

Role of Mothers' Language on the Conceptual Clarity of Students at Primary Level

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Abstract



This study was undertaken to explore the role of mother tongue in promoting effective learning amongst primary school children. The key aim of the current study was to assess teacher's perspectives about the efficiency of mother tongue as a mode of instruction for making improvements in the levels of students' comprehension, participation, communication, cognitive developments and performance. A descriptive survey design with a quantitative research paradigm was applied in the study. Primary school teachers made up the target population, and a sample size of 320 teachers was identified using a convenient sampling method. In the process of collecting data, a researcher-constructed questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale was used. The data obtained from participants were subjected to analysis in terms of frequencies, percentages and mean scores. The results of the study showed that most of the participants had very positive views about the use of mother tongue as a mode of instruction for primary schools. Teacher's perception was that students can comprehend complex concepts better when instructed in a language they know well. It was further indicated that mother language enhances comprehension, communication and information retention of the students. It was evident from the teachers' views that the students become more comfortable in asking questions, taking part in discussions, and learning in their mother tongue. Moreover, the results of this study revealed that teaching in mother tongue helps slow learners and avoids confusion in learning, enhances cognitive development, and increases students' confidence and performance levels. It can be concluded that mother language proves to be a useful teaching aid to increase meaningful learning and academic achievement. It was suggested in this study that there should be mother tongue-based multi-language educational policies and practices for primary level education.

Keywords: Mother's Language, Conceptual Clarity, Primary Level

Introduction

Language can be considered one of the key methods of communication and learning. At an early age, children gain knowledge, skills, and social experiences mainly through the use of the language spoken within the family, which is often termed the "mother language" or "mother tongue" (UNESCO, 1953). It is important to note that the mother language facilitates comprehension of surroundings and interaction with other individuals (Ball, 2011). Research into the education field suggests that learning becomes easier if children are taught in a familiar language (Benson, 2004).

Conceptual clarity involves being able to comprehend, interpret, and apply knowledge by students rather than having them merely memorize information (Bruner, 1960). This allows students to relate new concepts to their existing knowledge and be able to utilize this knowledge in varied situations (Ausubel, 1968). The significance of conceptual clarity is most prominent at the elementary level because it provides a basis for future learning (Piaget, 1952).

Language plays an important role in shaping students' comprehension skills. As such, if students are taught in a foreign language, they tend to struggle to comprehend concepts taught in class and resort to mechanical memorization (Cummins, 2001). On the other hand, using the mother language in instructions eliminates cognitive hurdles and ensures effective comprehension (Vygotsky, 1978). Research reveals that students taught in their native language exhibit greater comprehension,

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involvement, and performance compared to students instructed in a foreign language (Kioko et al., 2014; Dagalea et al., 2022).

In multi-lingual societies like Pakistan, many students use their local languages at home but learn through Urdu or English language medium at school (Rahman, 2004). This problem results in making it difficult for students to comprehend the lessons in schools, which leads to inadequate development of concepts among students studying at primary levels (Qasim & Qasim, 2014). Thus, examining the significance of using the mother language in clarifying concepts becomes imperative.

Moreover, the significance of mother language goes beyond scholastic performance and touches on the areas of socialization, emotional development, cognition, and culture in the process of growing up. The relationship between identity, values, culture, traditions, and language is so strong that mother language plays a crucial role in the holistic development of children (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). Children who learn in their mother language feel more confident in class and are better prepared for the learning process (Ball, 2011). As such, mother language-based instruction is not just a technique applied to facilitate learning but a tool for promoting comprehensive development and educational opportunities among primary school children (UNESCO, 2024).

Statement of the Problem

Conceptual clarity is imperative in fostering productive learning experiences and academic excellence. Many primary-level school students have problems comprehending the class concepts owing to language differences between the school language and mother language (Qasim & Qasim, 2014). Language differences lead to lower levels of engagement, comprehension, confidence, and academic achievement (Rahman, 2004). Previous research has shown that use of the mother language leads to better comprehension, classroom engagement, and concept development (Kioko et al., 2014; Khan et al., 2020). Nevertheless, there is very little literature about how mother language contributes to academic achievement among students in Pakistani primary level institutions. For these reasons, the present study seeks to examine the contribution of mother language in conceptual clarity and meaningful learning.

Significance of the study

The significance of this research lies in the fact that it brings into focus the importance of mother language in promoting clear concepts in the minds of the students at the primary level. The results obtained from the study will help the teachers understand the role played by the use of the mother language as the medium of instruction in improving comprehension, engagement, and performance in academic activities among the students. Besides, the results obtained from the study will guide curricula designers and education policy makers in devising suitable policies regarding the use of mother language in promoting effective learning among the young students. Moreover, the study will help create an understanding among the parents regarding the importance of mother language instructions in boosting the confidence and mental abilities of the children. In multilingual societies like Pakistan, the study will be helpful in improving teaching techniques through the introduction of local and mother languages in the teaching processes at the primary level.

Research Questions

1. What is the importance of mother language in primary education?
2. What is the effectiveness of mother language in enhancing comprehension and concepts of the students?
3. What are the uses of mother language in the primary education system?

Research Design

A quantitative research method was used under the positivist research approach. This is because quantitative research allows researchers to obtain objective data that is measurable and to analyze the relationship between variables (Cohen, 1980). Descriptive survey research was conducted in order to obtain information from primary school teachers concerning the use of mother language in ensuring that concepts are clear. Thirty Likert scale questions were included in the structured questionnaire that was used to obtain information. The data obtained from the survey was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies and mean scores.

Review of Literature

Concept of Mother Language

The concept of mother language is associated with the first language that a child learns in the natural process through interactions with his/her family members and immediate surroundings (UNESCO,

1953). It plays an important role in the development of communication skills and helps to develop cognitive abilities (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). As mentioned by Cummins (2001), knowledge of the first language will help in learning new languages and subjects. Research has found that students are better able to learn in their mother language (Ball, 2011; Benson, 2004).

Conceptual Clarity in Education

Conceptual clarity is associated with having a good grasp of concepts; students are able to understand and use their knowledge in real-life settings, rather than just rote learning (Bruner, 1960). According to Ausubel (1968), meaningful learning happens when new information can be linked to existing schemas in the mind. Conceptual clarity allows students to build analytical skills, which are essential for academic success (Piaget, 1952).

Theoretical Foundations

The Cognitive Development Theory of Piaget postulates that knowledge is built based on interaction with the environment and associating new experiences to previous knowledge (Piaget, 1952). Early experiences being associated with the mother language, learning in the native language facilitates knowledge building.

Sociocultural Theory by Vygotsky emphasizes the significance of language in cognitive development and knowledge acquisition. As stated by Vygotsky (1978), "learning takes place within a social context," and language plays an important role in communication, particularly in a familiar language.

The interdependence theory by Cummins explains how abilities attained in the first language can be applied in the second language. This is why strong mother language ability aids greatly in academic success (Cummins, 2001).

Mother Language and Cognitive Development

Cognition and language are very closely interrelated. Through language, children can arrange ideas, comprehend experiences, and think through solutions (Vygotsky, 1978). By being exposed to education via the mother language, children reduce the level of cognitive overload and are able to concentrate on grasping ideas rather than translating information in their heads (Cummins, 2001). According to UNESCO (2016), students who learn in their native language exhibit better cognitive functioning and comprehension.

Mother Language and Conceptual Clarity

It is clear from the research findings that teaching in the mother language promotes clarity in concepts for the students. The students who are taught in their native languages comprehend better concepts, actively take part in classroom activities, and have greater retention of what they have learned (Ball, 2011; Benson, 2004). Nakamura et al. (2023) revealed that mother language teaching improves literacy skills and conceptualization.

Mother Language and Academic Achievement

The level of academic achievement depends on the language used for instruction. The use of the native language leads to superior academic performance since the students can grasp the lessons well (UNESCO, 2016). As indicated by Heugh (2011), the use of native languages in education contributes to better literacy and less dropout, leading to good learning results. Likewise, according to Khan et al. (2020), students who underwent education using Pashto had better comprehension and engagement compared to those who used only English.

Classroom Participation and Communication

Classroom participation plays an essential role in successful learning. Students will find it easier to participate in discussions and put forward their views when instruction takes place in a language that they are familiar with (Vygotsky, 1978). There have been studies which reveal that mother language instruction encourages students' self-confidence, ability to communicate, and active involvement (UNESCO, 2016; Ball, 2011). Increased participation leads to concept acquisition.

Global Perspective on Mother Language Education

Mother language education has found extensive global backing. According to UNESCO (2024), mother-language based multilingual education is an approach that can be adopted to foster equity, inclusiveness, and quality learning. Some countries that have effectively utilized mother language policies include Ethiopia, Philippines, South Africa, and Finland, where they have seen enhanced literacy and academic performance (Heugh, 2011; Walter & Dekker, 2011).

Mother Language Education in Pakistan

The bilingual setting in Pakistan makes issues arise about the medium of instruction. Even though Urdu and English are used extensively in academic settings, there is a large number of children who converse in their local dialects (Rahman, 2004). Studies carried out in Pakistan reveal that mother language instruction increases comprehension, confidence, and active participation of students (Channa et al., 2016). According to Khan et al. (2020), when the instruction was in Pashto, students understood the concepts more easily compared to instructions in Urdu or English.

Mother Language Education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK)

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), an ethnically rich province of Pakistan, is home to a large number of languages but Pashto remains the predominant language spoken in this province. Traditionally, English and Urdu have been used for teaching in educational institutions resulting in a discrepancy between students' native languages and languages of instruction. Mother language instruction positively influences literacy acquisition and conceptual clarity, particularly among early grade students in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, as has been shown in recent studies. Nonetheless, some factors remain a hurdle in implementing mother languages in classroom instruction, including lack of teaching resources and insufficient teacher training (Khan et al., 2020; UNESCO, 2016).

Challenges of Mother Language Education

While there are numerous benefits to mother language teaching, there are many obstacles to such a process. These obstacles range from limited resources to teacher preparedness to classroom language diversity to societal bias towards education in English (Mansoor, 2005; Mahboob, 2020). Despite these obstacles, the UNESCO (2024) asserts that they can all be overcome by proper language planning.

Conclusion

It is imperative for mother language to have an important function in improving conceptual clarity in young students at primary level. The research proves beyond doubt that effective learning takes place when instructions are given in a language with which students are proficient. Mother language education facilitates clarity, brain development, active participation in class, communication skills, confidence building, and success in academics. It enables students to relate new knowledge with their own experience.

Mother language instruction at the primary level of multilingual nations like Pakistan has a positive impact on educational performance as well as removes various barriers that may hinder the learning process. In spite of facing some difficulties in the process, the advantages of mother language teaching are greater than its disadvantages. It is suggested that educational authorities should adopt this methodology at the primary level of education.

Furthermore, it is crucial that the findings from this study bring out the importance for educational policy makers, curriculum planners, and administrators of the need to embrace linguistic diversity in the classroom. Incorporating the mother language in the process of teaching can go a long way in ensuring that there is inclusivity in the education system, where children benefit greatly through learning from their mother language. This promotes creativity, critical thinking skills, self-esteem, and overall academic success. Developing an education system based on mother language at the primary school level will go a long way in ensuring that children develop into well-rounded individuals who will make a positive contribution to national development.

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