

## Home Language as a Third Language in the Schools of Arunachal Pradesh

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### Abstract

Language is a human and social activity without which people cannot operate in society. It is tied to the people's identity, their way of life, native wisdom, and a wealth of knowledge about the community of language users. Time and again, educational policy in India has underscored the need for following the three-language formula in letter and spirit (NPE 1986, NCF 2005). NEP 2020 reiterated that the third language be given its due place keeping in mind the constitutional provisions, aspirations of the people, local area, and the need to strengthen multilingualism as well as national unity. While some of the states of Northeast India have indeed recognised the language of the region as one of the official languages, Arunachal Pradesh has not been able to do so. In Arunachal Pradesh, schools follow the three-language model established by the Centre, delivering compulsory instruction in English, Hindi, and a third language. This study attempted to investigate the advantages and drawbacks of teaching home language in the educational set-up of Arunachal Pradesh.

**Keywords:** Primary school level, home language, third-language in school curriculum.

### Introduction

Language is a natural human phenomenon that provides a sense of identity to both individuals and social groups, often resulting in a multitude of identities. According to linguistic philosopher Sapir, language is a truly human and instinctive mode of transmitting ideas,

emotions, and desires through voluntarily constructed symbols (Sapir, 1921). Language is also an important vehicle of knowledge in the sphere of education. It is used as a form of expression in all aspects of life. India is a country with a diversified population, culture, language, and religion. When it comes to language diversity, India has twenty-two official languages that are listed in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution and hence referred to as the 'scheduled languages'. Over 96 per cent of people speak these languages, according to the Census of India (2011). However, language policy has been a challenge, both in the academic setting and in the community at large, where language, culture, and ethnicity are all interconnected. To reflect India's linguistic variety and to promote its people's naturally multilingual way of life, the government stipulated a three-language formula in 1968, which has been implemented in most of the states of the Indian union. This stipulation required students to study three languages, one of which being English and the other two Indian languages. Though the three-language formula is not part of India's language policy (Pattanayak, 2005), it demonstrates care for linguistic rights of minorities, and India has responded positively to the aspirations of Indians to learn English. While designing the national curriculum, NCERT underlined the importance of responding to multilingual India with a multilingual education. NCF 2005 and NCF 2023 embrace the Three Language Formula in both text and spirit. The formula had been suggested in an early report of the Central Advisory Board of education (CABE) to fulfil linguistic aspirations of a linguistically diverse country (CABE, 1956) and was formally adopted by the National Education Commission in 1964 as: (a) regional language/home language; (b) Hindi or English; and (c) a modern Indian or foreign language that is not covered by (a) and (b) and is not the medium of instruction. For the tribal children, the commission recommended: (i) using the tribal language as a medium for the first two years and oral instruction in the regional language; and (ii) using regional language as a medium from the third year onwards, according to the recommendations of the National Educational Commission 1964-1966, commonly known as the Kothari Commission.

### **Home Language as a Medium of Instruction**

The phrase 'home language' also called the mother tongue can refer to a variety of situations. The definition frequently incorporates the

following elements: the language(s) learned earliest; the language(s) with which one identifies or is perceived to be a native speaker of; the language(s) one knows the best; and the language(s) one uses the most (Raaj, 2017). According to Ashworth (1992), a person's "mother tongue or native language is the language that he or she acquires in childhood and that normally becomes his or her natural instrument of thought and communication." The first language one learns as a child, the language one grows up knowing, is the home language or the mother tongue. While learning in their home languages, children learn about their own culture and the environment they live in on a daily basis; this is where school learning and the home environment connect. In this setting, a study by Pinnock (2009) (quoted in Devi, 2017) demonstrates that studying in a school language that is not used in children's homes is associated with both low performance and total exclusion from school. Furthermore, several studies conducted in various nations suggest that understanding concepts better in the home language, and learning, reading, and writing in a recognised language provides superior academic results. It was an established provision in our constitution for the mother tongue to become the medium of education. According to Article 350 (A) of the Constitution of India, "The state shall endeavor to provide adequate facilities for instruction in the mother tongue at the primary stage of education to children belonging to a linguistic minority group." Two issues stood out in a UNESCO report, 'The Use of Vernacular Languages in Education', published in 1953. The first is that "every child of school age should attend school, and the best medium of teaching is the pupil's first tongue," and the second is that "all languages, even so-called primitive ones, are capable of becoming media for school teaching, some perhaps merely as a bridge to a second language, while others may be used at all levels of education." Thus, it is appropriate to examine the minority education issue in the context of a majority tribal state like Arunachal and implement appropriate interventions so that underprivileged children enjoy their childhood with a meaningful schooling. The purpose of this study is to analyse the issue of teaching home language as a third language in the educational curriculum of Arunachal Pradesh.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To study the significance of home language in school education in Arunachal Pradesh

2. To discuss the issue of the medium of instruction in schools of Arunachal Pradesh.
3. To determine the status of home language as a third language in the school curriculum of Arunachal Pradesh
4. To identify the practical challenges associated with implementing the home language as a third language in the school curriculum and to provide suggestions for overcoming these.

### **Methodology**

The data was gathered from both primary and secondary sources. Unstructured interviews with a SCERT member and school teachers were used to acquire primary data. Books, journals, research studies, websites, theses, and project reports were used as secondary data sources.

### **The Significance of Home Languages in School Curriculum of Arunachal Pradesh**

The home language is the language a person has been exposed to since birth. It is the language that the infant acquires without much conscious effort on her part. It is a language that a child learns while growing up in her own social group. Hence, Article 350 (A) of our Constitution states that every state must provide suitable facilities for instruction in the home language at the elementary stage of education to children from linguistic minority groups. Various committees, commissions, and educationists have also urged that a child's home language, variously referred to as the mother tongue, native language etc., should be the first language they learn as also the medium of instruction at all levels of education. According to Cummins (2001), research has clearly demonstrated that the home language has a critical part in children's overall development. Children who learn two or three languages gain a better awareness of how to use diverse languages effectively (Malik, 2019).

Arunachal Pradesh is a multilingual state with a diverse linguistic ecology. Tribal populations – around 26 major tribes and 100 sub-tribes - have different languages, and people in different locales within the tribal regions speak different varieties. Unfortunately, home language development could not take place in the state education system under the colonial rule and the attempts to impose Hindi as the main language in

the 1960s totally undermined the educational benefits of home language education in Arunachal Pradesh.

We enumerate some of the advantages of home language education in schools below:

- **Learning Skills and Additional Language:** Nishanti (2020) asserts that a strong foundation in the home language enhances children's ability to learn additional languages. Children who are exposed to multiple languages during their early years are likely to develop diverse reasoning skills at a younger age compared to those who acquire a single language (Ray, 2021).
- **Enhancing Cognitive Growth:** According to NEP 2020, young learners understand concepts better when education is given in their home language. Fafunwa (1975) highlights that the home language provides a basis for learning new languages while also promoting higher comprehension, conceptual internalisation, and cognitive consistency.
- **Emotional and Intellectual Development:** The influence of literature and poetry is crucial in the development and refinement of emotions, and the home language is the most important tool for bringing about emotional development in the individual (Patra, 2017). Nishanthi (2020) found that a student is educated in his or her home language has higher educational achievement as compared with a student educated in a language different from their home language.
- **Preservation of Culture and Tradition:** Language is the flag bearer of various aspects of tribal culture and heritage. The loss of home language is typically viewed as a cultural loss. Many languages varieties in Arunachal Pradesh are on the verge of extinction. If they are not conserved now, future generations may lose the ability to understand tribal history and cultures forever. As such, efforts must be made to maintain the state's diverse home languages by making them the languages of education.
- **Multilingual Approach Promotes Quality Education and Equality:** Multilingual education makes quality education possible by adapting traditional instructional techniques and resources to the local culture. It builds bridges over the cultural and linguistic

asymmetries that prevent minority language speakers from living within the larger language and culture. According to Devi (2017), the UNESCO position paper on Education in a Multilingual World claimed that mother tongue education is a means of increasing quality and bringing socioeconomic and gender equity in linguistically diverse communities.

### **The Medium of Instruction in the Schools of Arunachal Pradesh**

Arunachal Pradesh education system follows the center's three-language formula, delivering compulsory instruction in English, Hindi, and a third language. Almost all administrative committees and commissions have unequivocally advocated education in the home language. However, historical factors, political compulsions, and the unprecedented diversity of language varieties have posed a significant challenge in the emergence of home language as the medium of instruction in schools. Arunachal Pradesh chose English over its indigenous languages as its first language. Furthermore, because there was no link language, Hindi developed as the lingua franca among tribal people and acquired the status of the second language under the three-language formula. In 1951, Arunachal Pradesh, then North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA), was administratively governed by the Government of Assam, an arrangement that lasted until 1965. Under this dispensation, Assamese became the medium of instruction in schools. However, in 1974, the Arunachal Student Union launched a protest asking for the replacement of Assamese with English as the language of teaching in schools. Though the National Language Policy has had some influence on the language issue and medium of instruction in schools, the state has taken some measures to develop a state language policy. In the 1960s and 1970s, school teachers were encouraged to learn a tribal language in order to interact more effectively with the students. From the 1980s onwards, local languages such as Khampti, Adi, Apatani, etc. were introduced as a third language in some of the schools. However, Sanskrit and Assamese have also continued as the third language at the primary school level. Currently, English is the medium of instruction, Hindi is the lingua franca, and the local language/home language or Sanskrit are offered as the third language especially at the primary level.

### **The Home Language as a Third Language in School Curriculum of Arunachal Pradesh**

Most tribal language varieties have been categorised as endangered by UNESCO. The home languages of most of the 26 major tribes and over 100 sub-tribes in Arunachal Pradesh are at brink of extinction. The National Education Policy (2020) emphasises the use of the mother language as a medium of instruction in schools, particularly in the primary and lower secondary grades. Keeping this in mind, and taking into account the diversity of tribal languages, the government of Arunachal Pradesh has decided to introduce books for the third-language from Class 6 to 8 in the state in collaboration with the Apex bodies of various tribes. The books for Nyishi, Galo, Tagin, Mishmi-Idu, Mishmi-Kaman, Mishmi-Taraon), Aka (Hrusso), Singpho, Tutsa, Adi, Tangsa, Wancho and Apatani tribes are being introduced for different schools of the respective tribes with the purpose of improving students' grasp of the subject matter. The development of these books has been entrusted to SCERT, which is working in collaboration with the Apex bodies of the concerned tribes.

The following are the details of home language books for the third language in the school curriculum of Arunachal Pradesh:

1. **Qok Agom Vol. I**, for Class 6 (*Textbook for Galo language*)
2. **Galo Agom Part I**, for Class 7 (*Textbook for Galo language*)
3. **Galo Agom, Part II**, for Class 8 (*Textbook for Galo language*)
4. **Kaman Pit 1**, for Class 6 (*Textbook for Kaman language*)
5. **Taraon1**, for Class 6 (*Textbook for Taraon language*)
6. **Asahi, Idu Azobra**, for Class 6 (*Textbook for Idu Mishmi language*)
7. **Tagin Gaam Kitap I**, for Class 6 (*Textbook for Tagin language*)
8. **Tagin Gaam Kitap II**, for Class 7 (*Textbook for Tagin language*)
9. **Tagin Gaam Kitap III**, for Class 8 (*Textbook for Tagin language*)
10. **Nyishi Lvr Kitab Jabkin**, for Class 6 (*Textbook for Nyishi language*)
11. **Nyishi Lvr Kitab Jabbum**, for Class 8 (*Textbook for Nyishi language*)
12. **Sedan Book**, for Classes 6 to 8 (*Textbook for Wancho language*)
13. **Tangsa** for Classes 6 to 8 (*Textbook for Tangsa language*)

14. **Adi Agom Kennano – 1** for Class 6 (*Textbook for Adi language*)
15. **Ako Na Kako – 1** for Class 6 (*Textbook for Aka language*)
16. **Tanii Agun Book – 1** for Class 6 (*Textbook for Apatani language*)
17. **Jinphaw Hti Laika Nnan Hpung** for Class 6 (*Singpho Basic Reader*)

However, the third language is included as an optional subject at primary level of school education, offering a specific home language subject based on the region. For those who do not want to opt for the home language as a third language have the option of taking up Sanskrit. Some of the third-language textbooks, such as Wancho and Tangsa, are written in their script, while others use the Roman script. Further, SCERT has collaborated with the relevant tribal apex bodies to provide a teacher training programme to selected in-service teachers.

### **Challenges in the Adoption of Home Language as the Third Language in School Curriculum**

The primary difficulty in introducing home language as the third language in the school curriculum of Arunachal Pradesh is that there is no one indigenous language. Instead, twenty six major tribes, and over 100 distinct languages and dialects need to be taken into account. Although the state has seriously taken up the issue of preservation of the local tribal languages and cultures through education, whether more than 100 languages and dialects can indeed be mobilised in this effort. The challenges confronting this effort are:

- i. The majority of the tribal languages do not have their own scripts. The few exceptions are Khaptis, Monpa, Tangsa, and Wancho. For the rest, the Roman script is being resorted to.
- ii. Tribes usually settle in a dispersed manner, and the same group of tribal people speaks differently depending on where they dwell. Perhaps, this is true of languages everywhere but the overwhelming diversity of languages in Arunachal Pradesh makes the problem intractable. The deployment of a specific home language as the third language in a given region deprives the children from other tribal groups living in the same region of their opportunity to learn their own home language at school.
- iii. The task of training teachers in numerous native languages is demanding in terms of costs incurred and the effort.

### **Suggestions**

- An awareness campaign for the tribal communities to help them understand the importance of providing their children with early education in their languages at home is needed. This will ensure a certain preparedness on part of the children when they enter school.
- The language development difficulties should be addressed with experts, curriculum developers, and stakeholders from the respective communities through in-depth discussions and research.
- When developing a text for instructional purposes, experts from several disciplines must collaborate to comprehend ethnic groups' social structures, culture, and traditions from their point of view, as well as to communicate them in a comprehensible manner.
- Funding and project proposals should be made available to educated tribal group members interested in generating study materials and scripts.
- Selected teachers should be given adequate training for specific home languages so that they can be truly proficient in teaching these in the schools.
- The stakeholders should exercise extreme caution when designing policies and initiatives, bearing in mind the importance of home language teaching and learning in the school curriculum.

### **Conclusion**

There is no doubt that the inclusion of home language as the third language subject in the school curriculum is beneficial to the tribal community and is the best approach to preserve the ethnic diversity of the state of Arunachal Pradesh. It is important for students because it encourages bilingualism and multilingualism, which are characteristics that promote cognitive growth, social tolerance, divergent thinking, and academic achievement. The Constitution of India has specific provisions for the protection of linguistic rights of minorities in Article 29. Thus, schools need to provide a space where students can exercise their learning rights, such as the right to learn in their home language, the right to learn in their natural environment, the right to learn in their own culture, and so on. Although there are challenges in introducing home languages of all tribal groups in school education, it is important

to confront them and to evolve practical strategies to strengthen the teaching of home language at school.

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