



ISSN -PRINT-2231-3613/DLNE2455-8729
International Educational Journal

UGC APPROVAL NO. - 42652

CHETANA

Received on 15th Jan 2018, Revised on 20th Jan 2018; Accepted 30th Jan 2018

ARTICLE

Multilingual Education: An Innovative Strategy to Achieve UEE in Odisha

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Key words: *MLE, UEE etc.*

Abstract

Imparting education to tribal students in between a multilingual and multicultural context is a biggest challenge for the teachers and govt. of India. Though access to schools has increased and enrolment rates are improving, the dropout rates are still alarmingly high and achievement levels are low compared to their counterparts. One of the reasons for this is that education is conducted in a language they do not understand using an unfamiliar cultural context. In this paper the author has tried to outline how Multilingual Education (MLE) helps for achieving universalization of elementary education in Odisha. Under different heads, Concept of MLE is described by specifying the goals of it. Initiatives taken by the Govt. of India are also discussed in short and more emphasis is given on the history and rationale of MLE introduction in Odisha, following different elements of MLE.

Introduction

Multilingualism (used as a synonym to plurilingualism) refers to the capacity of humans to communicate in different languages, either individually or collectively. Depending on one's linguistic biography, one can be competent in more than one language. At the same time, societies can be composed by groups that use different languages (Carbonell, 2014). Sridhar (1996) has classified Multilingualism as Individual Multilingualism and Societal Multilingualism.

1. Individual Multilingualism: Individual multilingualism is the ability of an individual to have competence in two or more languages. For example, if a child has a Punjabi father, a Bengali mother and is raised by a Bhojpuri maid and he is living in a metropolitan city like Mumbai, then, the child will grow up acquiring Individual Multilingualism.

2. Societal Multilingualism: Societal Multilingualism is defined as the linguistic diversity present in a society. In societal multilingualism some issues such as role and status, attitude towards languages, determinants of language choices, the symbolic and practical uses of the languages and the correlation between language use and social factors such as ethnicity, religion and class are important. For example –the families from states like Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and nearby states come to Delhi and settle down there. Despite Hindi being the dominant language, they continue to maintain their own language. This results in multilingualism within a particular society which is multilingual, but has an official language of its own (Shodhganga 2013).

Concept of MLE

Multilingual education implies use of two or more languages in the classroom. It emphasizes using mother tongue as medium of instruction at initial stage. After that only, switch over to the regional or national language. It will bring success. Multilingual education defined by UNESCO as the use of at least three languages in education---the mother tongue, a regional or national language and an international one (UNESCO, 1999).

Over 10,000 mother tongues (MTs), which were named by the respondents in the 1991 Census Survey of India, were rationalized and classified into 3372 MTs. Out of which, 1576 were listed and the remaining 1796 were grouped under the 'other' MT category. The MTs are variously classified into 300-400 languages belonging to five language families. 22 of these languages are constitutionally recognized as official languages listed in the VIIIth schedule of the Constitution of India. In addition, English is recognized as an associate official language. Large numbers of languages are used in various national domains - 104 languages for radio broadcasting as well as adult literacy programs, 87 for print media and 67 in primary education. The figures are daunting and they do point to mega diversity; India ranks fourth in the world in terms of the number of languages (Skutnabb and Kangas, 2000). However, Indian multilingualism is unique in many ways not just because of the presence of a number of languages in different spheres of social life in India; the dynamics of the relationship between these languages and their users, the manner in which the languages are organized in the society and the way they are reflected in the daily lives of the common people all over the country make the ethos of language use in India quite distinct from the dominant monolingual societies

Goals of MLE

MLE in Odisha is provided taking into account the following objectives:

To ensure equitable quality education to tribal children.

To enable the tribal children to explore the world around them and use their resources meaningfully for their livelihood.

To empower tribal children with reading and writing skills.

To enable them to acquire knowledge and information in their mother tongue as well as in state, national and international language in future.

To develop self- respect for their language and culture which enriches human knowledge.

To reduce the number of out of school tribal children and dropout rate by removing mismatch between their home and school language.

Constitutional Provisions

Despite a clear constitutional provision that the state and the local authorities shall endeavor to “provide adequate facilities for instruction in the mother tongue at primary stage of education to children belonging to minority groups” (Article 350A, Constitution of India), a large number of minority languages are weakened and endangered by their exclusion and non-accommodation in school education and literacy programs (Mohanty, 2006).

MLE in India: An Overview

In India MLE Programme is being run in two states- Andhra Pradesh and Orissa. Besides these two states, Chhattisgarh has also started MLE programme in 2010 in seven languages. The policy document for MLE has also been drafted and finalized. While MLE is not implemented as a state programme in Jharkhand, several attempts have been made to prepare material which would serve as bridging material for the tribal children coming to classrooms equipped with a linguistic different from the one required in school. Similar attempts have also been made in other states to bridge the gap between a child’s home and school language. These attempts have been made possible by the efforts of several individuals, groups and institutes and have led to production of a rich resource pool. It is important that the material developed & the resources, have made this development possible to be documented to ensure their optimal use (Nag et.l,-).

History of MLE in Odisha

Under the assistance of NCERT, CILL and UNESCO conducted a national seminar at Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL) on Multilingual Education (MLE) by giving special focus to tribal children (October 25-27, 2005).

In the light of low literacy rates among the tribes, a National Conference was conducted by OPEPA in 2006 and findings of the conference were adopted by the government as a programme in July 2006.

The tribal advisory committee headed by chief minister of Odisha provisionally declared the introduction of the tribal language as medium of instruction including Santali as a tribal language.

In 2006-07, the SSA initiated MLE programme in Ten Languages for the period of five years in a pilot basis which was based on the principles of NCF, 2005. DIET faculties were identified for academic support. Teachers and language resource person selected from 10 tribal communities were trained on MLE and NCF, 2005 in the context of educating tribal children.

Context/Rationale of MLE in Odisha

Rationale behind introducing MLE in Odisha can be best described by the following quotation.

Quality of education results from a large number of factors such as, learning environment, family support, activities outside the classroom, relevance of learning to children's life situation and context. The language of instructions in schools plays a significant role towards quality achievement. It is recognized that teaching children in their mother tongue or regional language at the lower primary level impacts achievement rates. The United Nations, in the forum of Education for All, International Plan of Action Resolution (A/56/116) stated that, "Literacy for All will be effective only when children are taught in the mother tongue. The World Bank report (2004) reveals that fifty percent of the world's out-of-school children live in communities where the language of the schooling is rarely, if ever, used at home. This underscores the biggest challenge to achieving Education for All (EFA). In view of this, one of the targets set for Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) has been to reduce the drop-out rate and decrease repetition rates especially among children from marginalized and disadvantaged communities. Keeping the above in view, the goal of the MLE programme is to ensure equity and quality education by allowing tribal children to

develop reading and writing skills and acquire knowledge and information in their mother tongue first. It also develops self-respect for their language and culture, thereby increasing tribal children's sense of self-esteem. Mother tongue education has sufficient implications in regards to the learning achievement of marginalized groups, particularly Scheduled Tribes (STs) children. In most cases, the context for learning, as given in the curriculum and textbooks, may not be suitable or relevant, and the examples and illustrations used are also not suitable; this may impede learning comprehension. Studies reveal the need for a strong foundation in the mother tongue as it acts as a strong predictor of second language development among children. Furthermore, children with a solid foundation in their mother tongue develop stronger literacy abilities in the school language. Children's knowledge and skills transfer across languages from the mother tongue to the school language (Cummins, 2000). UNESCO also supports mother tongue instruction as a means of improving educational quality by building upon the knowledge and experience of the learners and teachers (United Nations, 2003). It is of paramount importance that learning begins with what a child knows and understands. Children learn what is important in their communities and indigenous knowledge is best learnt through indigenous languages, cultural identity and place in the community. Such considerations have led to the introduction of the Multilingual Education (MLE) Programme in Orissa. (Program Evaluation Report, Multilingual Education In Orissa, NCERT2011)

Elements of MLE in Odisha

Preparation of Curriculum, Textbooks and Teacher Training Module

In view of this, a package of instructional materials like thematic curriculum, syllabus, teaching learning materials (TLMs) viz. Word Web, Alphabet Book, Big Book and Small Book, etc. were developed both in tribal languages and Oriya from July 2006 to May 2007. Teachers from 10 tribal communities and 8 DIET faculties, in-charge of the MLE program were engaged in material preparation and trained on the MLE approach.

Teachers' Recruitment and Deployment

After introducing the MLE Program, the Government of Orissa (GoO) decided to either engage existing tribal teachers as MLE teachers in MLE pilot schools or recruit unemployed tribal youths from the same community to teach the learners in their own language, where existing tribal teachers were lacking. Accordingly, apart from Bonda and Juang tribal communities, all other eight tribal language teachers were deployed from existing primary

schools to act as the MLE teachers. However, educated youths from Bonda and Juang community were appointed as MLE volunteers in the MLE pilot schools. In addition, 100 Santhali teachers were appointed by the District Project Office, SSA, Mayurbhanj to teach children in the Santhali language in MLE schools.

Capacity Building of Teachers and Other Functionaries

Training was imparted to MLE teachers for fifteen days followed by five days of refresher training. A fifteen-day training program was organized for the MLE teachers of each language group separately on all the MLE training modules in each district with the help of teachers and DIET lecturers who were trained as Master Trainers on MLE. The MLE teachers were also provided hands-on experiences for two days in one of the MLE Schools. Besides, the Head Teachers, CRCCs and BRCCs were also trained on the MLE approach at the district level for fifteen days. Monthly resource day meeting was conducted to refresh the day-to-day issues and challenges on MLE. A cascade model of training was conceptualized for capacity building of functionaries across the spectrum, i.e., from the State level to cluster level. Ultimately, all primary school teachers were to be trained before the start of the program. To ensure uniform quality training, a training package was developed by the OPEPA.

Organizational Structure of MLE

The organizational structure of MLE is as follows:

District Project >Office Block Level Office >Cluster Level Office > School

Monitoring and Assessment of MLE Schools

A monthly resource day meeting is held in each block headquarter. In these meetings, with the help of MLE District Resource Group (DRG) members, MLE teachers are encouraged to discuss problems and issues related to classroom transaction and share good practices and experiences in MLE schools. Detailed documentation of teachers' experiences and reflection on children's performance are captured. Accordingly, suggestions and instructions are provided to MLE teachers to improve the effectiveness of the classroom teaching-learning process. A monitoring team was constituted at the District /Block/CRC level to assess the day-to-day progress of the MLE pilot schools. The BRCCs and CRCCs are trained on how to monitor and assess the classroom transaction effectively so that the children can learn meaningfully.

Interventions taken by OPEPA

Mother Tongue based Multilingual Education

Multilingual education is a structured programme of language learning and cognitive development providing

- A strong educational foundation in the first language
- Successful bridging to one or more additional languages
- Enabling the use of both/all languages for life-long learning.

The purpose of a multilingual education program is to develop appropriate cognitive and reasoning skills enabling children to operate equally in their native, state and national languages, starting in mother tongue with transition to second (Oriya) and third languages (English).

(i) Scaling up of MLE schools in ten languages

Right now there are 544 Schools which have adopted MLE in 10 Languages over the Eight Districts. It is proposed in the perspective plan that Multilingual Education will be introduced in 1000 schools over a period of five years i.e 2007-2012.

Phase wise number of schools adopted for MLE programme in odisha

DISRTICT	LANGUAGE	No of school in 2007-08	No of schools added in 2008-09	Total school in phase 1 and 2	No. of schools added in 2009-10	Total no of schools in three phases
		Phase-1	Phase-2			
Gajapati	Saura	20	20	40	20	60
Keonjhar	Juang	10	10	20	10	30
Mayurbhanj	Munda	10	10	20	15	35
	Santali	-	100	100	-	100
Malkanagiri	Bonda	5	5	10	-	10
	Koya	20	20	40	-	40
Sambalpur	Kisan	19	12	31	09	40
Sundargarah	Oram	20	20	40	12	52
	Munda	10	10	20	13	33
Rayagada	Saura	-	10	10	10	20
	Kuvi	20	20	40	25	65

Kandhamala	kui	20	20	40	20	60
Total=8	10	154	257	411	134	545

Source: [Program Evaluation Report, Multilingual Education In Orissa, NCER,(2011)]

It has been decided by the State Govt. to introduce MLE in additional 456 schools in ten existing tribal languages. Santhali language has been introduced in 100 schools of Mayurbhanj district. Now it has been decided to introduce Santhali as a medium of instruction in other districts. For up scaling of schools in existing ten tribal languages multilingual education shall be introduced in other districts over and above the present ones.

As regards training of teachers, teachers of MLE schools will be imparted training on Class-I to Class-V training manual. Newly recruited teachers will be trained on Class-I & II MLE classroom transaction. Instructional materials for Class-I, II, III and IV on MLE approach will be prepared and distributed to 544 MLE schools covering 10 languages. Special grant of Rs.10, 000/- will be provided to the Schools which will adopted MLE during 2011-12 for setting up of model MLE classroom.

(ii)Adoption of 16 (sixteen) new tribal languages under MLE approach:

The new languages to be adopted during this year will be as followings: There are 62 scheduled tribes in Odisha out of which 26 scheduled tribes have their ethnic language. Rest of the tribes has been assimilated to the mainstream Oriya language. Out of the living languages of the tribes of Odisha in the first instance 10 tribal languages have been adopted under MLE approach.

During last 4 years , OPEPA has contributed substantially for the promotion of primary education in mother tongue learning from the national and international experience. Even the intensive curriculum development, material development from the respective cultural context have been a challenging task. But the MLE resource groups are able to overcome the task and successfully prepared the materials. The MLE groups of Odisha have the experience on MLE approach and there is a strong resource group in the field which can provide its support if new languages are adopted under MLE approach. Initial work for adoption of MLE in these new tribal languages will take at least 7-8 months. This includes identification of resource groups in different languages, orientation of resource groups, and exposure visit of resource groups to MLE schools of neighbor districts,

collection of resource materials for preparation of curriculum, learning materials, and teacher training module. Providing a strong foundation in the district and the community would help the MLE to be grounded in the schools effectively. Classes in ten new tribal languages will be initiated during 2012-13 academic session.

No	Name of the Tribe	Name of the Language	Name of the District
1	Gadaba	Gutob & Ollari	Koraput, Malkangiri
2	Bhumij	Bhumij	Mayurbhanj, Balasore
3	Ho	Ho	Mayurbhanj
4	Gond	Gondi	Nabarangapur, Kalahandi, Nuapada, Sundargarh, Sambalpur
5	Banjari	Banjari	Kalahandi, Nuapada
6	Paroja	Parji	Koraput
7	Kharia	Kharia	Sundargarh, Sambalpur, Mayurbhanj
8	Matya	Matia	Dhenkanal, Khurdha, Malkangiri, Jajpur
9	Bhumia	Desia	Koraput, Nabrangpur, Malkangiri
10	Mirdhas	Mirdha	Sambalpur, Bargarh
11	Mahali	Mahali	Mayurbhanj
12	Shabar Lodha	Savar	Gajapati, Khurdha, Rayagada, Kalahandi, Dhenkanal, Cuttack
13	Kolha	Kol	Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar, Balasore
14	Lodha	Kudumali	Mayurbhanj
15	Bhunja	Chatisgarhi- Oriya	Nuapada
16	Didayi	Didayi	Malkangiri

Source: OPEPA, School and Mass Education, Odisha

Conclusion

From the above discussion it may be concluded that MLE plays a major role for the success of UEE, it is an innovative strategy to achieve UEE. National and international studies have also proved that the medium of instruction in the schools, especially at lower levels, is a determining factor for quality education which goes a long way in enriching children's lives (Thomas and Collier, 1997; United Nations, 2003). That is why it is recommended that the culture and language of ethnic and minority communities should be the foundation of their education as they are naturally endowed with rich cultural knowledge and linguistic diversities.

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