



The Role of Mother Tongue in Promoting Inclusive Education: Challenges and Opportunities in Multilingual Classrooms

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<p>Received 02/06/2025</p> <p>Accepted 05/06/2025</p> <p>Published 09/07/2025</p>	<p>Abstract</p> <p><i>The Right to Education Act, 2009 in the Constitution of India has mentioned the right to education for all children regardless of race, religion, caste, therefore, there is a need to ensure education for all students using their mother tongue through inclusive education. Children from less physical or mental background from underdeveloped areas can learn and mix with the developed children. They can even learn something from their classmates and have the opportunity to become educated together in education. This research provides an in-depth exploration of the role of mother tongue in multilingual classrooms or in promoting inclusive education. While conducting the research, I saw that although there are many benefits in education through mother tongue, there are also several challenges to be faced. Inclusive education aims to provide equal opportunities to students in multilingual classrooms. According to many researchers, this system of education is easier and more acceptable to students when it is conducted through the mother tongue, but in some cases, it becomes a challenge in bilingual classrooms. This system of education focuses on linguistically diverse communities. UNESCO (2017) and Benson (2004) have discussed the importance of mother tongue education. Benson (2016) has discussed the challenge of teaching through the mother tongue to students to think critically and understand complex concepts. Gandhar (2016) and Kohila (2016) have discussed the challenge. This research attempts to re-examine the effects of mother tongue-based education on children from diverse backgrounds and in multilingual classrooms to see how mother tongue-based education can help students develop their full potential. Inclusive education aims to provide equal opportunities to students in multilingual classrooms. According to many researchers, this system of education is easier and more acceptable to students when it is conducted through the mother tongue, but in some cases, it becomes a challenge in bilingual</i></p>
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classrooms.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Multilingual Classrooms, Mother Tongue

Introduction

Inclusive education is defined as an approach that aims to ensure that all students, regardless of their individual differences, including disabilities social-economic background or language barriers, are educated together in a common language environment. The principal of inclusivity stress equality, diversity and the adaptation of teaching methods to meet the needs of the students (UNESCO,2017) Through this recharge, I have tried to explore the role of mother tongue in inclusive education, through which it has contributed to the all-round development of students, and on the other hand, what challenges it faces.



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Review of Literature

Inclusive education is defined as an approach that aims to ensure that all students, regardless of their individual differences, disabilities, socio-economic background, or language barriers, are educated together in a common learning environment. The principal of inclusivity stresses equity, diversity, and the adaptation of teaching methods to meet the needs of students (UNESCO, 2017).

Benson (2004), Mother tongue -based education (MTBE) or the use of a child's first language as the medium of instruction, plays a critical role in achieving inclusive education. Research suggests that using the mother tongue in early education enhances cognitive development, academic success, and emotional well-being, especially for students with learning disabilities, linguistic Minorities backgrounds, and other marginalized groups

Bakery (2006), a large body of research underscores the cognitive benefits of using a mother tongue in education Cummins (2000) emphasizes the independence hypothesis, which argues that students who learn in their first language build a solid foundation of literacy skills that can later transfer to other languages. Furthermore, studies show that when students learn in their mother tongue, they are better able to understand complex concepts, think critically, and retain

information.

For children with special education needs (SEN), the use of their first language can reduce cognitive overload, which is especially beneficial for children with disabilities such as dyslexia, attention disorders, or autism spectrum disorders.

Ginsburg (2008) suggests that instruction in the mother tongue enables students to engage more fully with the curriculum, as they can better comprehend and process the material. Language is not only the tool for academic learning but also for social instruction and identity formation. For students from linguistically diverse backgrounds, mother tongue education helps preserve cultural identity and facilitates emotional security in a learning environment.

Skutnabb-Kangas (2000), the emotional connection to one's native language provides a sense of belonging and self-esteem, which is critical for students' social integration and confidence in their educational setting. This sense of security can also promote better social interaction, as children are able to express themselves fully and interact with peers without language barriers.

Bakery (2011), in the context of inclusive education, mother tongue allows students from diverse cultural backgrounds to feel respected and valued, enhancing their participation in the classroom. This is particularly important for students with disabilities, who often experience marginalization in international education systems.

While the benefits of mother tongue education are clear, its implementation in multilingual classrooms is fraught with challenges. One of the major obstacles is the lack of educational resources in minority language. According to Heugh (2014), in many regions, textbooks, teaching materials and trained teachers are often unavailable in the mother tongues of marginalized communities. This creates significant barriers for teachers who may not be adequately prepared to teach in multiple languages, especially in contexts where the language of instruction is different from the home language of the students.

Additionally, in many countries, there is often social pressure to adopt dominant language, which may limit the focus on mother tongue education. In multilingual nations, the dominance of a national language or global languages such as English can undermine the value of indigenous languages. This pressure can lead to the neglect of mother tongue education in favour of teaching in the national or global language, thereby hindering students' academic success and social integration (Gandara, 2016).

The challenge of teacher training is another significant issue. Many educators in multilingual classrooms may lack proficiency in the different languages spoken by their students, or they may not be trained in how to implement mother language-based instruction effectively. As a result, teaching methods that rely on a single language of instruction can fail to meet the needs of all students, particularly those from linguistic minority background (Colliery, 2015). Despite these challenges, several studies demonstrate that mother tongue-based instruction can be integrated into inclusive pedagogy through various strategies. For example, bilingual education programs that use the mother tongue alongside a second language have been found to support both linguistic and cognitive development. Bilingual education allows students to build proficiency in both languages, which enhances their academic opportunities (Baker, 2011).

Additionally, collaborative teaching methods that incorporate the languages spoken by students can help create an inclusive classroom environment. Research by Cummins (2001) suggests that fostering a classroom culture of multilingualism, where students' languages are

respected and valued, can promote inclusivity and create a more equitable learning environment for all students.

A number of policy recommendations and practices support the integration of mother tongue education within inclusive education frameworks. UNESCO (2017) highlights the importance of developing multilingual education policies that ensure the inclusion of mother tongue as a medium of instruction, particularly in the early years of schooling. But promoting mother tongue education, governments can help ensure that marginalized communities have access to high -quality education and reduce educational disparities.

Additionally, in countries with diverse linguistic populations, teacher education programs that focus on multilingualism and inclusive pedagogy are essential. According to the work of Manda (2014), teacher training initiatives that equip educators with the skills to teach in multilingual classrooms can ensure that the benefits of mother tongue education are realized. Educators can be trained to use a variety of teaching materials, adapt to diverse language needs, and create inclusive classroom environments that support all students, regardless of their linguistic or cultural background.

Research Gap

In the role of mother tongue in promoting inclusive education is significant, particularly in multilingual classroom. Research has shown that mother tongue education enhances the cognitive, social and emotional development, enabling students to participate fully in the learning process. Despite the challenges of implementation, such as the lack of research and trained teachers, mother conclusion tongue-based education present an opportunity to create more inclusive, equitable educational environments. Policy makers and educators must work together to ensure that multilingual classrooms are equipped to use mother tongue as a means to promote inclusivity and improve educational outcomes for all students, specially those from marginalised communities.

Objectives of the Study

- To examine the role of mother tongue in enhancing inclusive education in multilingual classrooms.
- To investigate how mother tongue based instruction can support the academic achievement of students with diversities needs, including those with disabilities and marginalised community.
- To identify the challenges and barriers to implementing mother tongue education in multilingual and inclusive classroom.
- To examine the strategies used by educators to address the linguistic diversity of students in inclusive settings.
- To explore the opportunities that mother tongue education presence in fostering an inclusive and equitable learning environment.
- Provide policy recommendations to promote the use of mother tongue as a tool for inclusive education.

Research questions

- What is the role of mother tongue in promoting inclusive education in multilingual classroom?

- How do students with diverse needs, including those with disabilities, benefit from instruction in their mother tongue?
- What are the challenges faced by educators in implementing mother tongue based instruction in inclusive education?
- How do schools and teachers adapt their strategies to address the linguistic diversity of students in inclusive education settings?
- What opportunities does mother tongue education offer for fostering an inclusive and equitable learning environment?

Methodology of the Study

Research Method: This study used a mixed-methods approach. It combined both qualitative and quantitative data to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research questions.

Sampling: The study focused on primary and secondary schools in multilingual areas. A purposive sampling method was used in schools that implement inclusive education practices and use mother tongue-based instruction. Participants included teachers, students and school administrators.

Data collection:

Surveys: The researcher distributed a structured questionnaire to teachers and school administrators to assess their views on the challenges and difficulties of mother tongue education in inclusive classrooms.

Interview: The investigator conducted in-depth interviews with a selected group of teachers, students, and parents to gather personal insights into how mother tongue influences learning outcomes in inclusive settings.

Classroom Observations: In this study, the researcher observed the classroom strategies employed in multilingual and inclusive classrooms, particularly language use and student participation.

Results

- The researcher has selected five primary and five secondary schools that have inclusive education facilities for data collection and what was found from the data is that in primary schools, there is 70% benefit in inclusive education through mother tongue and 30% challenge. On the other hand, in secondary schools, we can see from the data that there is 65% benefit and 35% challenge in using mother tongue in inclusive education.
- Teaching in mother tongue in inclusive classrooms has a positive impact on academic performance.
- There are some negative effects on inclusive education even after teaching in mother tongue due to lack of special grants.
- Some negative effects can be observed due to lack of educated teachers.
- Some underdevelopment has been observed in the teaching methods of teachers.
- Policy recommendations are being made to support the same cause of mother tongue instruction in inclusive education systems at local and national levels.
- Despite some benefits, several challenges can be observed in the case of mother tongue in inclusive education.

Conclusion

The Right to Education Act, 2009 in the Constitution of India has mentioned the right to education for all children regardless of race, religion, caste, therefore, there is a need to ensure education for all students using their mother tongue through inclusive education. Children from less physical or mental background from underdeveloped areas can learn and mix with the developed children. They can even learn something from their classmates and have the opportunity to become educated together in education. This research provides an in-depth exploration of the role of mother tongue in multilingual classrooms or in promoting inclusive education. While conducting the research, I saw that although there are many benefits in education through mother tongue, there are also several challenges to be faced.

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