

# Primary Education in Kashmir: The Critical Role of the Mother Tongue

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**Abstract**—This research paper explores the critical role of the mother tongue in primary education in Kashmir, emphasizing its impact on young learners' cognitive development, language acquisition, and overall academic success. In Kashmir, where Kashmiri is widely spoken alongside other languages, the use of the mother tongue in early education remains a topic of great importance. The study examines how mother-tongue instruction can facilitate better comprehension, foster cultural identity, and create a more inclusive and engaging learning environment. Through qualitative and quantitative methods, including interviews with educators, surveys with parents, and classroom observations, the research highlights the advantages of teaching in Kashmiri, particularly in terms of literacy skills, emotional connection to learning, and self-confidence among students. The paper also delves into the challenges faced by educators and students, such as the shift to non-native languages like Urdu and English, which may hinder learning in the early stages of schooling. Moreover, it discusses the implications for educational policy, advocating for a balanced approach that incorporates the mother tongue in primary education to improve learning outcomes. The findings underscore the necessity of nurturing linguistic diversity and aligning education with the cultural and linguistic realities of the region, thereby strengthening the overall educational framework in Kashmir.

**Keywords:** Mother Tongue, Cognitive Development, Language Acquisition, Academic Kashmiri Language, Literacy Skills, Cultural Identity, Educational Policy

## I. INTRODUCTION

Every nation considers it a moral obligation to protect its culture by fostering and conserving its vernacular. It is a natural phenomenon that everyone loves his birthplace and mother tongue. Jammu and Kashmir is a territory that is located in the Himalayan region and is well-known for its magnificent scenery, vibrant culture, and a wide variety of languages. Kashmiri is one of the oldest languages. A voyage that saw it emerge, spread, improve, and ultimately flourishes. The irony is that a language with such a proud history is destroyed by its own people. Kashmir was previously regarded as the centre of wisdom, and people from other areas of other countries used to bend their heads in respect for it. Reaching on the height was made possible by educational and spiritual progress. Indeed, credit goes to the wisdom of the Kashmiri language, which has developed to prominence. Languages represent culture, history, and identity in addition to being a tools for communication. The Kashmiri language has a great history of rich culture and customs and is in no way inferior to other languages. Like various other languages, Kashmiri can accommodate the vocabulary of other vernaculars and has been enriched with a combination of Arabic, Persian, and Sanskrit linguistic components. School curriculum developers and implementers have long taken the argument over the medium of instruction seriously. It is thought that in order to succeed academically, mother tongue promotion is necessary because language proficiency is linked to academic success. The mother tongue is the language that every person speaks at home. It comes from his or her parents. A mother tongue is a language that a child speaks fluently before attending school. The child should be able to communicate confidently in all aspects of their life, regardless of whether both parents speak the same language. It is the language that a child first learns from either their mother or father. In India and many other Asian countries, women often adopt their spouse's language and way of life, which allows their children to learn the father's language. In certain situations where the mother and father have different communication backgrounds, they can communicate with their children in a third language. Children find it quite easy to learn in their mother tongue, but learning a foreign language takes more time, which means they have less time for play and other activities. Eventually, it spontaneously ruins the children's personalities. The mother tongue can be removed from the classroom but not from the students' mind, researchers emphasized that instruction must be provided in their mother tongue. When trying to learn a second language, mother tongue is very beneficial because it offers direction and support. Since children imagine and think in their mother tongue, which is the main instrument and foundation of people's traditions and education, teaching in their mother tongue is therefore necessary and crucial.

## II. BACKGROUND OF MOTHER TONGUE INSTRUCTIONS

Kashmiri, which belongs to the Dardic subgroup of the Indo-Aryan language family, is deeply rooted in the hearts and minds of the Kashmiri people. Kashmiri, a language derived from ancient Sanskrit, is mostly spoken by the Kashmiri Pandit minority and the region's Muslim population. The language has a unique script known as Sharada, which was widely used in the past but is now primarily assigned to religious writings. The idea of providing instruction to a child in their mother tongue during their childhood is not new. It can help a school going child to better understand what they have been taught in their institution. According to Article 350 A of the Indian Constitution, states and local authorities must provide suitable facilities for linguistic minority groups to receive education in their home tongue. The Kothari Commission (1964–66) also recommended that for the first two years, books and the medium of teaching in tribal regions be in the native tribal language. In a similar vein, the Right to Education Act of 2009 endorses the idea of teaching mother tongue instruction on schools. Additionally, UNESCO encourages mother tongue teaching in the early years of education. The National Education Policy of 2020 also emphasizes the vital importance of teaching children in their mother tongue till the age of eight. Furthermore, a large number of researcher backs up the idea that teaching a kid in their mother tongue throughout the early years of education is better for them than teaching them any other language.

### **III. PREPARING TEXT BOOKS**

The provision of mother language instruction for elementary school will also decentralize the textbook-writing process, bringing the material closer to the students and improving their comprehension of the curriculum, so promoting mechanical learning. Textbooks should be written in Kashmiri if Kashmiri is to be used as the medium of teaching. Thus, the school education department is also responsible for designating a committee to be in charge of creating the textbooks for pupils in grade V. The strategy aims to conserve India's cultural and linguistic variety by include local content in textbooks, such as Kashmiri stories, history, culture, music, and folktales etc. Additionally, this approach requires authors to be fully proficient in all aspects of the Kashmiri language. This will help the school going children to learn knowledge in their mother tongue.

### **IV. DESIGN THE CURRICULUM**

It is a method for teachers to arrange lessons. When instructors create a curriculum, they specify what will be done, who will execute it, and the schedule to be followed. Every curriculum is created by teachers with a specific educational goal in mind. The final objective is to enhance student learning. Designing a curriculum using Kashmiri as a medium of teaching involves addressing concerns such as curriculum content, syllabus, instructional materials, and technical assistance.

### **V. TRANSLATION OF TEXTBOOKS**

It is a significant problem for the government to give these textbooks in Kashmiri as students are expected to acquire not only the local cultural component but also other disciplines like logic, science, mathematics, and history etc. Therefore, the current textbooks must be translated into Kashmiri before this strategy is implemented at the grassroots level. Translation is not an easy task. It is a challenging academic task, and the translator must be fluent in both the source and destination languages. Translating academic texts requires subject-matter expertise as well. Therefore, the translator must be fluent in both languages and possess subject-matter expertise in order to translate science, math, and other textbooks into Kashmiri language.

### **VI. ENGLISH LANGUAGE VS MOTHER TONGUE INSTRUCTIONS**

We can't deny with the significance of the English language in today's revolutionary globe English provides new opportunities for individuals in India, especially in Kashmir However, learning English at the expense of one's cultural heritage is concerning as one's mother language defines one's identity and passes on one's culture from one generation to the next. English-medium education is a major tragedy in India's education system today, particularly in Kashmir, where English has become both a dream and a source of sorrow for millions of people. The incapacity to learn in English not as a language, but as a medium of teaching has reduced learners' productivity and results. Mother tongue is important in shaping people's thoughts and feelings, which contributes to a child's overall development and allows the learner to express him/her more clearly. Educating children in their mother tongue fosters strong home-school collaboration in their learning. Parents will be able to engage in their child's education, making the children's learning experience more healthy.

### **VII. GOVERNMENT AND PRIVATE SCHOOL ACCEPTANCE**

The mismatch between home and school languages has long had a negative influence on education systems across the world. Language barriers between home and school have long had a negative effect on educational institutions worldwide.

Considering the present state of the Kashmiri language in the Kashmir Valley, several private schools there forbid their pupils from speaking Kashmiri, and the younger generation is quickly moving toward Urdu and English. “Convincing such institutions to use Kashmiri as the primary language of instruction will be extremely difficult for the government. Implementing the mother tongue in education confronts problems such as a scarcity of skilled instructors fluent in regional languages and a lack of standardized curricula. However, the benefits are tremendous, including increased student engagement, cognitive growth, cultural heritage preservation, improved communication skills, and greater teacher-student connections.

## **VIII. RECRUITMENT FOR TEACHERS**

Teachers serve as role models for pupils and must possess extensive knowledge and expertise in their subject matter to ensure successful teaching and learning. The government must create a distinct recruitment policy to find teachers who can teach all four skills in Kashmiri as the medium of instruction. This is because using Kashmiri as the medium of instruction requires that the teachers be proficient in all four Kashmiri language skills. The recruitment of thousands of primary-level teachers in Kashmir raises the question of where they will go as general line instructors. Professional development for existing instructors is the only answer to this dilemma. Teacher training institutes in Kashmir Valley, such as District Institutes of Education and Training and the State Council of Educational Research and Training, provide crash courses to help teachers develop all four skills in Kashmiri. It would take years for professional development institutes to provide their staff with functioning knowledge of Kashmiri language.

## **IX. PARENTS APPROVAL**

The teaching and learning process involves three key stakeholders: schools, parents, and students. Each of these three is essential to the process’s efficient operation. In Kashmir, the majority of parents want their children to speak English starting in first grade and choose English-medium schools over government ones so that their children may fully master all four English language skills. It will be challenging for the government to persuade parents and pupils to get education in Kashmiri, rather than English. Governments and cultural organizations should organize seminars, workshops, conferences, and interactive games in Kashmiri to educate students and parents about the importance of their mother tongue and foster a positive attitude towards it.

## **X. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The researcher collected data from young learners, their teachers, and parents in selected schools located in underprivileged areas such as the districts of Kupwara and Baramulla to assess their comfort levels with the mother tongue and other language. The study also assessed the participants’ comprehension levels across various subjects using different mediums of instruction, namely the mother tongue, English or other language. The irony is that Kashmiris are disappointingly unsupportive of this language. In the modern era, we have made a poor contribution to the enrichment of our language. While we are proudly teaching our younger generation other languages like English and Urdu, the language that has given us identity is becoming distanced in our families. The process of introducing new languages was started for social recognition and pursued carelessly. Some people even experience identity crises. We must educate and raise the awareness of our younger generation by setting an example in order to maintain our social, cultural, and moral values. Using one’s mother tongue as a medium of instruction can preserve cultural and linguistic identity, as well as provide additional benefits. This study supports the idea that students acquire new ideas more readily and that there are numerous additional cognitive advantages for children. The New Education Policy 2020 has strongly argued that in order to accomplish the intended goals, mother tongue instruction should be used. It is the moral and legal obligation of educators at all levels to carry out their teaching in their mother tongue. To preserve the centuries-old Kashmiri civilization, we must protect the Kashmiri language and make it a compulsory subject to be taught in schools up to the 10th grade, while also keeping it as one of the streams that students can choose from up to the 12th grade in higher secondary schools. There is an urgent need to use Kashmiri in our daily lives, not only to make it more relevant, but also to encourage children and young people to read and write.

## **XI. CONCLUSION**

Nowadays, the majority of teachers are confused about whether to prioritize the native language or the chosen language in a given teaching scenario, as well as whether to utilize a national language or a native language. Any nation’s identity is embodied in its mother tongue. The Kashmiri language, however, is not in danger of extinction as long as it is spoken. The NEP 2020 recommends using Kashmiri, the mother tongue of the majority of people in Jammu and Kashmir, as a medium of

instruction up to 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Implementing this policy will protect Kashmiris' cultural and linguistic identities. Implementing this policy in Jammu and Kashmir will take years due to challenges in the school education department, including designing a new curriculum, arranging textbooks, translating books into Kashmiri, finding subject-specific teachers, professional development for teachers, government support, funding, approval of schools, and changing the system. Although the Government of Jammu and Kashmir may take years to implement this policy, mother tongue instruction will benefit Kashmiri students and preserve the Kashmiri language.

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