

People's Perception on Multilingual Education: A study of Tamang Language based Multilingual School

Aita Bishowkarma

Rainbow International College

Tribhuvan University, Nepal

abgorkhalig@gmail.com

Abstract

Recent discourse on multilingual education largely has been dominated by the perception of people in the areas of policy and practice. There has been inadequate research on the education and schooling of Tamang children from a critical perspective. This study explores the perceptions of stakeholders on Tamang language-based multilingual education (MLE) practised in Nepal. This paper critically examines the perception of stakeholders and pedagogical practices in the classroom from the perspective of access to quality education to Tamang children in a primary school in Nepal. The qualitative data were generated from the policy makers, experts, head teachers and parents purposively selected from two Tamang language-based schools in Rasuwa. The data was generated from MLE practitioners through interview were analyzed triangulating the theoretical lens and discussed applying descriptive and exploratory methods. The findings reveal that current practices of multilingual; education is inadequate to provide access to quality education to Tamang children due to the inefficient pedagogical practices people's perceptual value on standard language. The stakeholders have diverse perceptions regarding the access to quality education to Tamang children from mother tongue-based multilingual education. The findings imply enhancing Tamang language-based multilingual schools.

Keywords: Multilingual education, Tamang language, quality education, Tamang children

Introduction

Multilingual education is one of the recent issue initiated by the Government of Nepal with the constitutional provision. With the objective to provide access to quality education to ethnic minority children. The Government of Nepal (GoN) launched some initial programmes for the protection of the languages as a way to protect the cultural heritage of the country. In response to commitments arising as a result of ratifying different international conventions and, being under pressure from various national stakeholders, the GoN with the technical assistance of the Finnish Government launched a pilot programme of Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education (MT-BMLE) in eight languages and in seven schools of six districts during 2007 to 2009 A. D. The Tamang language in Rasuwa, Magar language in Palpa, Athpahariya Rai in Dhankuta, and Rana Tharu in Kanchanpur, Urawa local Tharu in Sunsari and Santhal and Rajbansi in Jhapa were piloted (Department of Education, 2009). Pedagogical intervention to materialize the premises of multilingual education seems more significant. In the final MLE pilot project evaluation report, Skutnabb-Kangas & Mohanty (2009) referred positively to MT-MLE for the first 6-8 years children, with the teaching of Nepali as a second language and English as a foreign language, and possibly other languages too, with locally-based materials which respect local indigenous knowledge (p. 32).

When a child begins learning in his or her first language, s/he is more likely to succeed academically and is better able to learn additional languages in the later stage of life. However, pedagogically, this has been challenging for the teachers. A teacher might not be

from the same language community and may not have learnt the language of the children being taught. Furthermore, there might be children who have yet another mother tongue. Enabling access to education in the language in which the child feels most comfortable significantly increases that child's chances of success in life (Cummins, 2000). Similar experiences were found in MLE with regard to Sami language-based schools in Nordic countries such as Norway, Finland and Sweden (Puoskari, 2009). The present study is an attempt to explore the perceptions of stakeholders' in Tamang language-based multilingual schools in Rasuwa.

Objectives of the Study

This study attempts to explore the perception of people on multilingual education in Tamang language based multilingual school. The study aimed to initiate a discourse on multilingual education in Tamang language based multilingual school to suggest some pedagogical implication in the classrooms.

Research Questions

The following research questions were devised to meet the above-mentioned research objectives in this study.

1. What is the perception of people on Tamang language MLE programmes?
2. What are the pedagogical practices employed in the classroom practices?
3. What are the pedagogical implications of language teaching in Tamang language based multilingual schools?

Methods and Materials

This paper is an effort to explore people's perceptions and pedagogical practices in Tamang language-based multilingual education in Rasuwa.

Saraswati Lower Secondary and Bhimsen Primary schools were at Dhunche, Rasuwa were selected purposively. The study was qualitative in nature and interview and focus group discussion were the methods of data generation. Two Head teachers, four teachers, one policy maker, one expert, 24 students and two parents were the respondents. A total of ten interviews and two FGDs were carried out to generate qualitative data from the field. The study employed a descriptive, exploratory and interpretive method for the analysis of secondary data (Cohen et al., 2007). The study focused on qualitative inquiry in the post-positivist paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) to seeking pedagogical implication in multilingual education and a descripto-analytic approach was used to interpret both primary and secondary data.

Result and Discussions

Multilingual education remained a social concern in a multilingual society. Education as a social enterprise, people hold diverse perceptions towards it. As a social reality, the researcher tried to dig out how the stakeholders perceive multilingual education in the context of Nepal. With interview guidelines, the researcher visited Expert -1 who was (popular linguist, Indigenous leader) very much hopeful on the MLE. He was the personality who has been involved in the initiation of the MLE programme. He was the trainer of MLE and travelled to visit the MLE programme in India. He was one of the activists of the Tamang Indigenous community. He has written several books articles, journals. He's one of the famous books is '*Bahubhasic Siksha Ka Kura (2012)* is a milestone in MLE education. He argues:

MLE policy practised in Nepal is the best approach in the world. MLE in Nepal has followed the bottom-up approach. Our policy appreciates local community participation. Decisions are made at the local level from the broad discourse within community members such parents, teacher, head teacher and SMC member's community members can design the curriculum, in the local language and produce textbooks Teaching materials are made at the local level. It is obvious that the local curriculum and local textbooks and teaching materials reflect the spirit of community people. This participatory approach incorporates the cultural aspects of the community since language learning is facilitated with these cultural aspects. Interview, April 2070)

Local participation for the production of the curriculum and textbooks and even in pedagogical approaches enriches indigenous culture, knowledge spirit including linguistic inclusion. Expert-1 agrees with Bourdieu (1986) who recognizes the centrality of the parents. He appreciates MLE programme in Nepal is the best approach in the world, the reason behind this the community participation in the decision making of the medium of instruction, curriculum and teaching materials and textbooks with the local resources. This process assures the formation of potential cultural capital. Bourdieu (1986) analyzed it as complex interactions between home backgrounds; the processes of schooling and a child's educational career are integral to cultural capital (Reay, 1998).

Policy Maker (PM- 1) was one of the busiest personalities. He hardly managed time for an interview. He is not much hopeful from MLE. He stated that MLE can be run only at the primary level where Nepali languages are not spoken as a means of communication but it is not beneficial. He claimed that MLE can't raise the standard quality of education. He even blames that, MLE programmes are only the slogan of leaders but it doesn't have any value in the local level'. He argued:

English is the language of demand of people but not the mother tongue. However, if some community is interested there is a provision in the law /curriculum that 100 full marks subject can be kept in the decision of SMC. Local people can decide and keep their mother tongue as their subject (Interview, March 2070).

The ideas expressed by policymaker contradicts with the ideas of an expert. On the opinion expressed by PM 1, Expert-1 strongly opposes and argues:

Now, the government is not responsible. There is the provision of MLE School in the constitution. The School Sector reform program (SSRP) has already targeted to establish 7500 MLE schools by 2015 AD. MLE section has been opened in the Education Sector. DG level post has been created in the Deputy Director Post has been created but they have neither school mapping nor the records of the MLE schools. Expert A further argues: "These all conditions show that either these civil servants of Nepal Government are either incapable or they don't have a positive attitude towards MLE schools. Interview, April 2070).

However, PM- 1 strongly remained critical to the leaders of the indigenous community spoke: ‘In fact MPs and political leaders who demanded MLE. Nepal government also has allowed by law. But there is no effective implementation. MLE never has become the slogan/demand of local people’. Regarding MLE in Nepal, he expressed his disagreement. MLE education is possible where there is a majority of mother-tongue speakers. He argued:

Sustainability of MLE hampers /draws the national background. His logic behind this; is if the people of Karnali only speak the local language they never can develop. Nations can't go forward. At present this is not the demand of time. (Interview, March 2070).

HT -2 one of the head teachers of Lower Secondary School in Rasuwa who was the head of a Tamang Mother Tongue based multilingual school in Rasuwa was also a TOT and Curriculum designer of Tamang based Multilingual Education states: ‘ that the problem was before starting MLE’. He agreed that the Nepali medium was problematic. It was difficult. It had hampered children even to appear in SLC level at the age of 18/19 years in place of 15/16 years due to language barriers in the community because of the differences in the community language and home language. He opined that MLE needs to be applied effectively in the days to come. HT-2 explained:

There are many advantages of MLE first of all school dropout has been decreased, students stay from 10 to 4 pm long time, local teacher have been encouraged, local parents also have believed that their children can learn many things through our language.(Interview, March, 2070).

As head teacher he had received the remarks from the parents. He states: ‘Parents are happy their language also could be medium of instruction.’ He finds except Nepali and English, teachers are also happy’. However, he wants to emphasize on other language teaching also. There should be equal emphasis on

Table 1 *Perceptual differences in the use of MLE in Nepali classrooms*

Use of MLE in Tamang language based Schools (Thematic areas)	Perceptions of the Respondents	Gaps
Bilingualism is enough	MLE is slogan of leaders; it only draws the nation “Sustainability of MLE draws the nation backward. If the people of Karnali only speak local language, they never can develop. Nations can't go forward. At present this is not the demand of time”. Backward, why to bother mother tongue, children have already known. (PM1)	Forgotten Linguistic human right, killing indigenous knowledge, increases school dropout, leads to lower achievement and failure. Failure to understand the classroom context of Nepal.
Major language is enough	English and Nepali language are enough. Parents focus on English language and prefer to send their children to Boarding schools. English is the demand of the time. Modern technology demands English language.(Parents in interview)	Minority languages will be killed, Cultural heritages will be lost, Linguistic Genocide

teaching languages in school. He agrees that: ‘ while teaching Tamang, Tamang language should be emphasized, while teaching Nepali should be emphasized and while teaching English, English has to be emphasized’.

He encouraged language co-existence in context of Nepal. One of the participants from focus group discussion expresses his experience that the perception of parents was not positive as they were not aware in the past. He claimed that ‘now, they have to become happy with the feeling that their language also could be the medium of the instruction. Students are happy because their home language has been the medium of instruction (Interview, March, 2070).

Regarding the pedagogical process in MLE, HT- 2 emphasized to start teaching in mother tongue. “First of all Nepali language is taught through Sambota script. Later Nepali, English languages are encouraged. All the languages are taught but Tamang language as the bridge for all subjects. HT-2 agreed with Cummins that although, the surface aspects of different languages (e.g. pronunciation, fluency, orthography etc.) are clearly separate, there is an underlying cognitive/academic proficiency that is common across languages. In fact, this common underlying proficiency makes possible the transfer of cognitive/academic or literacy related skills across languages (Cummins 2009, p.26) Tamang, Nepali and English can be taught using the common underlying proficiency between these languages. However, for the language enrichment, he emphasized that state has to encourage mother tongue education from basic level to higher level. For the further enhancement of MLE he claims: ‘Resource person should be mother tongue speaker. School administration should allocate physical, financial and staff support. There should have national networks of mother tongue schools have to be transmitted through national media”. Below is the table that displays the perceptual difference of different stakeholders of MLE in Nepal.

MLE is a need	It is an opportunity to child friendly education. It provides access to minority language children.(Expert 1, Interview)	How to provide pedagogical justice minority children in MLE school?
Language transfer is a need	There is an underlying cognitive/academic proficiency that is common across languages. Mother tongue, Language of Nation and International language (HT1, interview)	How to exploit the linguistic diversity of Nepal? What pedagogical approaches do we have to apply?
Pedagogical practices	We lack sufficient teaching materials to teach in Tamang language.(Teachers, in Interview)	Major obstacle for quality education.
Goal of MLE	We like to read in Tamang but our parents told us to read in Nepali and English language(FGDs with students, March, 2070)	Lack of understanding of parents on transfer of knowledge from first language to second language

Source: Field Report (2070 BS)

The above table showed different perceptions on the use of MLE in Nepali classroom. This implied that bilingualism was enough for some respondents whereas major language was enough for some of the respondents. Specially, expert put forward the strong demand of MLE in the classroom pedagogy. Similarly, language transfer was the essential feature for some respondents. While analyzing the responses of the different respondents the researcher found gaps in their understanding on issues of MLE, viz, as linguistic human right, as pedagogical justice, as language to be conserved, as language of the majority, as the language of minority children and as the celebration of the ethnic identities of the children in the MLE School.

Conclusion

The findings indicates that parents are happy with the feeling that their language also have be the medium of the instruction. Students are also are happy because their home language has been the medium of instruction. School administration allocates limited physical, financial and staff support for the purpose of multilingual education due to limitations of resource. Teachers were not satisfied with the textbooks which were not available in the schools. He encouraged language co-existence in context of Nepal. One of the head teachers expressed his experience that the perception of parents was not positive as they were not aware in the past. The parents were motivated towards the market oriented ideas regarding multilingual education. They preferred Nepali or English for the foreign employment and tourism business rather than teaching Tamang language to their children. Teacher lack teaching materials for effective teaching in Tamang language. Head teachers and SMC members felt critical lack of resources for implementation of multilingual education. The findings shows that for access to quality education present practices of multilingual education in Tamang language school has not been effective despite the potentiality to foster critical pedagogy in mother tongue based education. The study implies in the enhancing pedagogical practices in Tamang language based multilingual education.

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