

mother tongue education is even better). Ethiopia, a poor African country, has a national policy of 8 years of mother tongue based multilingual education. However, since the system of education is decentralized across the states and districts, in some places teaching in mother tongue is given for only 4 or 6 years. A national level comparison in Ethiopia shows that children receiving mother tongue medium instruction for 8 years, besides learning English and the dominant language (Amharic) as school subjects, have better performance in science, mathematics and other school subjects and, even, in English. The performance of children with 6 years of instruction in mother tongue is not as good and the children who have switched to English medium instruction from Class IV have the worst performance in school subjects including English. This shows that 6 to 8 years of teaching in mother tongue is necessary for high levels of performance in school subjects and in languages like English, Hindi and Oriya.

? English medium schooling is in popular demand. What are its consequences?

There are many studies in India and abroad comparing English medium and regional mother tongue medium education. It is found that initially English medium children may show better competence in English, but comparable children from similar quality mother tongue medium schools have better understanding and performance in school subjects like Mathematics and Science. By Class VIII, compared to mother tongue medium pupils who learn English later in schools, English medium pupils do not show better knowledge and understanding of school subjects and, even, their reading, writing and comprehension skills in English are no better. Further, English medium pupils lack reading and writing proficiency in their mother tongue and they do not have adequate language and vocabulary to express in the mother tongue



what they have learnt in English. They may have conversational fluency and some skills in use of English, but this is at the cost of conceptual clarity in school subjects and development of their own language. Lack of Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) for complex thinking and reasoning with language, limits both their mother tongue and English proficiency. Poor English proficiency among teachers also contributes to poor English in most schools in India. What is popularly perceived as the benefits of English medium schooling is primarily the effect of costly private education for upper class children who can afford this. Similar quality schooling in mother tongue medium can foster better school achievement, creativity and innovative thinking skills. Even, The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 recommends teaching children in their mother tongue. It is well established that with comparable quality of schools and socio-economic status, pupils from mother tongue medium multilingual education programmes show better school learning and talents compared to those from English medium schools.

Mother tongue based MLE for first 6 – 8 years can develop high levels of multilingual proficiency in mother tongue, second language such as Oriya and foreign languages like English. Such education builds on children's own language and culture and provides a good research-based model of quality education.



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WHY MOTHER TONGUE BASED MLE?

Quality education begins with the mother tongue. A strong foundation in the mother tongue ensures effective education and high levels of proficiency in many languages. Education in the mother tongue is guaranteed in our constitution and recommended in the National Curricular Framework, 2005 and The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009. However, for most children, particularly for the tribal and minority language children, there is no provision for education in the mother tongue. Education of such children imposes an unfamiliar school language on them, often leads to large-scale failure and pushes them out of schools. Mother tongue based multilingual education for at least 6 to 8 years is education of quality for all children.

? When children go to schools, they already know their mother tongue. Why should they continue to learn in their mother tongue for 6 – 8 more years?



At the age of 5 – 6 when children join school, they can talk in their mother tongue in routine daily life and face-to-face situations. They express themselves in the present context using the mother tongue to talk about what they experience, see, hear and touch. Adults also help them by providing a model of correct language use (“That is a cat, not a dog.”). School age children can speak clearly and correctly. They know many words and how to use rules or grammar of their mother tongue. They can clearly express their experiences, needs and simple

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thoughts. They have necessary abilities for social communication or basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS). This may appear to be sufficient when children join school since education in Class I usually begins with what children already know. However, as children move up, they need to learn new words, complex information and abstract concepts that are not directly seen or experienced. For such learning, children must move beyond their simple social communication skills and engage in deeper intelligent mental activities. In schools, children are required to learn abstract ideas that cannot be directly sensed or experienced (e.g. honesty, just-unjust), high level concepts such as in Science and Mathematics, and facts far removed from their immediate context (such as those in History or Geography). They need to understand and learn all such complex information and write and speak about them. School education involves much more than use of language for social expression; it requires thinking about language (e.g. making a sentence with a word) and using language for reasoning and problem solving (e.g. "When you add two quantities it becomes more not less, so here I have to subtract"). As children move up in the primary classes and to higher levels of education, they need to develop language for intelligent and scholastic use; they need cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). Children's basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) develop spontaneously and quickly without much effort. However, development of language for cognitive and academic use (CALP) is slow. It takes children several years to use language for complex mental activities. Skills in mother tongue need to develop to the level of CALP based on early social communication or BICS and school experience. Beginning from their knowledge of the mother tongue, children develop higher levels of language skills in school. Development of knowledge and language always moves from simple to complex levels. However, education in a language other than the mother tongue hinders such progress and children cannot develop the ability for complex intellectual thinking with language (CALP).

Tribal children, pushed to education in less familiar or unfamiliar languages like Oriya or English, fail to

understand the school subjects for at least 2 to 3 years. They may simply repeat the class teacher like parrots, but they fail to develop understanding of and ability to think through language of the classroom. As a result, most tribal children are pushed out of schools in early primary grades without learning to read and write, without developing knowledge in the school subjects and their mother tongue.

When the children's mother tongue is the teaching language, they learn much better, understand the school subjects and develop proficiency in complex thinking through their own language. Education in mother tongue for at least 6 to 8 years prepares them better for education in higher classes, for learning other languages like English and Hindi and prepares them for complex intellectual thinking and knowledge.

? Parents want children to learn major languages like Oriya, English and Hindi. How would children learn these languages if they are taught mainly in mother tongue for so many years?

All Multilingual Education (MLE) programmes introduce teaching of major state language like Oriya (or Telugu) as a second language in Class I or II and teachers know children's mother tongue and the second language. Cognitive and Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) across mother tongue, second (Oriya) and third (English) languages has a lot in common. A child's learning of reading and writing involves understanding of the relationship between spoken language and its written form. Learning to read and write is easier in the mother tongue. When a child reads and writes in mother tongue, she understands the relationship between spoken and



written language and this understanding facilitates learning to read and write in another language even when the script or Akshara system is different. Similarly, c o n c e p t s a n d

information understood once in the mother tongue need not be learnt or understood again in another language; only some new words or labels for the concepts need to be learnt. For example, once children understand mathematical concepts of addition and multiplication (and the relationship between the two) in their mother tongue, they do not need to learn the same thing again in another language. Similarly, when they understand the digestive system in human body, they just need to know the concepts and labels in a new language. Many such things are learnt in the mother tongue; children do not need to relearn them in a second or other additional language. Languages are different but they share some common proficiency underlying all the languages that we develop as multilingual individuals. Once a high level of proficiency is developed in the language that children know best when they come to school, there is a positive transfer of such proficiency to other languages and a better understanding of how languages function. This makes it easier for proficient mother tongue users to learn new languages. The proficiency developed in the mother tongue as well as a second language, such as Oriya, makes learning of other languages like English and Hindi easier. Compared to monolinguals who know one language only, multilinguals who know two or more languages well learn a new language like English better. International research shows clearly that the longer children learn in their mother tongue the better is their school performance and proficiency in other languages like Oriya, Hindi and English. It is found that children's school learning is affected more by the length of teaching in mother tongue than their socio-economic status. Thus, mother tongue based multilingual education is effective for the disadvantaged children in poverty.

? What is the problem if children are taught in a second language such as Oriya after 2-3 years of teaching in their mother tongue?

Education in mother tongue for 2 – 3 years may be somewhat better than education in a second language (Oriya) or in English, but it is not enough. Development of language for cognitive and academic activities needs at least 6 years of education in mother tongue (8 years of