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Report on National Seminar on Language Education

February 21 - 23, 2014

Backdrop

21st February is celebrated across the world as “Mother Language Day”. On the eve of International Mother Language Day, a three-day long National Seminar on “Language and Education” was organized by SCERT, Raipur in collaboration with ICICI Foundation for Inclusive Growth (IFIG), Raipur. The objectives of the National Seminar were to:

- Understand the language in education from the perspective of NCF-2005, RtE-2009, and the position paper on language education.
- Examine theoretical perspectives on multilingualism and multilinguality with a focus on education.
- Learn from the experiences of the various states on policy and implementation of language in education.
- Consultations with National organisations/ Universities/ Linguists / Educationists on theory and practice in language education.
- Prepare a road map for language education in primary stage in Chhattisgarh.

The seminar addressed these issues by posing the following questions:

1. How multilinguality is a reality and how our schools are unable to ensure the linguistic rights of the children?
2. How language of the text book is teacher-centric and unable to represent the meaning of the texts in a language that is not understood by the children.
3. How education can be imparted – as far as practicable to those children who are linguistic minority, and equally be able to maintain equal competencies in many

languages like Hindi and English based on their mother tongue.

Introduction

The tone of the seminar was set by Dr. Mahendra Misra who gave introductory remarks on the various technical sessions and programmes of the seminar. He emphasized the importance of knowledge of the local language which is not only a medium of communication but, an important subject to learn and mediate in the essential subjects such as mathematics and science.

He told that there are some differences between children’s experiential language in relation to book language of the school, differences between the language of thought and language of speech. Achievement of children depends on comprehension and comprehension is possible when the children learn through their own language in initial years and achieve second language along with their first language.

Shri Anil Rai, Director, SCERT, Chhattisgarh elaborated and concretized these remarks in the context of the state. He said that enrolment of children as per the gender ratio and SC/ST population in the state is achieved as a part of universal access followed by retention. But the quality aspect of schooling is still a big challenge. Referring the Achievement Survey of Chhattisgarh, he lamented on poor performance of class III to VIII students in the state where only 22% students have achieved required language skill. He emphasized the multilingual nature of the society and monolingual situation of teaching that impedes learning of the children. He categorised the regional language of Chhattisgarh; Chhattisgarhi, Sargujiya, Kuduk, Gondi (Kanker and Baster region), and Halbi. He

stressed on quality education as people are aware of RTE Act and posed two questions:

- How language is useful in Chhattisgarh textbook designing and in improvement of education standard?
- How to make multilingual textbook in the diverse context to Chhattisgarh state?

Dr. K.K. Chakraborty, Chairman, Lalit Kala Academy, New Delhi stressed following local protocol instead of global protocol and expressed that all western knowledge is not scientific. He gave some factual data of Chhattisgarh state but lamented that there are no historic articles, evidences, and records in local and regional language. He emphasized that with the help of micro and minor projects, practical workshops should be organised. He stressed focus on regional language policy and to be aware that it should not be for 'museumization' but to maintain the cultural tradition from the past and to perpetuate the best of it in the modern times.

Padmashree Prof. D.P. Pattanayak, Founder and Former Director, Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore defined the scope and nature of multilinguality and its implication in education. He said that many people are still not clear about multilingualism but there is a great need to understand it. He explained the history of acceptance of multilingualism in India and narrated that purpose of education system is to bind the family, society, country together. He emphasized understanding the nature and forms of multilingualism.

Proceedings

Prof. Rajesh Sachdeva briefly explained the importance of multilingualism in different states of the country. He also demonstrated the meaning and purpose of Right to Education (RTE). He explained a famous statement of Robert Cooper - "To plan language is to plan society", and categorised language as a problematic issue. He described the word DIVERSITY in terms of language in detail, and said that there is no point where a man is without language. He put forward some data of census of India and said that the enumeration is erroneous as it ignores the

language whose speakers number less than 10000 and derecognises their ethnic and linguistic identities.

He said that language planning has three main areas:

1. Planning for the state
2. Corpus planning
3. Acquisitioned planning

He admired that the state of Nagaland has done major work for multilingual education, particularly the tribal languages.

As per the "Linguistic Interdependence Theory" the child should learn in his first language or mother tongue. Most of the deliberations in the seminar were on the importance of the mother language. Language is instrumental as medium of instructions carrying knowledge and meanings in all the subjects. The involvement of child's own language in learning and teaching is very much essential for basic educational development or else it is sure that the learning will be blocked and a huge human potential is damaged.

Prof Minati Panda stated that most of the people know more than two languages. While learning many language, brain works as a magical machine. In our brain there is linguistic structure not just a language (either Oriya, Telugu, Bengali or any). Brain is capable of decoding language of multiple structures. She also explains the Gills theory for comparative graph between evolution of brain and culture, in which graph of culture is fast because of neurological inputs. She highlighted the Multi lingual education (MLE) programme of Odisha state. Prof. Minati explained the "Linguistic interdependence theory" and emphasized that child should be explained any subject in his first language or mother tongue.

She also posed some questions:

- Why is MLE so material centric?
- Why we are not focusing on how any language is learned?

From here she also moved on the kind of models that have been developed in different parts of the

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country where she discussed Andhra and Orissa model and commented that these are mostly integrative approaches whereas we need an inclusive approach. She also shared her experience of working in Orissa and writing two books named EraiErai.

The next session focused on MLE in Chhattisgarh. Many teachers from different regions of the state also shared their experiences. NCF 2005 ensures that every child has the right to education in her mother tongue. These learning rights can be possible when multilingual education is adopted in state curriculum and text book production. In reference to developing a multilingual child in Hindi along with other language i.e. mother tongue. in Chhattisgarh state, it has been noticed that no historic articles, evidences, and record of scientific knowledge is available in local and regional languages.

The importance of multilingualism has also been discussed in the context of Chhattishgarh. The state can be divided in to three linguistic zones, Central Chhattishgarh which stretches out from Raipur, Bilaspur, Durg, Rajnandgaon, and Kawardha. The Northern Chhattishgarh is consists of Surguja, Jashpur, Korea, Korba and Raigarh. The Oram and Korba tribes are dominant in Northern Chhattishgarh. Southern Chhattishgarh is known as Bastar region which consists of linguistic diversities with Gondi, Halbi, Bhatri, Maraththi, Kolami, Dhurua, and Abujhmaria. The multilingualism in Chhattishgarh is a strength which should not be treated as problem. The house criticized western countries for using the unique quaint terms, seems to be typical for general people. We also follow and opted words from Sanskrit language, and always marginalize the common languages used by the people.

In Chhattisgarh the disappearance of many local languages is a major impediment to the development of the language due to declined numbers of language speakers due to dominance of state language and external influences. The state has accommodated 25% text materials in the state curriculum and text books in six regional languages. Within the state it is difficult to learn

all regional languages which are spoken by linguistic minority people in a limited area. In this direction creative writing may support to conserve the language diversity which is at the verge of extinction. The Gondi, Halbi, Dhurva and many other regional languages should be included in textbook.

The second day started with the technical session titles "Language across the curriculum". There were specific presentation on language related issues faced in different subjects. For example, in maths:

1. Vocabulary: Very technical words are used in the textbooks like, parallelogram, multiplication. Also same words might have many different meanings in our daily conversation but in mathematics each word has specific meaning which needs to be understood by the child.
2. Syntax related issues
3. Abstract and Natural Language.
4. Miscue and word problems: The way language is used in the mathematics, it can give some miscues to the child because of which child can make a mistake.

The session emphasized that it is necessary to learn how the curriculum and text books are designed based on children's learning need. Some states have taken steps on it and this should be explored by the new state where there is an opportunity of teaching the children in their mother tongue is essential. It is necessary to learn from others experiences. Therefore, some micro and minor projects should be organized in length to learn from other states.

As expected, a substantial discussion was taken up in the seminar addressing the multidimensional approaches of language education. The focal theme of the seminar was to discuss on language of science and language of mathematics in the context of children's learning abilities and teachers teaching difficulties. It was found that , the subjects like Science and Maths may be made simple and compatible to the children's language of comprehension or else the learning will be blocked.

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Recommendation of the Seminar to State Government

1. Report preparation on linguistic survey: This was already done in 2008 by SSA but not in a report form; only raw data were made available;
2. Reform of curriculum, based on children language, knowledge and reform text book in the context of Kurukh, Gondi Halvi, Baiga, Korba and Abujh Maria and Dhurua;
3. Strengthening of TEG (Teacher Educator Group)
4. Policy documents on language in Chhattisgarh to be developed
5. 2-3 conceptual seminars to be organised on language in different cities.
6. Research and language education to be promoted.
7. Convergence with Women and Child Development and Tribal Welfare Department on using MT in early childhood and education.
8. Lastly, in reference to Kothari commission it has been recommended that each child should be given essentially mathematics and science education for ten years in school. We should build our ability to construct new knowledge.

