

A Study on Academic Challenges of Tulu Mother Tongue Students of Kasaragod District, Kerala

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Abstract

In Kerala, Malayalam is the mother tongue of most people. However, the dialects spoken by the primitive tribal communities in Kerala are numerous. Each tribal community has its language and literature. Different mother tongues are there in a school when different sections of children come to school. According to modern linguistic theory, this problem needs an essential solution. With the formation of the linguistic states, in the Malayalam speaking territory bordering other states (Tamil Nadu and Karnataka), the languages of these states is continued to be used. There are educational institutions for students belonging to the linguistic minority communities. These schools protect the right to learn and learn through minority languages.

The situation in the Kasaragod district is a bit more complicated. There are officially Malayalam and Kannada medium schools in the district. But in Kasaragod, which is known as “*saptha bhasha sangama bhoomi*” -nationally recognized languages such as *Tulu, Konkani, Marathi, Hindustani, and Byari, Havyaka, Arakannada*, and other dialects are also used for communication. Tulu is a part of the unique culture of Kasaragod and the most spoken language after Malayalam. But there are currently no facilities available for children to learn in their mother tongue. They fail to make achievements in academics; they are not able to mingle with Malayalam or Kannada mother-tongue students, feel shy and less social with other children. There is gap between school and family culture, and there is lack of school resources in Tulu language. Lack of empowered teachers significantly block their learning. The prevailing situation is the denial of children's right to learn in their mother tongue. They have adjustment problems with others in the school, they feel depressed, feel shy, feel alienated, disappointed,

depressed, etc. To overcome these situations the teacher can help them to do education activities, listen to music, talk with friends, etc.

The different discourse languages of them can't be utilised to pursue education and this pushes them into feelings of alienation and consequent dropouts. Further it results in learning backwardness too, as reflected in behavioural issues associated with altering into truants, withdrawal from classroom activities, absence of response to the questions and the directions of teachers, poor performance in examinations and process of evaluation, etc. So, helping them to follow learning in their respective mother tongue is essentially the responsibility of our educational system. The oral culture and literature of such linguistic minorities appear to be splendid, particularly that of the Tulu language.

Keywords: Kasarcod district, school education, medium, minority languages.

Introduction

The students of the Tulu belt such as Manjeswaram, Kumbala and Kasaragod sub-districts often struggle to match the progress of the other sub-districts in maintaining the equilibrium of academic performance and achievements. The result percentage of L.S.S., U.S.S, and S.S.L.C. in the aforesaid sub-districts is found to be very low in terms of State average. No official system is available at present in these areas to have academic communication in Tulu language itself. Hence it becomes highly necessary to have the Tulu language and culture fostered within the classroom atmosphere. This necessitates the presence of teachers at the schools who are proficient in Tulu communication. It can be materialized through relevant enrichment programs for the existing teachers. Deliberate and scientific involvement of the machinery as well as the empowered role of the P.T.A. can ensure efficient results in this regard which can convert the Tulu learners into promising flowers of the future.

There are many studies which present the pedagogical challenges facing tribal and folk communities who are denied the facility to pursue learning through the medium of mother tongue. But no serious initiative and involvement has yet sprung up in the Tulu-speaking regions in terms of serious academic issues and limitations they have been facing. This makes the present research relevant and time bound.

Kerala remains the sole state of the country with Malayalam as its mother tongue. Still, this language has been officially recognized in the union territory of Laksha-Dweep. Malayalam exercises influence in the adjacent states of Kerala like Tamil Nadu and Karnataka

apart from the union territory of Pondicherry. The influence is felt both in spoken and written forms of the language. These areas promote the function of such educational institutions that safeguard the interest of linguistic minorities too. Still, in a society dominated by the majority, such interests in social, cultural, and economic dimensions often get overlooked either deliberately or unintentionally. This leads to the alienation of their language, culture, and even history.

The Constitution ensures the protection and preservation of the language, script and culture of people belonging to any part of the country. The article 350 of the Constitution assures the privilege of linguistic minorities to carry on education in their respective mother tongues.

Still there occurs innumerable linguistic variations in the speech system of the primitive tribal communities of Kerala. It conforms to the saying, “a hundred languages for a few”. The tribal communities have their distinct mother tongue and oral literature. When children from different tribal groups enter educational institutions, various mother-tongue clashes occur with regard to communication. Most of them miss the opportunity to pursue education in their unique mother tongue. Modern linguistic philosophy deems it as a prompt matter of solution.

Kasaragod

Kasaragod, a district nestled in the northern part of Kerala, India, is a captivating blend of diverse cultures and linguistic richness. Renowned for its scenic beauty and historical significance, Kasaragod stands out not only for its natural charm but also for the myriad languages that echo through its vibrant communities. The predominant language in Kasaragod is Malayalam, the official language of the state of Kerala. This Dravidian language is spoken by the majority of the population and serves as a unifying force, facilitating communication across various communities. The linguistic landscape, however, goes beyond Malayalam, reflecting the intricate cultural mosaic of the region. Additionally, Tulu, Kannada, and Konkani are also spoken by various communities, contributing to the rich tapestry of languages in Kasaragod. The historical backdrop of Kasaragod has played a crucial role in shaping its linguistic diversity. The district has witnessed influence from various rulers, including the Kolathiri Rajas, Vijayanagara Empire, and later, the British and Tipu Sultan's regimes. These historical dynamics have left an indelible mark on the linguistic landscape, fostering a milieu

where different languages coexist and thrive. This linguistic diversity mirrors the region's unique cultural amalgamation and historical influences.

It is worth noting that linguistic diversity is a prominent feature of India, with numerous languages and dialects spoken across the country. One of the notable linguistic elements in Kasaragod is Tulu, spoken primarily by the Tuluva community. Tulu, a Dravidian language with its distinct script, adds a unique flavour to the linguistic diversity of the district. The Tulu-speaking population contributes to the cultural richness of Kasaragod, bringing their traditions, folklore, and expressions that resonate with a historical connection to the land. Tulu has its own script, which is known as the Tulu script or Tulu Lipi, but it is not widely used.

Need and Significance of the Study

Most of the children in the Kasaragod education district have Tulu as their mother tongue. The Marathi-speaking community is also practicing in various parts of the district. Even though there are not many, the number of children who speak Urdu, and Konkani as their mother tongue is not small. A major problem these children are facing is that their mother tongue is omitted from the scope of learning. Because of this, they are unable to get a primary education in their spoken language. This can lead to children feeling alienated from school.

It leads children to learning backwardness. Being too lazy, not responding properly to teachers' suggestions and questions often result in problems such as evaluation, exams, and lagging. For LSS, USS, and SSLC examinations, the three sub-districts of Kasaragod Educational District (Manjeswaram, Kumbala, and Kasaragod) are far behind the state average. So, it is necessary to create Tulu language learning tools in classrooms to nourish the whole language and culture. Teachers also should be empowered in the Tulu language.

The linguistic culture and literature of the above-mentioned languages are rich. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the team and the educational system to ensure the learning of such children through their mother tongue.

Review of Related Literature

Research undertaken in the area of primary education proves that learning in mother tongue significantly contributes to the educational achievement of primary school students.

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Wurok (2018) studied “Tribal education challenges - the case of Wayanad in Kerala” and found out that there are many reasons for the backwardness of the tribal community; the most important is that their mother tongue is not the medium of instruction.

Geetha (2013) studied the ‘Language and schooling of tribal children: issues related to the medium of instruction’ and highlights the crucial role played by home languages in early learning.

M. Cerensnikova, R.Rosinsky, M. Sanko, et.al. (2017) studied ‘Language performance of Roma children in a language that is not native’ and suggested that Roma children are secondarily bilingual and before the beginning of education, there is a need for support for the development of the secondary. The results show that the extent of vocabulary is significantly influenced by the extent of spatial exclusion. Therefore, the Roma children need intensive support for the development of their linguistic competence.

Krishnan (1998) “Study on the awareness and utilization of educational development schemes by tribal of Wayanad district” has concluded that Kerala is one of the states in India, which had introduced several tribal education programs. Still, tribal literacy was the lowest in Kerala when compared to other sections of the population. In spite of the commendable enrolment rate among the tribals, their dropout rate is a matter of great concern. The major issue with regard to tribal education is their retention in schools. He suggested more planned and imaginative policies were called for to settle those problems.

G. Vinoba (2013) studied ‘Education of tribal children in India and issue of medium of instruction: A Janshala experience’ and suggests that the development of primers in the tribal dialect involving content from the local text will go a long way in ensuring children’s active participation in the learning process in school.

VS Subhash, TK Vinisha, Sujatha pinky (2020) studied “Educational backwardness of Paniyan community of Wayanad’ and found that the main reason for the educational backwardness of the Paniyan community is the lack of mentor teachers and teachers who can handle Paniyan language.

These problems are also relevant in the case of Tulu mother tongue children. However, a comprehensive study of educational issues in Tulu areas requiring serious intervention has not yet been conducted; so, the relevance of the current research is significant.

Methodology

The survey method was adopted for the study to know the academic problems of Tulu language children.

Sample

A sample of 100 students from 10 schools, where the majority of Tulu mother tongue students were surveyed from sub-districts of Kasaragod educational district. The 10 schools with the highest number of Tulu mother tongue students selected using the purposive sampling technique. Tulu mother tongue students studying in Malayalam or Kannada medium in these schools were selected as samples.

Tools and Techniques

- Rating scale for teachers
- Interview questionnaire for educational officers
- Guide for FGD
- Observation schedule for headmasters
- Observation schedule for teachers
- Observation schedule for students

Rating Scale of Teachers

The rating scale for the teachers of sample schools was prepared in statement form. Three options like 'Always', 'Sometimes' and 'Never' were given against each statement. All the expressions are related to the academic issues of the learners. The teacher is directed to put 'tic' for each relevant option.

The rating scale for teachers helped to gather necessary suggestions regarding the academic standard of students, issues related to continuous learning activities, the realisation of child - friendly atmosphere, the insufficiency of Tulu language hand book and other matters.

Interview Chart

Prepared questionnaire for interview to the responsible authorities like DDE, Diet Principal, DEO, District Programme Co - Ordinator (SSK) for discussing and suggesting remedial measures for the issues faced by the Tulu mother tongue students at the district level.

Questions in connection with the special learning issues and challenges faced by the students in a multi - tongue society, supporting systems of the government, research works undertaken earlier etc. were included in the interview.

Focus Group Discussion

The focus group held discussions with the parents of Tulu mother tongue students. The method of presenting questions naturally and registering responses had been adopted.

Observation Schedule

Headmaster: School development document, master plan, SRG minutes, school calendar, novel activity projects

Class : Class library, learning activities, wall magazines

Learner : Study materials, notebooks, edited works

Teacher : Teaching manual, learning materials, other collections

Provided with opportunities to respond on questionnaire based upon ten areas related to the academic issues of Tulu mother tongue students of the district.

Observation

Index of the Observation among Tulu Mother Tongue Students

On analyzing the student notebooks and hand-written manuscripts of selected 10 schools, it was found that 7 schools carried out works effectively up to 70%. The academic activities of 3 schools were below average (30%). There is no school at all without any element of package implementation. In the case of wall - magazines, the work at 3 schools was effective up to 30% only and 6 schools expressed the percentage below 60%. The work was quite

insufficient in 1 school (10%). On evaluating the areas of the story, poems, proverbs, riddles, etc, 2 schools performed efficiently, the percentage of 3 schools was below 30% and that of 5 schools had 50%.

Observation Index - Headmaster

* The academic master plan was carried out effectively by 2 schools (20%), whereas it was up to 30% in 3 schools. 5 schools performed the master plan at a rate below average.

* 5 schools expressed efficiency in the case of SRG minutes and SRG meeting minutes. But 5 other schools presented them only within average performance level.

Observation index - Teachers

Lesson Planning Documents

Among the selected schools where learning package had to be implemented, 7 teachers (70%) prepared the lesson planning excellently and 3 teachers (30%) did it only at average level.

Class Library

The activities of the class library were found functioning well at 8 schools (80%).

Tools for Tulu Language Learning

The materials for Tulu language learning enhancement were prepared and utilised at average level only at 2 schools. 8 schools were found making use of learning tools very rarely.

Collections of Teachers

The collections for Tulu language learning among the teachers of 5 schools had been found at average standard whereas it was found absolutely inadequate in the case of the teachers of 5 other schools.

The learning package prepared for the students with Tulu as the mother tongue had been found utilised at average perfection by the teachers of 2 schools. The teachers of 8 other schools were observed not utilising the learning materials at all.

Teacher Experience

The index on Tulu language familiarisation reveals that 4 teachers are having proficiency of language above average level, 4 with average awareness only and 2 teachers with no Tulu linguistic knowledge at all.

Analysis of the Rating Scale of Teachers

The areas considered for analysis are the planning of the learning activities among Tulu mother tongue students, its implementation, the evaluation of the learners, the self -study of the teachers concerned in Tulu language, the enthusiasm of the students in learning activities, the system of group and co - learning, the interest of the teachers in promoting the academic excellence of Tulu mother tongue students etc.

The Facts Derived from Index Analysis

Two teachers pointed out that it is always difficult to translate the learning experience of the text - books into Tulu language; 4 Teachers expressed that the difficulty is felt sometimes only, and two other teachers said that they never experience difficulty at all.

4 teachers expressed the index ‘absolutely good’ to have a Tulu language handbook; 5 teachers agreed to it at average level. One teacher disagreed with the statement.

7 teachers agreed completely to the statement that students are interested at presenting examples in the Tulu language; 2 teachers agreed to it only partially and 1 teacher completely disagreed to the statement.

Only one teacher expressed the view ‘absolutely’ to the statement that Tulu equivalent words will be found out for new words and expressions; 7 teachers marked it at average level and 2 teachers responded as ‘never’.

5 teachers completely agreed with the statement that Tulu mother tongue students maintain high academic standard in the first term; 5 teachers responded to it at average level only.

2 teachers gave the index that Tulu mother tongue students have clear difficulties in communicating with the other language students; 6 teachers reacted to the statement at average level and 2 teachers viewed that there is no communicative difficulty at all.

One teacher alone used to observe discourses and cultural programmes related to Tulu language and literature regularly; 5 teachers are accustomed to listening to such programmes at average level. But 4 teachers never listen to them at all.

4 teachers marked it as ‘always’ to the statement that Tulu mother tongue students used to experience difficulties in undertaking homework and continuous learning activities; 5 teachers marked it as ‘sometimes’ and 1 teacher alone responded as ‘never’.

3 teachers reacted it as ‘always’ on the statement evaluating the skill and ability of the Tulu mother tongue students to involve in the artistic and sports related activities of the school

and also to take up lead roles in the various committees of the school; 6 teachers marked it at level 'average' and 1 teacher responded to it as 'never'.

5 teachers reacted as 'always' on the statement related to the participation of the parents of Tulu mother tongue students in PTA meetings; 2 teachers expressed the response, 'sometimes' and 3 teachers marked it as 'never'.

1 teacher suggested that the classroom presentations of Tulu mother tongue students on learning activities are never intelligible; 7 teachers responded to it at a limited level and 2 teachers expressed no difficulty in discerning at all.

3 teachers reacted as 'always' to the statement on continuous communication with the parents of Tulu mother tongue students; 4 teachers marked it 'sometimes' and 3 teachers responded as 'never'.

1 teacher alone suggested that the proverbs and communicative slang of Tulu language are widely utilized in promoting classroom activities; 2 teachers agreed to its average standard and 7 teachers opined 'never' to the statement.

2 teachers expressed 'always' on the statement related to the skill and ability of the Tulu mother tongue students in exchanging their ideas in the respective mother tongue itself; 4 teachers responded as 'sometimes' on the statement and 4 others marked it as 'never'.

Focus Group Discussion - Parents

Recorded below are the facts consolidated from the information availed consequent on a direct interview with the parents.

- * There should be textbooks as well as student workbooks in Tulu language to reach the expected target.
- * Stories, songs, proverbs, riddles, etc. in Tulu language are to be utilized effectively in learning activities.
- * Academic activities must be prepared particularly taking into consideration the views of the parents of Tulu mother tongue children too and its relevance should reflect itself in the modules prepared in connection with the activities of class PTA / PTA etc.
- * Relevant games, artistic forms, rituals, and traditions associated with Tulu language and culture should be inseparably interlinked with school academic activities.

* Necessary measures should be adopted to avail books in Tulu language at school libraries and other storehouses of academically related books.

Questionnaire for Interview

Interview questionnaires were issued to the Deputy Director of Education, Kasaragod, the Principal of Diet, the DPO of Samagra Shiksha Kerala, the DEO Kasaragod, the AEO, etc. After collecting their responses through questionnaires as well as direct oral discourses, the main findings are assimilated and registered as follows:

*** Children Face Plenty of Challenges in a Multi-linguistic Society**

- Since teachers plan and execute academic activities mostly in recognized official languages within classroom sessions of interaction, students apart from those languages face difficulties in effective communication.
- As the cultural attributes of various languages are different, the linguistic discourse elements of the main languages remain more or less alien to the students whose mother tongue is different in multi-lingua societies.
- The process of communication does not flourish and get enriched due to the major differences in the words and terms of the daily language of communication and the medium of formal education.

*** The Particular Academic Issues Experienced by Tulu Mother Tongue Students**

- Formal classroom interactive sessions do not utilise the limited number of stories, songs, proverbs, and riddles available in the mother tongue of other languages children.
- The process of communication related to listening and speech confronts big hurdles.
- The learners feel alienated from their familiarised cultural elements of interaction.
- The written attributes of communication in Tulu language such as words and phrase
- linguistic expressions of stylistics etc. do not get considered at all.

*** The Consideration Due for Tulu Mother Tongue Students in Academic Monitoring Activities**

- The issues associated with Tulu language students often are not included in the agenda for discussion.

- Although such issues come up for discussion in the training programs of language teachers, grave importance is found often absent.
- The problems of Tulu mother tongue students are found generally neglected and ignored in the class - monitoring involvements of the educational officers and the Heads of the institutions.
- No serious discussions have been held on matters related to the academic shortcomings of Tulu mother tongue students which are mainly related to the system of transactions in languages alien to them.

*** The Supportive Systems Available for Tulu Language Students**

- Even though there are comparatively few teachers in Kannada medium who have functional knowledge of Tulu language, they often lack adequate support of academic inspiration in schools. It is to be noted that the teachers of Malayalam medium are almost ignorant of Tulu language.
- Despite being sufficiently enriched in literature; the Tulu language suffers from the non-availability of adequate learning tools and scaffolding systems.
- Appropriate modules, local textbooks, etc. related to the assistance of Tulu mother tongue students are not often created and utilized.
- Local systems of academic support and centers of learning enrichment are unavailable in the areas inhabited by Tulu mother tongue students.

*** Research-Oriented Studies Linked with the Academic Issues of Tulu Mother Tongue Students**

- No such thing happened till that date.

*** Specialised Support System for Tulu Mother Tongue Students in Schools**

- Not existing at present.

*** Particular Consideration of Tulu Mother Tongue Students by the Department of General Education**

- Not sufficiently available

*** Granting Special Incentives for the Teachers at Multi-Language Schools**

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- Does not exist now.
- **Specialized training programs and supportive systems for the teachers who handle multi-lingual students:**
- No kind of such training is available at present.

***Novel Academic Activities for the Excellence of Tulu Mother Tongue Students**

- Nothing exists now.

Discussions

The awareness programs for parents fostering the learning environment of Tulu mother tongue students have not been implemented adequately in any school. 10% of schools have maintained average standards whereas 90% of institutions carried out the work for namesake only.

With regards to the availability of sufficient opportunities for Tulu mother tongue students to communicate in their respective language itself, 40% of teachers opined that they enjoy the privilege sometimes, 40% are of the view that the chance is very rare and 20 % suggested that they get the provision always.

* The Tulu mother tongue students are not supported with textbooks and learning materials in their home language.

* The parents of Tulu mother tongue students do not deserve consideration in the meetings of the class PTA, general PTA, etc.

* The school libraries do not have literary books and other associated materials in the Tulu language itself.

* The issues of Tulu mother tongue students do not get normally discussed in usual academic meetings.

* The concerns of students with Tulu as their mother tongue are often ignored in the class - monitoring held by the educational officers, Heads of schools, etc.

Conclusion

The Tulu region and the Tulu culture are widely acknowledged to be the inherent existential realities of a spacious region of the Kasaragod district in the northernmost boundary

of the state of Kerala. The people with Tulu as their mother tongue are blessed with a splendidly adorned literary culture and high-flown values of life, who dwell mainly in Kasaragod and Hosdurg Taluks. They inhabit mainly the wider spaces of the states of Karnataka and Kerala extending from the district of Udupi in the former to that of Kasaragod in the latter. Unfortunately, they are denied the privilege of availing the education of their children in the home language itself and are forced to undergo schooling in languages like Malayalam and Kannada. This causes the grave issue of the absence of adaptation which is essential in the pursuit of knowledge acquisition. Its educational retortions on the budding learners appear to be huge and demand urgent measures of redressal.

Apart from being a mere medium of communication, language has plenty of bifurcator interests and functions that are closely interwind with the lives of people who make use of it. Thus, language becomes a direct definition of the pride and culture of any sect of people, wherever they belong. So, academicians are eager to introduce such strategies to help learners with languages alien to their mother tongue to reconcile with the learning situations and study tools of other media of transaction. When such methods of conditioning were tried out with sincere involvement and integrity, the positive changes were found to be tremendous in the learners. Besides the abiding support of the language experts and scholars with proficiency also instilled faith and confidence in the minds of all concerned. The findings with regards to the Tulu mother tongue belt of the Kasaragod district can form an affirmative index towards the betterment of educational standards in other multi-lingual regions too. The reflection of the major findings in the present study might look forward to implementing beneficial academic resolutions and perspectives to be practicalized in association with extended pedagogical activities.

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