education would be more functional in comparison of mother tongue education.

David (2021) discussed about the multilingual education based on mother tongue and its challenges in Malaysia which has three primary ethnic groups namely Malay, Chinese, and Indian along with many indigenous language speakers. David (2021) mentioned Philipson (1992) and Steiger (2017) and said that students, parents, and teachers have a strong desire to learn English (L2) and feel that utilizing English as MOI is the most efficient way to do so. Gyawali & Khadka (2016) discussed the use of suitable medium of instruction in a multi-lingual country like Nepali spoken by the majority but there are many languages as well as ethnic dialects The different ethnic communities are not getting education in their mother tongue (as cited by Bista, 2011) and are largely provided education in Nepali or English language. Hence there is a feeling of deprivation and isolation. The study suggested that there was a need to resolve the problem related to language issues and education should be in the language in which the commonly spoken language of the learners.

Naw Khu Shee (2012) conducted a study and collected data regarding MTB (mother tongue based) programmes in Myanmar. Ther examination results from pupils in three grade levels were compared with the results between students who got teaching solely in Burmese and those who received instruction in both Burmese and Karen. Based on those findings, the study came to the conclusion that bilingual learners out-performed monolingual learners in every subject area. The study recommended that multilingual education should be promoted. This study was supported by Davis (2020), who found that in the context of Myanmar that children who learnt both Burmese and Karen performed better on tests than those who only studied one language. As a result, ethnic minority children comprehended school materials and continued to attend school, thereby enhancing retention rates and advancing in all aspects of education.

The study suggested that in order to include and keep alive various minority languages, there should be establishment of language and literature committees from amongst these interested communities.

## Conclusion and Suggestions

The literature review of various studies thus shows that the mother tongue-based education is the most appropriate method for better understanding of the concepts and for development of cognitive capacities through education. Studying through mother tongue improves learning abilities and builds social and emotional strength. Thus, it is an effective medium for learning. On the other hand, when education is not provided in mother tongue, the native language students face many difficulties. This is not only in comprehension and expression but they also face lack of resources and pedagogical issues while learning in second language. This results in, academic and emotional challenges amongst learners.

The literature review also showed that learning other languages is useful and bilingualism has advantages for functioning in a global world. The challenge of dominance of English in digital technologies remains. Multi lingual classroom offer a healthy environment for learning and help to revie the feeling of deprivation and isolation. Teaching learning resources must be available in multiple languages if access to education has to be provided to all. However, in order to be successful in creating such environment where learners would not feel isolated, there is a need for governments, policy makers and academic institutions to work together to develop all the resources, infrastructure, instructional designs, pedagogical designs, curriculum designs and technological training so that both mother tongue learning and multi-lingual learning is able to take place as a medium of instruction for learners at all levels of education.

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