



UN And Its Agencies' Contributions for The Promotion of Mother Tongue Use as Instructional Medium

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Abstract

In this study the role of UN and its specialized agencies is reviewed to know the importance of mother tongue in education. Most of children who attended school, they encountered serious educational problems due to the instructional medium. Annual reports by UNESCO indicated the high rate of dropout and class repetition among students before they finish six years of education was due to not using their mother tongue in education. UNESCO's Director General stated on the 11th Annual Mother Language Day that three - languages formula: mother tongue, national language and an international language are most suitable instructional mediums. UN and its specialized agencies were agreed upon and recommended the mother tongue- based education system at least for six years of formal schooling. Hence education will be based upon already achieved knowledge and experiences of students. This will also enhance their enrollment, academic performance and social equality.

Key words: *Mother tongue, medium of instruction, United Nations agencies*

Introduction

The United Nations is an international humanitarian organization of independent countries. It has a multipurpose role in maintaining peace through solving various international conflicts and leads various programs against drug trafficking, diseases, terrorism, poverty and particularly illiteracy. The solution of these problems indicated by UN is education which can best be achieved through mother tongue (UN, 2008). In regard to education, the linguistic rights that have been framed in international agreements for minority and indigenous groups include the schooling of each child in his language, if so desired (UNESCO, 2003). Hence, UN is promoting the right of every individual to get education in his own mother tongue through its various organizations (Beka, 2016).



Most of the countries policy makers are still confused that which language should be adopted as medium of instruction. Hence in this study UN and its agencies role is explored to know the importance of mother tongue use in education as medium of instruction (UNESCO. 2007b).

Significance of the study

It is hoped that the study would enhance education of ethnic minority. This study will lead international educational agencies and curriculum designers to develop clear guidelines and principles for language policy in early education. This study will promote children's right to get education in their mother tongue which will ultimately protect world's endangered languages.

Review of literature

A review of UN contribution through their programs, funds and specialized agencies for promotion of mother tongue use in schools as medium of instruction is discussed in below lines.

UNDP CONTRIBUTIONS

Member of United Nations states were at the core of efforts to improve basic education within the larger ECUNDP (European Commission United Nations Development Program) to achieve million development goals through implementation of mother tongue – based multilingual Education program at elementary level. It is an effort of UNDP to protect children from the disappointing effects of school system, and an attempt to make school system more supportive. (Pinnock, 2011)

For implementation of mother tongue in education system, first we should train more teachers and print more books in the required language. But keeping in mind the regional sensitivities a government should proceed carefully in adoption of regional languages as medium of instruction which contributes to national integration rather than reinforcing the isolation of a community. Mother tongue use should neither reduce quality of education nor the solidarity of a country. In this way, diversity and distinct recognition will further solidify the foundations of a country (Fukuda-Parr, 2004a).

Many countries find ways to accommodate the twin objectives of unity and diversity by recognizing monolingual, bilingual or multilingual policy showed the respect and importance of people in society (Fukuda-Parr, 2004a).

Young children learn more efficiently through their mother tongues but lack of proficiency in national and international languages can severely reduce the chances of future employment (Fukuda-Parr, 2004a).



UNHCR Contributions

The United Nations through United Nations High Commissioners for Refugees has performed great services for attaining the Human rights (Fukuda-Parr, 2004b).

The United Nations Organization declared the International decade (1995-2004) for the protection of indigenous languages and in the year 2000 a permanent forum was also created for the said purpose (Fukuda-Parr, 2004b). In the United Nation’s General Assembly in the session of the year 2000 Millennium declaration was adopted for the protection of fundamental rights and freedom of expression of every individual regardless of any race, class, and community (Fukuda-Parr, 2004b).

UNICEF CONTRIBUTIONS

UNICEF internationally recognized the links between Education for All and the medium of instruction. A positive link was found between the use of mother tongue in education, enrollment and quality of learning (UNESCO, 2003).

UNICEF arranged various projects of education for indigenous peoples. In this connection article 8, 20, and 30 gives very importance to the cultural values and linguistic identity of every individual for their harmonious development (United Nations Inter-Agency Support Group, 2014). For fruitful education of indigenous people in Latin America, UNICEF worked on Bilingual Education Program in which mother tongue and national language were focused. In the beginning literacy process carried out in mother tongues of the children, while national and international languages introduced gradually. Therefore reading and writing skills learn at this stage. Later children transfer these learned skills of reading and writing to the national and international languages. Education system should also take into consideration maximum related contents, values and knowledge of indigenous society. Hence, indigenous languages and cultures both have an important place as pedagogical resources (United Nations Inter-Agency Support Group, 2014).

UNICEF as a part of ‘bridging activity’ distributed small amount of grants to 94 MNEC schools in 2015 through Ministry of Township Education offices. UNICEF has also supported the publication of textbooks in Burmese language upto 10,000 in MNEC’S MNS for Grade 1 to 5. UNICEF’s also included for MNEC teachers in-service training program and its main purpose was promotion of education in the local languages (South, and Marie, 2016).

UNICEF has been encouraged mother tongue- based multilingual educational programs. Particularly funds were provided throughout the world. It is a great hope that these programs will light the path for all those who have felt the importance of mother tongue but have not yet taken practical steps to make sure that “Education for All” in real sense for a child (UNESCO, 2007a).



UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) CRC

Bangladesh government ratified Article 28 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child i.e. religious, political, social, cultural and particularly free and compulsory education (Durrnian,T, 2007).

UNESCO CONTRIBUTIONS,

Article ‘9’ of UNESCO’s declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice in 1978 has pointed out that education of minority and foreign students should be in their home languages (UNESCO, 2003). UNESCO has recognized children right to learn through their mother tongues, and supported maintenance of linguistic and cultural diversity through policies of implementation of local languages in education (UNESCO, 2003).

Whenever a government political scenario changes, then the minority for their protection put forward linguistic rights with other demands to the new government. The minority considers its protection in language protection and for this purpose government should give official status and recommend their language to be used as instructional medium at schools or in higher educational institutions (UNESCO, 2003).

In Bangladesh the situation became worse because 80% of real tribal inhabitants (children) drop out before completion of primary school level. However, steps have been taken for creation of education awareness in local languages of Bangladeshi society and increasing their school participation among local inhabitants of Bangladeshi society through support of UNESCO. In this way, their school participation would also increase (UNESCO, 2007b) especially of girls. Ultimately their stay in school has found longer, did better performance, and their rate of grades repetition also decreased (UNESCO, 2005). UNESCO point out in its annual evaluation report that all those children who have lack of mastery of the instructional medium, encounter serious educational problems (UNESCO, 2000).

The choice of language may hinder or enhance the education process. Therefore UNESCO’s had three major objectives: to promote education in mother tongue of children in order to enhance the quality of curriculum and education all over the world, to minimize the possibilities of children being pushed of educational institutions into poverty, and to proceed them towards a better life (UNESCO, 2000 ; Orekan, 2011).

In 1999, UNESCO adopted the term ‘multilingual education system’ in the General Conference Resolution to implement as medium of instruction (Heugh *et al.*, 2007).

Article 6 of the Universal Declaration of UNESCO on Cultural Diversity in 2001 recommended that the most desirable way to minimize language related problems is only through ‘introducing mother tongue- based multilingual education process for



linguistically diverse communities. Because this education build upon already achieved knowledge and experiences of students which ultimately promotes quality of education and social equality (UNESCO. 2003). In this way production of more teaching learning materials in mother tongue was possible (Tonkin, 2011). UNESCO Institute of Education and the Association for the Development of Education in Africa conducted a study on mother tongue and Bilingual education in Sub-Sahara Africa and find out that from the past 100 years researchers have explored that mother tongue use a medium of instruction make students able to succeed through the entire curriculum of schools (Heugh *et al.*, 2007).

UNESCO admits that many parents desire their children to become fluent in mother tongue and to become bilingual or multilingual, which will provide strong foundations for present education and for future academic achievements (Ball, 2010).

In 1953, UNESCO put forward a report on African Language Education Policy. This report was about the use of local languages in teaching learning process, because it was evident from the researches and literature throughout the world that it would take about three years to get reading and writing skills through mother tongue. It is suggested to switch over to the English, French or Arabic etc. one of the international languages from the fourth year of school (Heugh *et al.*, 2007).

UNESCO has arranged a worldwide program to document languages at risk of extinction and provided local language societies with financial and human support that would help them reverse their declining positions and strengthen their local languages.

UNESCO pointed out that nearly half of 6000 languages, particularly unwritten and undocumented local languages spoken around the world will disappear by the end of this century. In this way the whole world would lose important cultural heritage and ancestral knowledge embedded, in local languages (Tonkin, 2011). According to UNESCO, a language that a child uses for communication with his parents, family members and nearby community members, it reflects his identity in his community as a native speaker, and it is the only highly familiar language that a child frequently uses in his communication (Murray, 2007). Ms. Irina Bokova UNESCO's Director General further added through her message on the 11th Annual Mother language Day in 2010; that mother tongue remains with every child from his/her birth and provides foundation to get information in his/her own culture. It is well approved by most of the investigators world over that every child's own mother tongue enhances his/her learning performance at primary level of education (UNESCO, 2011).

All over the world children upto twelve years of age get fluency to speak with ease in home language, because their continuous attachment with nearby people provide an environment to learn



mother tongue. This proficiency and confidence of home language provides linguistic and cognitive foundations for learning, even it is supportive to learn read and write in second language (UNESCO, 2008).

In Paris in 1972, UNESCO conference had concluded that the ideal instructional medium for children living in their own language environment should be home language and well accepted that their own language should be used as the instructional medium for longer time as much as possible (Opoku,1994).

Ms. Irina Bokova served as UNESCO's Director General. She added further in her message on the 12th Annual Mother language Day in 2012; that it maximizes students' performance, and provides a friendly environment for learning which ultimately minimizes their class differences (UNESCO, 2012).

Burkina Faso piloted a program to show that literacy in first language could be contributory in learning a national or international language, even for youngsters with no prior education. That was provided in two stages of 36- days intensive program for those adults who had just acquired literacy in their language first. At the completion of that program, they had got fluency in French equivalent to grade 5 or 6 level of students (UNESCO, 2008; Brown, 2014).

ILO CONTRIBUTIONS

In 1972, Bangladesh ratified the Article 23 of ILO Convention No. 107 that children belong to a particular community should be taught in their home language (Durrnian,T, 2007).

UN CESCR CONTRIBUTIONS

In General Comment No. 13, on the Rights to Education by the UN Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (UN CESCR) reviewed precise lawful obligations, declared that all over the world countries should take positive steps to ensure that education is culturally desirable for children of indigenous and minority people (United Nations Inter-Agency Support Group, 2014).

UNDRIP CONTRIBUTIONS

Article 14 of the UNDRIP recommended that native speakers should prefer their own educational (curriculum and pedagogical) material development and their education delivery should be organized and implemented with active participation of the local community (United Nations Inter-Agency Support Group, 2014).

Discussions

The reports of this paper are consistent with findings of Cummins (2000) and UNESCO (2008) that mother tongue based instructional medium is most advantageous at early primary school level in Papua New Guinea, Mali and Peru (Ball, 2010).



UNESCO find out that the rate of success of students' upto grade 5 was very low in most of developing countries. However the average of each grade repetition was 13% at primary school level.

In Bangladesh, the situation became worse because 80% of real tribal inhabitants (children) drop out before completion of primary school level (UNESCO, 2007b). Drop out is one of these problems which one is 30% of all students between fifth and sixth grades. Another problem is the rate of class repetition where more than 35% of students repeat their classes before completion of six years of (compulsory) education (UNESCO, 2000). These findings were consistent with research findings of Heugh (2000) that success rate of African students in examination dropped to 44% and their English language proficiency also declined.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this paper is based on UNESCO's Director General Ms. Irina Bokova's message given on the 11th Annual Mother language Day in 2010. She stated that in multilingual countries three language formula: mother tongue, national language and an international language were most suitable instructional mediums (UNESCO, 2010).

UN and all of its specialized like UNDP, UNESCO UNHCR, UNICEF, ILO, UN CRC, UN CESCR, UNOPS and UNDRIP all were agreed upon and recommended the use of mother tongue as medium of instruction at least for 6 years of formal schooling. Because strong links were found between instructional mediums and success in education (Alidou *et al.*, 2006).

Recommendations

- 1) UN through its agencies should continue to support the development and distribution of latest educational materials in local languages. Inclusion of more local educational material in the curriculum, which makes the educational process of more relevant to the children. It also, broadens the ways for greater participation of community members and particularly of parents' educational resources.
- 2) Quality of Education should be provided in L1 for at least 6 years of formal education. Because this education builds upon already achieved knowledge and experiences of students which ultimately enhances their enrollment, academic performance and promotes social equality.
- 3) The most desirable way to minimize language related problems is only through 'introducing mother tongue- based multilingual education system. UNESCO also suggested bilingual and multilingual-based education system at all levels for linguistically diverse communities.



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