

Mother Tongue Education: Aspirations and Responses in Manipur

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Abstract

The issue of teaching of Mother tongue is a long pending issue in the context of multilingual North East India. Though, Manipur has recognized 18 tribal /minority languages in education with the desired benefits of having Mother tongue education and as a response to the aspirations of the people as well as the country's policies and programmes like Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA) and Right To Education (RTE) Act 2002. Mother tongue education in the state has encountered various problems. The paper is based on a research conducted in Manipur on the attitude and perception of mother tongue education by various stakeholders. Data was collected from parents, community members, teachers and students. It is evident that the unclear policy on language, low functional load, and lack of resources like teaching learning material, teachers and the shrinking domain of usage of mother tongue are few issues creating problem in the mother tongue education in the state.

Keywords: Manipur, mother tongue education, three language formula, educational stakeholders, attitude

Introduction

Manipur is a multilingual state with 38 different ethno-linguistic communities living in harmony. The communities are Aimol, Anal, Angami, Chiru, Chothe, Gangte, Hmar, Kabui Inpui, Koirao, Koirang, Kom, Kharam, Lamkang, Liangmei(Kacha Naga), Mao, Maram, Maring, Mate, Meite, Meitei Pangal, Mizo, Monsang, Moyon, Nepali, Paite, Paumai, Purum, Ralte, Ruangmei (Kabui), Sahte, Sema, Simte, Tangkhul, Thadou-Kuki, Thangal, Vaiphei, Zeme and Zou. Among these Meiteis and Meitei pangals (Muslims) speak Meiteilon/Manipuri which is one of the scheduled languages of India. As per the three language formula the state designate Manipuri or one of the 18 recognised tribal language as L1, English as L2 and Hindi as L3¹. Manipur government is proactive in the sense that the state had recognized the importance of bringing mother tongues in the schools, way back in 1965 till date 18 tribal languages are recognised either as a subject of instruction or as a medium of instruction in the school system. As there exist a strong identity consciousness and identity reassertion in the North East as a whole the state has been continually adding the number of recognized languages in the education system. The reasons for not recognising the remaining

¹ There are also provisions for taking up Hindi/Bengali/Assamese and Nepali as L1 for the students who are desirous of taking it up as a subject.

as a subject of instruction or as a medium of instruction in the school system. As there exist a strong identity consciousness and identity reassertion in the North East as a whole the state has been continually adding the number of recognized languages in the education system. The reasons for not recognising the remaining languages may be the numerical strength² and the lack of teaching learning material.³ The following table shows the numerical strength of the tribal population in the state in 2011 and their status of recognition in education:

Table: Tribal languages, Population and status of recognition in Education

Sl. No.	Language	2011	Status	Textbook Production body
1.	Aimol	3190		
2.	Anal	23,509	Recognised	
3.	Angami	95		
4.	Chiru	8599		
5.	Chothe	3858		
6.	Gangte	17,178	Recognised	Gangte Literature Society
7.	Hmar	48,375	Recognised	Hmar Literature Society
8.	Inpui #	13,000		
9.	Ruangmei (Kabui)*	1,03,908	Recognised	Ruangmei Literature Society
10.	Linagmei (Kacha Naga)**	66,158	Recognised	Liangmei Literature Society
11.	Kharam	1,145		
12.	Koirao	4,475		
13.	Koireng	1,873		
14.	Kom	14,528	Recognised	Kom Literature Society
15.	Lamgang	7,770		
16.	Mao	93,343	Recognised	Mao Academy
17.	Maram	27,524	Recognised	
18.	Maring	26,424	Recognized	
19.	Any Mizo***	8,064	Recognized	
20.	Monsang	2,427		
21.	Moyon	2,516		
22.	Paite	55,542	Recognised	Paite Literature Society

² The lesser the speakers of the tribe fewer the number of children going to school and producing books and hiring teachers for few children is difficult in terms of the finance incurred.

³ Board of Secondary Education gives recognition to languages to become a subject of instruction only after evaluating the available school related books in the language.

23.	Poumai	127,381	Recognised	Poumai Literature Society
24.	Purum	278		
25.	Ralte	17		
26.	Sema	40		
27.	Simte	6,728	Recognised	Simte Literature Society
28.	Suhte	804		
29.	Tangkhul	1,78,568	Recognised	Tangkhul Literature Society
30.	Thadou - Kuki	2,15,913	Recognised	Thadou Literature Society
31.	Vaiphei	42,957	Recognised	Vaiphei Literature Society
32.	Zeme	22,294	Recognised	
	Zou	24,294	Recognised	Zou Literature Society
34.	Tarao	1,066		
35.	Any Kuki	28,342		

*Kabui is also called as Ruangmei

**Liangmei and Zemi are called Kacha Naga in Manipur, and in 2016 Liangmei is recognised by Board of Secondary Education Manipur.

*** Mizo is recognised as Lusahi in Manipur

ref. W. Pinky Devi (2011)

It is clearly visible from the above table that the literature societies of the concerned languages taken up the pains of developing the textbooks in the language at their own expense with partial little assistance from the Tribal Research Institute (TRI) at the same time take responsibility of distributing the books to the various stakeholders (Gangmei R. 2017). The efforts put forward by the literature societies are worth appreciating, they have shown their love and concern towards their mother tongue as well as opened up opportunities for the young child to be in school, happy and learning what is relevant in the community, the value system and of course taught the love for the language. The bigger question here in this juncture is are all people in the community as well as the mass in general support the mother tongue education? What is the future? What we want to achieve through it? And more importantly the sustainability question is to be taken into consideration. The educationists want mother tongue education, many in the community wants it, few governmental provisions provided it to whatever the little extent may be, but the reality sometimes is something else⁴. Many students do not get the opportunity to learn their mother tongue at whatever the level of school education, those students whose mother tongue is taught have to make serious efforts to opt for the mother tongue paper, many a times they have to appear examination in that paper without being taught. That is the theory say something and the reality is something else. Now it's time for each one of us to look into the reality and take a serious

⁴ It is seen that many language teachers appointed through RMSA are utilised to teach other subjects as there is no facility/opportunity to teach the language in the schools they are posted.

step towards making the tribal minority children learn the worth of being a child with equal rights and privileges.

Though the state recognizes and given the rights to learn their own languages to the tribal communities, the same scene of linguistic hierarchy prevailing among the Indian languages is also visible in the state. Manipuri being the schedule language and the lingua franca of the state enjoys the highest in the hierarchical scale, English follows the next⁵, Hindi the official language of the country comes up as one of the most used language as a link language, the need probably had arisen as for the business purposes⁶ and with the migrant workers. The question of visibility of the tribal languages in the public sphere is almost nil and utility seems to be restricted to small pockets in the state. Therefore, the people in general see little prospect in being educated in the tribal language. Adding further to the problem is that the capital city and smaller towns in the district headquarters are full of English medium schools⁷ where the tribal languages have no place till they reach high school.

Attitude and Perception towards the Status of Mother Tongue

Language is a social mechanism and any attitudinal study can only make sense against its actual context. The process of language learning whether it is L1 or L2 learning can be better understood if the social dimension is included. It plays a major role in developing in the teacher and the student a set of attitudes towards the language learned. It is the background which shapes most of the teachers and students' attitude and explains their reactions and options to different aspects of education in general and to the teaching of English in particular.

Attitudes are therefore a vital force, which determines whether a learner embarks on a task at all. They determine the effort and the time the learner puts in trying to learn the language. The learner approaches the language with certain attitudes – or in other words, learning is accompanied by emotional reactions which may sometimes leads to a constellation of likes and dislikes directed towards the language in question and to all languages in general. Because of this it can be assumed that an understanding of how attitude facilitates or hinders language learning will reveal how much they can be controlled or manipulated to enable the learner to be more confident in language learning.

One of the most important component of mother tongue education is the proper curriculum and it pedagogy with perfectly train teachers in the mother tongue / multilingual education. While the language acquired as mother tongue has different condition for using it as medium of instruction or subject of instruction. Even teacher and educationist know that even the best

⁵ However, because of the opportunities and status attached in English there is a high preference of English in the educational sphere.

⁶ The market has a sizeable chunk of non-Manipuris who dominate the business of non-local products and produces.

⁷ 71.1% of the children in Manipur goes to English medium school (ASER 2011).

curriculum and most perfect syllabus will remain non-functional unless quickened into life by the right method of teaching and by the right kind of teacher, a teacher with the right kind of attitude.

The perception teachers have to their role and their contribution to the learning process, their own experience and proficiency to the mother tongue, all influence the view that teachers have. Again, language learning is not one-way process. Teacher and student develop a network of interpersonal relations that can contribute positively and meaningfully to success in language learning. A teacher is an irreplaceable element in language instruction and the centrality of his/her role in the learning process remains unchallenged. However, a teacher's view or for that matter, a teacher's attitude is not often considered a worthwhile subject of discussion. Discussion on teaching methodologies and course materials often bypass these issues. They are either considered as being too delicate, sensitive or even divisive. Yet there is undoubtedly a fairly coherent set of attitudes on the part of the teacher, which can constitute a kind of social and psychological impact on his/her students. A teacher's attitude, perception and expectation of his/her students can affect their performance immensely and can partly explain or help to determine the cause of a student's success or failure in language learning.

The process of acquiring a language involves various conditions. However, the acquisition of the L1 and L2/L3 involved different situations. The common condition for acquisition of both the L1 and L2/L3 is the learner's attitude and perception towards the language. It is the status of the mother tongue that determines the attitude and perception of the speakers and in turn the attitude and perception also determine the status of the particular language. In the case of mother tongue, tribal and minority languages suffer from negative attitude and perception about the language as absence of its representative scripts, poor scientific and technological terminologies and vocabularies and future opportunity and scope for providing job in the particular language. All these conditions and opportunities determine the attitude and perception of speakers, schools, and educational stake holders which in turn determine the status of the language.

Though the linguistic right groups advocate for equality of all the language, we still find a hierarchy of language in Indian Constitution as well as people's attitude, perception and treatment towards different languages. For example, all the languages in India are divided into different categories. First, we have seen the division of languages as 'Schedule Language' and 'Non-Schedule Language' according to Indian Constitution; second we also found it as 'Language' and 'Dialect' as per Census of India; and finally we have 'National Language' and 'Regional Language' according to official status. Such hierarchization of languages on the basis of its importance and significance has prioritized different languages unequally and emphasis is also given according to this hierarchy.

The following Table: 1, 1(A), 1 (B) & 1 (C) highlight the status and its associated perceptions and attitudes toward mother tongue and its place in formal education in Manipur.

The Data

With the intention of studying the attitude and perception of the various stake holders towards mother tongue education data was collected from 11 tribal communities of Manipur residing in Churachandpur district, Imphal west, Imphal east, Senapati district and Ukhrul districts of Manipur. The Data has been collected both from the primary sources and the secondary sources. Primary data are drawn from questionnaire administration, focus group discussions and in-depth (individual) interviews with (i) community members (ii) parents (iii) teachers (iv) students) and (v) state educational functionaries. Questionnaires constructed by using Likert's scale were administered to the four groups of people:

- Parents (48 statements)
- Community members (48 statements)
- Students (50 statements) and
- Teachers (51 statements)

In addition to the questionnaires, focus group discussion and in-depth (individual) interviews were conducted with the Educational stake holders like literature society members and state educational functionaries. The total sample size was 326 parents, 362 students, 103 teachers and 236 community members. The statement based answers were grouped into 4 issues as:

- Status of Mother tongues
- Support and promotion of Mother tongue
- Extent of use of Mother tongue (for students).

Results and Findings

1. Status of Mother Tongue: Majority of the parents, Community members and teachers agree that all the languages are equal 51.2%, 44.4%, 50.8% respectively for Parents, Community members and Teachers, while majority of the students agree with the stand (38.6%), many are undecided about the status (24.5%). The possible reason may be students are not given a proper chance to study the mother tongues and they do not see much respect being given to the mother tongues. Each category of respondents feels that bringing a proper mother tongue education will help in enhancing the status of the smaller communities. The data speaks that people are unable to exploit the provision of mother tongue education provided by the state, 62% and 33.4% of the parents and community members are not sure of the opportunity and provision of learning mother tongue in the schools. Given a chance most of the stakeholders would like their children to complete primary education in the mother tongue (61.9%, 49.9%, 47.8%, and 56.6 % of the parents, community members, teachers and students respectively), however completion of higher education in the mother tongue medium is not desired by the parents and community members(46% and 43.9%), however 71.9% of the teachers opined that higher education can also be done in mother tongues, while as many as 59.9% of the students do not opt mother tongue as a

feasible option for completion of higher education. The probable reason for this is the fast changing world, the globalised economy and the need for expansion of boundaries beyond community. (Ref. Appendix: TABLE -I).

2. Support required for Mother Tongue Education: All the stakeholders agree to the statement that mother tongues need to be promoted and supported in the community level 97.1% & 84.6%; 96.6% & 95.7%, 72.8% & 87.1% and 91.6% & 81.8% respectively for the Parents, Community members, Teachers and Students. At the same time, they all think that some support with regard to the promotion of mother tongue is required and expected both from the central and state government. It is revealed from the data that 28% of the teachers and students, 33.1% of the parents 30.3% of the community members are not aware of the policies on mother tongue education. This implies the need for spreading awareness in this regard. Nearly 90% by all the groups opined that one of the most important aspects which need serious attention in the present day is the development of appropriate technology and teaching learning material for the promotion of MTE.

(Ref. Appendix: TABLE -II)

3. Extent of Use of Mother Tongue: The survivability and sustainability question of smaller tribal languages is determined mainly by the extent of use of the language by its speakers in different domains. This also will show the path for further advancement of the language. A language shrinks when its functional load is diminished, and people do not feel any worth of the language and it remained in the status of one of the many traditions followed by the group of people. It is revealed from the data that mother tongues are still visible in the private and public domains the students/youths use their mother tongues to their grandparents, parents and to their siblings (97.2%, 97.7% and 89.9% respectively). There is no constraining in using mother tongues in public domain with the mentioned groups of people. It is only in the school and related domains. They rarely use their mother tongue with the teacher and friends (11.6% and 32.5% respectively). However, their use of mother tongue with the friend outside the school domain is more (60.5%). The data clearly shows that there is positive attitude of the use of mother tongue by the younger generation which is a healthy sign of sustainability. The reasons for which children do not use their mother tongue in school is probably because the school is an English medium school, or the teachers and classmates speak other languages. (Ref. Appendix: TABLE -III)

Conclusion

Manipur has a lot of diversity of languages. All these languages do not occupy the same status perhaps because of the number of speakers, available literary traditions and also its takers in education. Despite of unequal position of all the languages in this state, the particular attitudes and perspective of various sections of the people like youths, parents, community, teachers and government are also a vital force, which determines the status and development of the particular language in various spheres. Though all the stakeholders in general agree on the equal status of

languages, a few people disagree on this perhaps their view is influenced by the existing hierarchy of languages prevailing in India in general and Manipur in particular. It is also observed that mother tongue has more important role for primary education than higher education in the state. It shows the importance of mother tongue for completion of primary education as it reduces the dropout level and increases children’s confidence. In higher classes (secondary onwards) studying MT is not considered important except by the teachers. There is a correlation between the promotion of the mother tongue and the preservation and promotion of identity and culture.

The survival and development of any language depends upon its support from various sections of the society - the community including government and various stake holders. It is evident that, there is the need for proper policy for encouraging mother tongue education along with other L2 and L3 teaching. The understanding that any and form of language teaching-learning should serve as a resource for lifelong learning in the languages studied. The unclear linguistic policy at state and national level coupled with the socio-political and economic constrains of the community affect strongly the successful implementation of mother tongue education in the state. Today the use of mother tongue at various places and context has a complex scenario. It is not uniform always in every sphere. Mother tongue therefore has its own context of usage and importance.

It is also observed that mother tongue is frequently used in the domestic sphere and to the kinsman. Attitude of the people towards the status of mother tongues are not so much negative. It is because of their strong ethnic identity consciousness. In fact, languages play an important role for maintaining group identity and its ethnic boundary. Taking into consideration of all the benefits of mother tongue education as is evident by the researches all around and the present study shows that we need to convince people for bringing a positive attitude and perspective towards the mother tongue education.



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The data

TABLE –I: Status of the Mother tongue

No.	Status of MT	Degree of Perception and Opinion toward status of MT (Frequency in %)																			
		SDA				DA				UND				A				SA			
		Pa	C m	Te a	Stu	Pa	C m	Te a	Stu	Pa	C m	Te a	Stu	Pa	C m	Te a	Stu	Pa	C m	Te a	Stu
1.	Equality of All Language	3.3	0	2.5	1.1	6.7	16.1	8.4	12.7	15.9	11.4	27.1	24.5	51.2	44.4	50.8	38.6	22.6	24.1	11.0	22.9
2.	MT and Equal Status of All	2.4	0.4	1.6	0.0	4.6	11.0	5.0	9.9	16.5	14.8	25.4	15.4	50.3	52.5	56.0	45.3	26.0	21.1	11.0	23.7
3.	School does not provide Equal opportunity for MT	7.3	8.4	7.6	7.7	33.4	34.7	16.1	37.2	10.4	23.3	14.4	12.1	31.9	21.6	43.2	30.9	16.9	11.8	18.6	25.1
4.	No option to study MT in School	7.0	11.8	5.0	6.7	50.0	49.5	3.3	35.6	27.0	19.0	5.0	12.3	11.9	17.3	68.6	30.6	0.9	2.1	17.7	35.6
5.	MT has no opportunity to complete primary Education	6.7	14.4	8.4	9.1	37.4	39.0	18.6	39.1	30.6	25.4	17.7	17.1	18.4	13.9	42.3	22.9	6.7	7.2	12.7	33.3
6.	MT facilitate the Completion of Primary Education	6.1	0.8	9.3	2.4	3.6	17.0	22.8	7.4	28.2	32.2	20.3	53.8	39.2	40.2	37.2	23.7	22.7	9.7	10.6	22.9
7.	MT and Completion of Primary/Secondary Education	6.1	1.6	0.0	0.0	3.6	6.7	9.3	6.0	28.2	37.2	30.5	52.4	39.2	41.5	45.7	25.1	22.7	12.7	14.4	23.7
8.	MT and Completion of Higher Education	4.6	5.0	2.5	3.5	25.7	11.0	5.0	24.8	27.3	10.5	21.1	28.1	23.9	45.7	50.8	35.6	18.4	27.5	20.3	25.1

SDA- Strongly Disagree, DA –Disagree, UND-Undecided, A – Agree, SA – Strongly Agree

Source: Questionnaire Survey of Fieldwork

TABLE –II: Support required for promotion of Mother Tongue Education

No.	Support & promotion of MTE	Support & promotion of MTE (Frequency in %)																			
		SDA				DA				UND				A				SA			
		Pa	C m	Te a	Stu	Pa	C m	Te a	Stu	Pa	C m	Te a	Stu	Pa	C m	Te a	Stu	Pa	C m	Te a	Stu
1.	Promote MT at Community Level	0	0	0.0	0.0	0.9	0.8	16.1	3.0	0.9	2.5	11.0	4.6	64.7	64.4	47.4	51.6	33.4	32.2	25.4	40.6
2.	Community Support MTE	13.5	0.4	0.0	0.9	0.3	0.4	3.3	1.3	1.5	3.3	8.4	16.4	54.9	60.6	59.3	59.1	29.7	35.1	28.8	22.7
3.	Promote MT at State Level	0.6	0.0	0.8	1.1	0.3	0.8	8.4	2.2	3.6	2.5	10.1	11.3	62.2	64.4	58.4	63.9	33.1	32.2	22.0	22.5
4.	State Govt. Support MTE	5.8	1.2	0.0	12.0	3.6	4.6	9.3	14.1	15.0	18.6	16.1	11.2	45.7	58.4	49.1	54.1	29.4	17.0	25.4	8.6
5.	Better facilities by State Govt.	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.3	0.8	0.0	1.1	2.4	2.9	5.9	1.9	51.2	55.0	64.4	47.1	45.7	41.1	29.6	49.1
6.	Promote MT at National Level	9.2	0.0	1.6	18.2	12.9	2.1	5.0	12.1	14.7	4.2	25.4	40.3	46.3	61.4	47.4	19.0	16.5	32.2	20.3	10.4
7.	Central Govt. Support MTE	8.2	3.0	0.3	28.4	3.9	5.9	8.4	12.9	18.0	30.9	24.5	27.1	42.6	43.6	41.5	18.2	26.6	16.5	24.5	13.4
8.	Better facilities by Central Govt.	0	0.0	0.0	0.2	0	1.6	0.0	1.3	0	3.8	10.1	2.4	53.3	53.8	55.0	46.1	46.6	40.6	34.7	49.7
9.	Appropriate TLM for MTE	0	0.0	0.0	0.2	0	0.8	0.0	1.3	0.6	1.6	4.2	3.5	52.7	56.7	58.4	46.6	46.6	40.6	37.2	48.0
10	Appropriate Technology for MTE	0	0.0	0.0	0.2	0	0.4	0.8	12.9	0.6	0.8	8.4	6.9	53.0	50.0	56.7	64.4	46.3	49.6	33.8	44.4
11	Present MT policy of State and benefit of All the children	11.0	14.0	5.0	12.1	16.5	23.7	18.6	33.1	30.3	39.4	28.0	34.5	27.3	17.0	36.4	16.5	14.7	5.9	11.8	3.5
12	Present MT policy of Central Govt. and benefit of All the children	16.8	14.4	9.3	10.4	17.4	28.0	11.0	30.6	37.1	35.1	22.0	43.6	25.1	16.1	47.4	12.4	3.3	6.3	10.1	2.7
13	Language teacher and support of MTE at School Level	9.5	0.0	0.0	11.1	1.8	3.3	3.3	0.7	9.5	11.0	8.4	9.6	50.6	65.2	59.3	52.1	28.5	20.3	28.8	26.5
14	Language teacher and support of MTE at Higher Education	10.4	0.8	0.0	13.1	2.7	3.8	4.2	11.7	9.5	9.7	5.0	10.6	49.3	65.6	59.3	44.1	28.5	20.0	31.3	21.0
15	Language teacher and non-support of MTE at Higher	21.7	11.4	0.0	22.2	35.5	30.0	6.7	33.1	34.6	45.0	4.2	17.9	3.3	13.5	55.0	11.2	4.6	0.4	33.8	15.6

	Education																				
16	Socio-Political and Economic Constrain of MTE implementation Socio-Political and Economic Constrain of MTE implementation	4.2	0.4	0.8	2.1	3.3	5.0	2.5	23.7	9.5	6.7	16.1	14.5	49.3	66.5	57.6	42.3	33.4	21.1	22.8	18.6

SDA- Strongly Disagree, DA –Disagree, UND-Undecided, A – Agree, SA – Strongly Agree (Source: Questionnaire Survey of Fieldwork)

TABLE –III

Table 4: Extent of use of Mother Tongue as perceived by students

Sl. No	Community and Stake Holders	Degree of Perception and Opinion toward MT usage (frequency in %)				
		SDA	DA	UND	A	SA
1.	Use MT with the grand-parents	0.0	1.3	1.3	37.8	59.3
2.	Use MT with the parents	0.0	1.9	0.5	45.3	52.2
3.	Use MT with the siblings	0.0	8.0	3.0	39.5	49.4
4.	Use MT to Talk to parents in Public Places	0.0	2.4	1.1	42.2	54.1
5.	Use MT to talk to the Siblings at the Public Places	3.3	4.4	1.6	41.4	49.1
6.	Use MT to talk to the teachers in the School	26.7	52.4	9.1	11.0	0.5
7.	Use MT to talk to the teachers in Public Places	19.0	29.0	13.5	30.3	8.2
8.	Use MT to talk to friends in the School	17.6	38.6	10.7	29.5	3.0
9.	Use MT to talk to friends outside the School	4.4	24.3	9.6	42.8	18.7