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CHAPTER I

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1.1. Introduction

Language was the first, and is still, the most important of all the creations and acquisition of man. Of all the activities which we learn as children, language has been among the first and foremost. More than that, language also plays an important part in our acquisition of knowledge and other skills. Without language, the development and cultivation of mental faculties and the accumulation of knowledge, which has been responsible for the immense material progress which we see around us, would not have been possible. Language assumes such an important role in man's life that it has been described as "the basic foundation of all human co-operation, without which no civilization is possible".

1.2. Nature of the Language

The traditional view of the nature of language was that it was an innate and instinctive or natural activity. It was even accepted by the men of old days, as a special gift to man from God. But, all these are no longer accepted by the linguists of today. They claim that language is "a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols". It is this non-instinctive nature of language which distinguishes it from other sounds. According to Sapir, "sounds are differentiated products of the vocal behaviour which is associated with the larynx of the higher mammals". Though the origin of these sound symbols is associated with the larynx, it is the tongue which gives them the subtle inflexions that are important in any spoken language. It is these subtle inflectional changes which give emotional undertones to the spoken word, thereby making the tongue indispensable. This indispensability of the tongue could be clearly seen from the common usage of the term 'tongue' to denote language.
The history of any language in the world will show that, at some advanced stage of that language, a written form, closely connected to and imitative of the spoken form has developed. This has been made possible by the development of alphabets and scripts representing specific sounds, and the patterned use of such alphabets eventually led to the formation of words, phrases and sentences. It is this written form of the language that preserves, in the form of literature, the purest form of that language, because literature is, and has been, mostly the activity of learned people. When literary works were not developed, the language has remained stagnant and some of them have gradually disappeared.

When people speaking different languages come into contact with one another, there is linguistic interaction leading to one influencing the other. This could be responsible for a language to lose its purity. When a language ceases to be a vehicle in the daily activities of a people, and lives only in the literary works, it becomes a 'dead language'.

1.3. Importance of Language

Language has always been of importance in the life of man. It is so involved in our lives that there is not a single aspect of life which is not permeated by language.

It is generally accepted that the primary function of a language is that of communication. In this respect, language functions by communicating one's thoughts, intentions and expectations to others, and vice versa. Thereby, a chain of communication, which results in bringing people together and closer, is created. Without language, social intercourse, which makes man a social animal, is not possible. Language acts as a socializing force, and, in that respect, it integrates individuals. It is also a potent factor in the growth of individuality.

Another importance of language is its cultural role. The history of any language is invariably the history of the cultural life of the people speaking that
language. Language, as a product of the activity of all members of a 'linguistic society', is the basis of the culture of such societies. All the thoughts and creations, in the arts and sciences, of which a nation might be justly proud, are expressed and developed through language. Language not only defines and expresses a culture, it also transmits it. That is why knowledge of language, not merely one's own, but those of other people also, is considered to be of vital importance in cultural developments and contacts.

Language also has an important place in the education of an individual. The process of education is carried on mostly by means of either spoken or written language. As a medium, language not only embodies the information which is transmitted to the student, but also provides him with the organising patterns necessary to remember, understand and apply what he learns. Here language functions as the instrument of education. In addition language serves as a subject of study in its own right.

It is because of these functions especially the cultural and educational ones, that language becomes the centre of controversies in the lives of individuals and nations.

1.4. Type of Language

Language has an important place in education. Education is imparted mostly by means of either spoken or written language. It is impossible to think of any field of knowledge, which could be taught without a medium. As a medium, language embodies the information that is transmitted to the student, while, at the same time, providing organising patterns that are necessary for the student to remember, understand and apply what he learns. In this sense, language functions as an instrument of education. Language also serves as a subject of study in its own right. In such contexts, the language or languages learnt are classified as mother tongue and foreign languages. The term mother tongue is used to indicate the home language of the child i.e. the language spoken by the
child in its home surroundings. It is learnt as a means of self-expressions and understanding, while foreign languages are studied as means of international communication, acquisition of additional or advanced knowledge and their cultural values.

1.5. Language and Thought

What is the connection between thought and language? Certainly language is important in the development of thinking. Language and thought are not the same. Language is not essential to the growth of thought but is certainly important in relation to it. This language which serves thought, develops in the communicative relationship of children. All the high thoughts and creations in the arts and sciences of which a nation might be justly proud are expressed and developed through language.

It is generally accepted that mother tongue is the natural language of thought for the child and eminently suited for concept formation. Mother tongue is the only tool for logical thoughts and expressions while any language may be the language of added comprehension. The language with which one lives and grows is best suited to achieving originality in thoughts.

1.6. Meaning of Mother Tongue

What do we mean by "mother tongue?" Traditionally, the language first learnt has been called the mother tongue. All other languages are called second, third languages or foreign language. Some scholars have accepted a language learnt without formal training as the mother tongue.

The confusion relating to mother tongue can be seen from the instructions given in successive census of India. In the census of 1872 there was no reference to mother tongue. In the 1881 census, mother tongue was defined as 'the language spoken by the individual from the cradle'. In the 1891 census, the term was changed into 'Parents tongue' which was defined to mean the language
spoken by the parents of the individuals. In the 1901 census, 'Parents tongue' was replaced by 'Language ordinarily spoken in the household'. According to the instruction given in the 1961 census, mother tongue is 'the language spoken in the childhood by person's mother; if the mother died in infancy ' the language mostly spoken in the person's home in childhood; in the case of infants and deaf / mutes, 'the language spoken by the mother'.

But as regards definition of mother tongue, certain problems have been posed. In multilingual context, the socialization of a child may involve multiple languages. For instance, an Oriya boy marrying a Tamil girl, speaking mostly English at home and employing Hindustan Ayah could bring up a child who would be using four languages before formal training. Under these circumstances, it would be erroneous to treat one of them with precedence over other in a ranking scale. There are instances of Indian girls marrying western boys when either English or French becomes the communication language among the parents and the child grows up with that language rather than the language of the mother.

In respect of European countries, ideas about mother tongue appeared as follows: In the 1923 census it was meant to be 'thinking language'. In 1934 as 'the language of the cultural circle': In 1951 as 'the language of every day use' and in 1961 as 'the language of their homes'. Webster's Third New International Dictionary defines mother tongue as 'the language of one's mother; the language naturally acquired in infancy and childhood; one's first language.

Though many views have been put forward about the mother tongue, in brief it can be explained as follows:

Mother tongue is such a language with which one is emotionally identified. It is the language through which the child recognizes and organizes his experience and environment around him. It is the language used to express one's basic needs, ideas, thoughts, joys, sorrows and other feelings.
1.7. The Nature and Functions of Mother Tongue

The mother tongue is the means by which the child adjusts himself to the life and culture of his social group. It is the most effective tool for the externalization of creative forces. Sociologically, it is a means of identification among the members of the community to which he belongs. On psychological grounds, mother tongue is a system of meaningful signs that work automatically in the child's mind towards expressions and understanding. On educational grounds, the child learns more quickly through the mother tongue than through an unfamiliar linguistic medium. It is the language used to express one's basic needs, ideas, joys, sorrows and other feelings. This is the language which if one gives up, one may remain intellectually alive but emotionally sterile. The mother tongue is the language of creativity. Therefore it should be given its rightful place. It is not merely a language like any other language because it is the foundation of one's personality. It is even said that a man who forgets his mother tongue forgets himself.

1.8. Mother Tongue in Education – Importance and Advantages

1.8.1. Importance

All the educationists and philosophers agree and there are no two opinions about the fact that a child learns the most and in the easiest way in his own mother tongue. Most educators agree that the first twelve years in a child's life are the most important. During this period, child's attitude and aptitude are developed. Hence, during that time the physical as well as emotional needs of the child require intelligent care. The mother tongue becomes the ideal medium during this period, because it is as natural to him as the mother's milk, and children are able to explore their own natural environment better in their own native tongue. In addition, if the foundation for the future development of the child is laid in his own mother tongue, the child will be able to buildup on it in later years even in another language. It is also generally accepted on pedagogical grounds that the mother tongue is best suited as the medium of instruction. It is
the natural language of thought for the child and highly suited for concept formation, while any language may be the language of added comprehension. Only the language with which one lives and grows is best suited to achieve originality in thought and expression.

A meeting of United Nation's experts has shown that the mother tongue is the best medium for teaching a child. The emphasis on mother tongue education is not merely for educational growth and achievements, but also for national reconstruction and development. This is evident from the report on mother tongue education by UNESCO in 1997 which considered mother tongue as "the key to success in education, as the best first entry into education, the best instrument of maintaining the culture of individual groups, and the participation in national reconstruction and development. It is also a powerful instrument in the fight against illiteracy and ignorance, discrimination and poverty. This is the best way, in fact the only way, to make education available in the most natural way for all".

Learning the mother tongue and learning through the mother tongue are the process of learning to mean - it means learning a multifunctional and multistratal semiotic system. It means developing the ability to play a variety of roles in the socio-cultural complex. The lesson in the mother tongue is not merely one occasion for the inculcation of knowledge; it is part of the child's intimation into the life of man. Training in the use of the mother tongue - the tongue in which a child thinks and dreams, becomes the first essential of schooling and the first instrument of human culture. It is therefore of great importance for our pupils to get a firm foundation in their mother tongue, for at the same time we are giving them a firm footing in their intellectual life. All the virtues that are necessary for a good citizen, clear thinking, clear expression, sincerity of thoughts, feeling and action fullness of emotional and creative life can be properly cultivated and
developed only if sufficient attention is paid to the foundation of emotional and intellectual life by the mother tongue.

If children learn through their mother tongue, it is easy. But when they learn in a foreign language, it takes more time and, therefore, lesser time is left for their play and other activities. This naturally hampers the personality of the children. Gerardo Wipio Deicat, a Peruvian educator states that "those who teach in a language other than that of the child in the schools are violating principles of good pedagogy and are guilty of cultural imposition. This type of education has been the cause of native children dropping out of school and experiencing psychological trauma, resulting in their failure to learn to read and write". Therefore teaching through the mother tongue and teaching of the mother tongue is important because the growth of our people depends on it.

1.8.2. Advantages

The arguments for the mother tongue bring forth the following advantages in studying through the mother tongue:

1. Gain knowledge in a natural manner
2. Learn quickly
3. Understand fully
4. Improve self-respect
5. Grasp well whatever is learnt
6. Learn with ease
7. Understand correctly
8. Instead of spending time in learning a language, the time will be better utilized for learning the subject matter
9. Relationship between the school and home will be strengthened, and
10. Even those who are unable to learn a foreign language may gain higher education through this.
1.9. Aspects to be considered in choosing the Medium of Instruction

If a medium of instruction is a tool, a vehicle of growth in knowledge, abilities, skills, interests and attitudes - albeit a tool of learning, the question of the suitability of a medium of instruction should be decided not on the basis of cultural, political or economic consideration, but on the consideration of its effectiveness as a tool of learning.

A volume of literature on experiments and researches by psychologists, linguists and neurologists in the relation between language and learning process has shown the right decision regarding the aspects to be considered in choosing the suitable medium of instruction. They are as follows;

1. Learning takes place with maximum effectiveness when it is inducted through the language most understood by the learner.
2. Learning is effective in proportion to the learner's competency on the language in which the sources of learning are available.
3. Learning conducted through a particular language can be effective only to the extent to which that language is a competent instrument for the communication of the contents of learning

The implications of these principles of learning are clear. The center of all consideration is the student, and the basic issue is what language is best understood by the learners? If it is mother tongue, then the medium of instruction should be the mother tongue of the student or if it is English or any other foreign language, the medium of instruction should be English or other foreign language.

The three principles of learning enjoin that the mother tongue of the student should be the medium of instruction so that maximum effective learning can take place. But it is true that in the situation as it is today in India and Sri Lanka, English language has advantages over the mother tongues of those countries as the medium of instruction in higher education, because it has more
sources of learning. But more significant is the fact that learning through the mother tongue of the student is more likely to have maximum effectiveness.

Further consideration on this issue reveals that the choice of the medium of instruction is justified not so much by cultural or political sentiments but by the very important academic consideration of facilitating (grasp) and understanding of the subject matter. Further, the University elites will be unable to make their maximum possible contribution to the advancement of learning generally, and science and technology in particular, unless this is a continuous means of communication in the mother tongue between the masses, and University dons.

1.10. Multilingualism – Introduction

Multilingualism could be designed as a phenomenon prevailing in societies where two or more languages are in use for public purposes. Though the term 'bilingualism' could be used to indicate a society in which two languages are used, here it will include that also in this classification as multilingual societies. According to William A. Stawart multilingualism could be designed as a phenomenon prevailing in societies when two or more languages are in use for public purposes.

1.11. Multilingualism - Nature and Problem

It is essential to specify the usage of more than one language for 'Public Purposes', because it is there that problems crop up. If it is only for personal purposes, such as reading for pleasure or in family communication, there need not be any effect in community life.

An important factor of multilingualism is the function of each language as means of communication to some context or other, within the nation. Different languages may perform different functions. On the other hand, there could be conflicts of function in the sense that more than one language may perform the same function. In such circumstances, speakers of one language try to obtain a
position of dominance for their own language, which attempt might be resented and resisted by other language groups.

Multilingualism becomes a problem when there are contradicting claims for superiority among the languages. One or more of those languages might dominate over the others. Indications of such dominance have been categorised into three:

(1) Numerical superiority - when one language dominates over others if it is spoken by more than half the population of the country.

(2) The extent to which a particular language is learned by native speakers of other language in the country.

(3) The use of one of the languages of the country for national purposes such as publication of official texts of laws, medium of education in state schools and military communication.

Where there is complete agreement among these indicators, the dominance of that particular language or languages is deemed to be full. When there is no agreement among the said indicators, tensions and problems develop.

Multilingualism assumes significance in countries which gain independence after a period of colonial rule. When the country was under the colonial rule, all the local languages would have been secondary to the colonial language. But, in an independent country the elevation of one or more of the local languages to a position of dominance over the others might lead to national strife.

Multilingualism also becomes a handicap and a problem in a developing country faced with the task of spreading literacy among its people. The rapid
spread of literacy among the masses can take place effectively only through the media of all the local languages. This would entail the encouragement and development of all the vernaculars. On the other hand, it could be argued that the promotion of new technologies and a national culture would require the use of a single common language. This is a dilemma which every multilingual nation has to face at some stage of its growth.

Multilingual governments, faced with such problems arising from multilingualism, have adopted measures to deal with them. Such measures are apparently aimed at bringing about unity of languages as a force towards cooperation and cohesion. In some contexts, linguistic groups are not prepared to accept those solutions. They tend to offer resistance to measures adopted by the government, and continue to put toward alternate demands of their own. Under such conditions, the success or failure of the policies formulated by the government depends on the nature and extent of the resistance of the respective language groups. The causes for continued resistance from linguistic minorities, and the problems that cropped up in the course of attempted 'solutions' to linguistic troubles, are topics of interest all over the world.

1.12. The Need for the Mother Tongue in Education in Multilingual Societies

One of the needs is the right of each individual to education, Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations Organisation, lays down that "Everyone has the right to education" which "shall be directed to the full development of the human personality". An individual benefits from the development of his faculties, and all other chances which enhance his chances of participating in the life and culture of his nation and the world. Such opportunities not only enrich the individual in an intellectual sphere, but also benefit him materially. Apart from its instrumental value in imparting knowledge, skills and changed attitudes, the educational process also has a practical value in that it gives individuals a chance to increase their incomes and
improve their standards of living. If it is to be of use in these respects, education should be easily accessible to the average man. The easiest way of ensuring this is to use a language of the mass as the medium of education. This consideration has to be reconciled with that of "the adequacy of the indigenous languages for transmitting knowledge relevant to this century", and the availability of teachers and facilities for teaching in the chosen language or languages.

Above all, it is the student and the effects on him, and the price he has to pay in terms of effort and achievement, which are important in deliberations on the language of education. Whatever criterion is used, language is just a means to an end and not an end by itself. The human being is the only thing which could be considered an end in itself. Hence, the interests of the child has to be put above all other issues. If it is accepted that the aim of education is to equip man to develop his creative faculties, in a way which enables him to play his part in building the society in which he lives, as well as develop his own personality, every effort should be made to ensure that knowledge and action go hand in hand during the process of education. In fact, the one and only way to assure this is to make education available in the most natural way and that is to impart education through the mother tongue.

The educational grounds for the need for the mother tongue were elaborated further:

1) The children understand it best.

2) The mother tongue in school will make the gap between the home and the school as small as possible. The entire school life of the child differs from his life at home. He is in a new environment and is subjected to new behaviour, new ideas etc. A new language will increase the burden and could make it difficult for him to adjust.
3) New information through a new language will be a double burden

4) There is better understanding between school and home. The child can express and apply at home what he learns at school; the parents can understand the problems of the school and can even help in the education of a child.

Further, children who are educated through a foreign language run the risk of having split minds. When they enter school, the pupils would have acquired proficiency in their mother tongue and built up a vocabulary covering most of the objects around them. At school they are expected to superimpose on this basis, a language of ideas and abstract relations. The outcome is the splitting of their minds into two water-tight compartments, one for ordinary things and actions expressed in their mother tongue, and another for things connected with school subjects and the world of ideas expressed in a foreign language. As a result, they are unable to speak about their home affairs in the school language and about subjects learned in their mother tongue.

Such needs have led to the conclusion that a child's mother tongue is the natural medium of his entire education and that all studies should centre around the mother tongue.

1.13. The Need of a Second Language – Link Language in a Multilingual Setting

In a multilingual society, an individual cannot do without another language in addition to his own. The community into which he is born may be using different languages for different purposes. In this situation, if the individual is to succeed in full communication within the community itself, he will need a link language. Therefore study of a second language, as a link language, is a step towards material progress for the individual. It is essential for the complete education of the individual. The teaching of a second language, mostly one of the advanced languages like English, French, German or Russian is a remarkable
feature in the educational systems of all the advanced countries and developing countries. Such knowledge is needed in order to have access to world history, news, art, science and technology.

The knowledge of a world language promotes understanding between nations, increases international contact and sympathy, and allows mutual appreciation. Normally Asian and African countries are newly independent nations and they are multilingual countries also. Hence communication among the multilingual people is essential. Therefore, learning a common link language like English or Spanish or French as the second language can be easy and it may help to avoid any conflicts. The countries where two or more languages co-exist and if they are given official recognition, there is an urgent need for effective communication and cohesion among the various groups. Such cohesion may depend on the effective crossing of language barriers of the entire population. This is perhaps the only way by which the integration of society, which is otherwise kept apart by differences of various types and magnitudes, could be achieved. Thus a link language serves as an instrument of integration.


Generally Higher Education is viewed as University Education. Being something great and occupying a high position, higher education is considered to be an education with higher ideas, aims and duties. Today, when one speaks of higher education, there is a tendency to connect it with University Education. The aims of education and their practical applications become complete in the University. The University educational philosophy determines the nature of educational activities.

1.15. University - Aims and Scopes

The Latin word 'Universitas' used for a 'society of the learned' in the late 14th century, was also generally used for groups of the learned. It is this word which later in English came to be used as 'University'.
It is said that a University is a great power that safeguards knowledge of all kinds, sciences, honesty, discipline, research, discovery experimentation and thought. The University is a living organization. It should be concerned about the country's developments and needs. It should be society centred. James A. Burkins has put forward the aims of the University as follows.

1) Search for new knowledge - Research
2) Spreading of knowledge - Teaching
3) Use of knowledge - Social service

These are the aims of a modern University. Further, a University includes one country and the world as a whole. It is also expected to help in the growth of brotherhood. There's only one race in the University and that is the human race. The University was also expected to help them to increase their earning capacity and creativity. They should also take into consideration that all the people should be given equal opportunities. Justice in education means helping an individual to bring out his capabilities and talents by giving him a fair and equal opportunity. As such, each talented member of the society should be given the opportunity to enter the University.

Knowledge is something that is always growing and changing. When we say Learning is 'in search of', it is not connected with what is already known. This new mental attitude towards knowledge and learning will keep on changing in this modern world. A student should be prepared in such a way that he should be able to go in search of knowledge to meet the needs, to teach and to turn this knowledge in the direction of man and society in order to serve them.

On the whole, the aims of the University Education are in accordance with those stated above. Still, the aims of University and colleges vary from country to
country depending on their needs. In that respect, in India, Sri Lanka and other Asian countries, the aims of university education can be stated as follows:

1. Impressing upon the minds of the students the basic principles of mankind and developing them, developing the skills of choosing the right plan of alternate principles.

2. Preserve and cultivate the hereditary culture and interning it with the salient features of other cultures.

3. Enriching the national language, communicating in it and utilizing it for national progress and unity.

4. Developing the personality of the students.

5. Help the advancement of science and technology and utilizing those skills for the progress of the country and to find solutions to national problems.

6. To contribute their share towards educational reforms and thereby serve the country

Further

(i) Higher education should play an important role in the efforts to develop the country and its regions.

(ii) Higher educational institutions should act as a bridge between science and technology and the needs of the people.

1.16. Mother Tongue in Education/Higher Education in Various Countries

According to the Erstwhile Russian constitution, all nationalities have the right to use their own language both for official use and in the schools. Korea has been under the domination of Japan for a much longer time. After becoming independent, both North Korea and South Korea have completely thrown off the Japanese language and now the entire education is done in their own Korean language. Bulgaria was under Turkish rule for a very long time. After
Independence, the Bulgarians have completely washed off any sign of Turkish domination in their culture. Japan, China, France, Germany, Switzerland and all other European countries do not encourage their children to learn through English or any other foreign language. They learn through their own language and they take pride in their own language. The necessity to teach the youngsters in their mother tongue has been realized in the USA and an act was passed in 1967 providing for bilingual education. By this Act, students of Spanish origin are taught Spanish as the first language. In all developed countries - U.S.A., Russia, Japan, China, Germany, France, Finland etc, the education of a child is in his mother tongue. Even in Israel, which was founded in 1948 Hebrew language has been the medium of instruction from pre-primary to the University.

Not only that, experiments in Southern Mexico, have shown that children read better, when first exposed to read in their native Indian language. Similar studies of Spanish children in Newyork show that those who were taught science in their mother tongue performed better. In China, the working group on Medium of Instruction jointly formed by the Board of Education and the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research conducted an opinion survey on the MOI policy in 1999 to gauge the views of secondary school principals, teachers, students and parents. The findings revealed that mother-tongue teaching enabled classroom teaching to be more versatile and made it easier for teacher - student relationship to make classroom discussions more animated.

In African countries like Ghana, Nigeria and Sieira Leone, though English is still in use, learning through mother tongue has become more popular today.

Therefore generally, in countries which are considered developed, the entire education of a child is done in his mother tongue. United States of America, Germany, France, Russia and Asian countries like Japan, China are some of the examples. In the above countries, it is through the mother tongue that great feats of development have taken place in science and technology.
Nowadays, not only developed countries but also the developing countries like Asian and African countries use the mother tongue as a medium of instruction of the child’s entire education upto the secondary level or try to introduce mother tongue as a medium of instruction in education.

1.17. Various Views on Mother Tongue as the Medium of Instruction in Education / Higher Education

Here the arguments for and against the importance of mother tongue, as the medium of education / higher education are mentioned.

1.17.1 Views for the Mother Tongue Education

1.17.1.1 Views of Indian Nationals

1) Amarnath Jha. D. (Educationist)

The unnatural system under which we lecture in bad English must be put away if the Indian Universities have not contributed more materially to the advancement of knowledge. To a large extent the responsibility for that must be traced to the circumstances, that education is imparted through exceedingly difficult foreign languages.

2) Arivu Nambi (Educationist)

If a Nation does not cherish and protect its own language it means that it has lost its integrity/respect. The colleges and universities where mother tongue Tamil is the medium of instruction provide a correct background for a Tamil student to gain wide knowledge in various fields of study. When there are suitable words in Tamil, if we use words from foreign languages without using the suitable words we have in Tamil, the mother tongue (Tamil) loses its qualities by infiltration.

3) Bhatnayak (Educationist)

One single cause of our dismal educational failure is our refusal to let these millions of students use their own language for their education. We
originally overlook the whole psychological harm we are doing to our disadvantaged millions by imposing on them both a language and a language style not their own and thereby violating their personal and psychic identity. I am making a passionate plea for imparting education in all three levels - primary, secondary, tertiary through the mother tongue.

4) Desai, A. R. – (Sociologist)

It is generally accepted on sound pedagogical grounds, that the mother tongue is best suited as the medium of instruction. It is the natural language of thought for the child and eminently suited for concept formation. While any language may be the language of added comprehension, only the language with which one lives and grows is best suited in achieving originality in thought and expression. If a language has not been exploited for expressing certain abstruse concepts, it is due to no inherent defect in that language. Language can only be enriched through use, and so the argument that a language cannot be used because it is not rich, is putting the cart before the horse.

5) Gajendragadker, P. B. (Justice)

I wish to reiterate that the universities would be adopting the regional medium up to the first degree course mainly on the ground that such adoption would help to improve the quality of education and would receive better response from students. This course is adopted not with a view to make education easier or cheaper in quality, but, on the contrary, to make it better in every way.

6) Jawaharlal Nehru (Former Prime Minister of India)

Students should learn only through their respective mother tongues. It is only through the mother tongue their minds develop well. Children can easily learn through their mother tongue. Though there is a shortage of words in science and technology in higher studies it is good to learn through the mother tongue. The difficulties that occur at the start will gradually disappear.
7) Kamarajar (Former Chief Minister of Tamilnadu)

Teaching in a foreign language is actually an exploitation of the native traditions. When we advocate that the mother tongue should be the language of education and all the learning should take place through the mother tongue, a conflict between the educated and uneducated may be seen, but unavoidable. Yet it is natural that learning should take place in the mother tongue.

8) Kothandaraman. Pon

Though Malaysia and Indonesia attained independence after us, yet the people of those countries use their own language up to University education. In Russia too the same prevails. The developed countries like Japan, Germany, France and China, being advanced in literature, linguistics, engineering and technology, did not use English language for their development. But only in Tamilnadu, English is given a pride of place. Besides, a false notion had been formed that only English can be the basis for all development.

9) Mahatma Gandhi (Father of India)

I must cling to my mother tongue as to my mother's breast inspite of its shortcomings. It alone can give me the life - giving milk I am certain that the children of the nation that receive instruction in a mother tongue other than their own commit suicide. It robs them of all originality. It stunts their growth and isolates them from their home. I regard such a thing as a national tragedy.

10) Murli Manohar Joshi (Former Minister of Union Human Resource Development)

The medium of education should be the national language, regional language or one's mother tongue, so that the child does not have to work twice as hard at grasping the language and then the subject. Education in one's mother tongue makes understanding of a subject easier for a child, so why put him to great pains of grappling with a foreign language.
11) Muthukumaran (Educationist, Former Vice Chancellor of Bharathidasan University)

The intelligentsia among the Tamilians must come forward to state without fear or favour the advantages of learning through the mother tongue, for a fast rate of growth of the nation and consider it their duty to enrich their mother tongue by writing and publishing books and articles in scientific, technological and modern subjects for the benefit of the society in which they live and prosper.

12) Pattanayak. D. P. – (Linguist)

Instruction in the mother tongue helps in the search for self-assertion, establishes group identity, satisfies the national urge for cultural rootedness and avoids fanaticism. It brings the child into a harmonious relationship with his environment and maximizes the opportunities offered by the early learning experience. It permits the adult learner to see issues in the perspective of the common man.

13) Periyar E.V.R. (Social Leader of Tamil Nadu)

Indian states are demarcated on the basis of language. It's through the language that a nation or society is introduced to the world. The influence of language in a society is great. Higher Education had been already introduced in many languages like Hindi, Gujarathi, Marathi and Bengali. Only in Tamil Nadu higher education has to be sought in the English language. It is necessary that all should be given higher education in Tamil, the mother tongue.

14) Rabindra Nath Tagore (Philosopher and Poet)

Education in any language other than mother tongue is against nature. Education contrary to nature cannot yield good fruits. The only natural way to education is through the mother tongue. The Japanese realized that they had already made provisions for that. It's through the language spoken by the common people that any kind of new knowledge can be extended to all.
Japanese Universities have perfectly achieved this. It is because of this that light of learning shines bright without any shadow / dimness.

15) Rajaji (Educationist, Former Chief Minister of Tamilnadu)

It has been my hope and ambition for long that the mother tongue should be the language of instruction. Still, I am of this opinion that not only in the primary and high schools but also in the Universities the medium of instruction should be mother tongue.

16) Shivendra K. Verma – (Educationist)

The mother tongue is the means by which the child adjusts to the life culture of his social group. Learning the mother tongue is a process of learning to mean. It means learning a multifunctional and multistratal semiotic system. It means developing the ability to play a variety of roles in the socio-cultural complex. The lesson is that the mother tongue is not merely an occasion for the inculcation of knowledge. It is part of the child's initiation into the life of man. Training in the use of the mother tongue – the tongue in which a child thinks and dreams – becomes the first essential of schooling and the first instrument of human culture. It is, therefore, of greater importance for our pupils to get a firm grounding in their mother tongue for, at the same time, we are giving them a firm grounding in their intellectual life.

17) Tamizhkudimahan (Former Minister of Tamil Nadu)

One's thoughts and all his deeds and actions resulting from his thoughts will be the natural consequence of his use of his mother tongue. It's only where the mother tongue is recognized as the language of education, the thinking power will grow and develop from one's infancy.

18) Thoulath Kothari (Scientist)

If from the beginning itself Science Education is imparted in a foreign language, the students will be confused with the language, and they will not
concentrate on the subject matter. If they memorise without understanding the subject, their skill of learning may decline. Unless the educationists patronise the regional languages, Science Education will lose its close link with the people. Besides, India may lose its ability to express its culture in the proper way to the world.

19) Tiwari K. K. (Linguist)

How long shall we remain foreigners in our own country? When shall we take pride in our own language? Are we living in an independent India or are we still slaves? A Japanese, a German, a French, a Russian, a Chinese or a native of any European country, will speak in his own language even if he knows English. He takes pride in his own language. But, we speak English on all occasions as if we have no language of our own. Instead of taking pride in our own language, we take pride in speaking in English. Giving English too much importance and speaking even on ceremonial and official occasions is anti-national.

1.17.1.2. Views of Sri Lankan Nationals

1. Anandacoomaraswamy (Philosopher. Art Critic)

The system of education of this country made the people ignorant of their native language, literature etc. The universities should be the seat of learning for the students to be enlightened of their culture and the special features of their learning and history

2. Arumuganavalar – (Tamil Hindu Reformer)

Education should be in the cultural environment of a child. Mother tongue should be the medium of instruction. Education should be for living and life long. As we could get valuable virtues that would pave the way for national cultural life we should not deviate from it.
3. Arunachalam, Pon.Sir (National Leader)

What will be the result if the English language is replaced by the German language as the medium of instruction in schools in England? The similarity between English and German languages is more, when compared to that of English and Tamil, English and Sinhalese. Hence it is easier for the English children to learn in the German language than for the Sinhalese and Tamil children to learn in English.

4. Chandrasekaram, P. (Educationist)

A country should attain feeling of independence in religion, language and culture prior to political independence. Then only, independence will be complete. The mother tongue as the medium of instruction in the Universities will be beneficial for the growth of religious, linguistic and cultural consciousness.

5. Dahanayake, W (Former Member of Parliament)

Knock out English from the pedestal it occupies today, and place there on our Sinhala and Tamil languages and we shall soon be a free race.

6. Green, H.W. (Educationist)

If swabasha is the medium of instruction the student can comprehend better, subjects like Arithmetic. A student who is able to answer at once a question asked in his own language, fails to answer the same question in English because of his inability to comprehend it.

7. Jaya T.B. (Muslim Leader)

If a nation does not cherish and protect its language, it means it has lost its integrity. It is only by making the mother tongue as the medium of instruction in the schools and University that a correct background for a native student to gain wide knowledge in various fields of study will be provided.
8. Kanagaratnam, A. (Tamil Representative of the Legislative Council)

As the schools in Ceylon are Swabasha medium schools and English medium schools the evils are numerous. Therefore education in the mother tongue is essential. If necessary, English could be made a compulsory subject.

9. Kanangara (Member of the State Council, Father of Free Education)

The major defect of the British rule was the creation of two separate units in this state as a result of their system of education based on the two different languages. As 95% of our students had their education in their mother tongue, they couldn't have any share in the administration of this country. Only 5% of our schools teach in the English medium. Those who pass out from such schools have no relations with the public and are ignorant of their own history and customs.

10. Nesiah, K. (Educationist)

A child's mother tongue should be the medium of his entire education and all studies should be centred round mother tongue.

11. Perera, N.M. (Former Finance Minister and Member of Parliament)

While claiming that national education is being imparted in the mother tongue, the government is not taking any steps to employ the mother tongue in the sphere of higher education, but is depriving the rural children and poor helpless urban children by continuing the English medium for medical, engineering, law and other professional studies in the universities. This situation must be changed.

12. Ramanathan. Pon. Sir. (National Leader)

I will not permit my children to speak English at home. I will say that my mother is superior to the ruler. My mother is Tamil, so the policy of the government should be to spend more on swabasha education. This will be stable and beneficial to the country.
13. Veerasingham (Politician)

If we look at the Universities of Israel, the entire education is in Hebrew. This language was in use two thousand years ago. This has been made the medium of instruction and well implemented. If that is so, why cannot the mother tongue instruction be feasible to the Ceylonese.

14. Vipulananda Swami (Philosopher, Educationist)

When we analyse the method of teaching higher education, we feel that it is like making them carry the whole mountain for a pinch of medicine. A student who tries to get a Diploma in Educational attainments though very versatile in his field of study, if he does not have the skill of expression in English, he is denied the chance of getting it. As a result, he loses his interest in education and suffers due to that. Because of reasons like these, it is indisputable that higher education too should be in the mother tongue.

1.17.1.3. Views of Internationalists

1. Aye-Bamgbose (Educationist)

In the world of education, the world wide opinion that exists today is that every child should have the right to receive his education in his mother tongue. This right should not be usurped from the African children. It is through the mother tongue that a child learns the cultural heritage of his parents. Therefore denying the right of learning in his mother tongue to a child is like cutting off the creative ability and skill of a child.

2. Babs Fafunwa (Educationist)

The mother tongue becomes the ‘ideal’ medium because it is as natural to the child as the mother’s milk. Children are able to explore their own natural environment better in their own native language. If the foundation for the future development of the child is laid in his own mother tongue, the child will be able to buildup on it in later years even in another language.
3. Bernard Spolsky (Sociolinguist)

In the African, Asian, Latin American multilingual societies, education should be imparted during the stage the children are growing up and in the mother tongue despite any difficulties. The children achieve proficiency and their attainment of knowledge, skill and growth of personality take place in their childhood. Hence education in the mother tongue is necessary at this stage. Involvement with a second language adversely affects the development of the child and impairs his skill of learning.

4. Gilevordvise (Educationist)

Mother tongue is the best language for any linguistic group to express or explain unique aspects of its individual tradition. It is difficult to explain their own traditional characteristics, which can easily be explained in their own language, than in a foreign language.

5. Henry Houlman (Linguist)

The key to the expression of our sentiments and desires of the heart is the one and only language we spoke when we were crawling infants in the lap of our mothers. It is that language we use first to pray God and the language we use unconsciously to express our happiness and sorrows. Teaching in another language other than the mother tongue burdens the student which he cannot endure. It also cripples him from acting independently.


Mother tongue languages should be favoured in education systems, from the earliest age. It is widely acknowledged nowadays, that teaching in both the Mother tongue and the official national language helps children to obtain better results and stimulates their cognitive development and capacity to learn
7. Lenin (Former President of Russia)

We are spoiling the Russian language, by using another language when we have appropriate words in our own language. Why should we employ words from other language to express the same meaning? Time has come for us to wage a war against the unwanted use of words from other languages.

8. Nichalas Hans (Educationist)

The children who are educated through a foreign language run the risk of having split minds. That the outcome is the splitting of their minds into two water-tight compartments, one for ordinary things and action – expressed in their mother tongue, and another for things connected with school subjects and the world of ideas expressed in a foreign language. As a result, the student is unable to speak of his home affairs in the school language and about learned subjects in his mother tongue. So a child’s mother tongue is the natural medium of his entire education.

9. UNESCO - 1953

It is axiomatic that the best medium for teaching a child is his mother tongue. Psychologically it is the system of meaningful signs that his mind works automatically for expression and understanding. Sociologically, it is a means of identification among the members of the community to which he belongs. Educationally he learns more quickly through it than through an unfamiliar linguistic medium.

10. UNESCO – 1977

The problem of mother tongue teaching, particularly in connection with literacy, was considered to be of primary importance within the overall developmental policy of a given plura-lingual country.

We have seen the fact that over one half of the world’s population is illiterate and the large proportion of the children of school age are not in school or are learning through a tongue which is not their own. We have the proposition that education is best carried on through the mother tongue of the people and if a child is taught in a foreign medium, he is at a disadvantage.

12. William A. Stewart (Linguist)

A student should be taught through his mother tongue. Even the other languages should be taught in addition to his mother tongue. Teaching a foreign language before a student learns his own language is like teaching horse riding to one who has not started walking.

1.17.2. Views Against Mother Tongue Education
1.17.2.1. From the Indian Nationals’ point of view
1. Gopal Ayengar A.R. (Scientist)

The introduction of mother tongue / regional language as the media of instruction at all levels and for all subjects of education including agriculture, engineering, law, medicine and technology would do incalculable damage to education as a whole and irreparable harm to the integrated development of the nation.

2. Pandit B.P. (Educationist)

English language has enough words and phrases to enable its users to express refined notions of physics, psychology, bio-chemistry and similar other natural and applied sciences. It has precise notions of law and administration; it has a body of literature ever growing on which one can always draw for verification. None of the Indian languages has such a well developed body of literature in various areas of human knowledge.
3. Raman C.V. (Scientist)

Introducing any Indian language in place of English in administration, education and particularly in the intellectual field will be very harmful to India.

4. Sri Ramswamy Ayer C.P

It is only through the medium of English in education and higher education. India could maintain its equal status with the other countries. Scientific discoveries and advancement/ progress are not published in common newspapers. Most of them are published only in English newspapers. Besides, one tenth of the population of the world speaks English. Three fifths of the broadcasting stations use English. Hence, if English is not given its place, India cannot progress in Science like the other countries.

5. Manoharan. C. (Principal of St. Thomas’)

The importance of English could not be undermined since it was an important factor in getting us independence. If we hadn’t got educated and become aware of what was happening in the world, the independence struggle would not have panned out as it did.

6. The Medical Council of the Institute of Engineers and the Bar Council of India

In order to maintain uniform standards in undergraduate and postgraduate education and to utilize fully the world literature, the English language should continue as a medium of instruction.

7. The President of Tamil Nadu Matriculation and Higher Secondary Schools Association

The State does not have the right to decide and impose that the young minds should learn a particular language (Tamil) and should not study any other. We are in a democracy and every one has the right to learn, speak and write in any language of one’s choice.
From the Sri Lankan Nationals' Point of View

1. Azeez A.M.A. (Muslim leader)

   English may be the language of foreigners. It may be the language of invaders who captured our country. Today we are independent to decide about the importance of English. We have the freedom to analyse the role of English in the world today and decide whether our country could progress without English.

2. Don Peter W.L.A. (Educationist)

   English education brought together the leaders of the various communities of the country to fight unitedly for Sri Lanka’s independence which they ultimately won —— There is no doubt that students must know their mother tongue well. But at the same time we cannot overlook the fact that in the context of our time a good knowledge of English is essential for education.

3. Perera. E.W.

   The vernacular languages are of no value in the education of the classes which attend English schools, elementary and secondary. I think it will be a disadvantage for Ceylonese boys to be taught the vernacular in such schools. The only way to aim at a standard of pure English is to make the pupils think as much as possible in English and to teach English in English schools through the medium of English alone.

4. Rajiva Wijesinha (Educationist)

   If English was one of the ‘International’, ‘Congress’ languages giving access to a large part of learning and discoveries in the current world, and as “Swabasha” languages were not sufficiently developed for the purpose of university education, adopting them would mean a serious lowering of standard and ultimately an abandonment of the ideas for which the university was founded.

5. Ranjith Ruberu (Educationist)

   There is no other way of opening to the mind of youth the channels of knowledge so pure and full as are opened by communicating in early youth
beginning even in child-hood a thorough acquaintance with English. With a good knowledge of English they may transfer much of the learning of the West into the language of the East.

6. University Academics

In the context of Ceylon (Sri Lanka) the medium of instruction at the university level could be only English as English was one of the “International”, “Congress” languages giving access to a very large part of the learning and discoveries current in the world.

1.18. Views from some of the Committees and Commissions

1.18.1. Committees and Commissions of India

1. Sadler Commission - 1930

The Mother Tongue is the true vehicle of mother – wit. Another medium of speech may bring with it a current of new ideas. But the mother tongue is one with the air in which a man is born. It is through the vernaculars the new conceptions of the mind should pass their way to birth in speech. A man’s native speech is almost like his shadow, inseparable from his personality. Through his mother tongue the infant first learns to name the things it sees or feels or tastes or hears, as well as the ties of kindred and the colours of good and evil. It is the mother tongue which gives the adult mind the relief and illumination of utterance as it clutches after the aid of words the new ideas or judgements spring from the wordless recesses of thought of feeling under the stimulus of physical experience of emotions.


Use of English as such divides the people into two nations, the few who govern and the many who are governed, the one unable to talk the language of the other, and mutually uncomprehending. This is a negation of democracy.
3. The Central Advisory Board of Education – 1949

The medium of instruction in the Junior basic stage must be the mother tongue of the child and that where the mother tongue was different from the regional or state language, arrangements must be made for instruction in the mother tongue by appointing at least one teacher to teach all the classes, provided that there are at least 40 such pupils in a school.


The change in the medium of instruction is justified not so much by cultural or political sentiments as on the very important academic consideration of facilitating grasp and understanding of the subject matter. India’s University men will be unable to make their maximum possible contribution to the advancement of learning generally, and science and technology in particular, unless there is a continuous means of communication in the shape of the regional language between its masses, its artisans and technicians and its University men.


The pre-eminent claims of the mother tongue as best suited to enable students to acquire knowledge with facility, to express itself with clarity and to think with precision and vigour.

6. Official statement of Dr. Triguna Sen - July 1967

The policy regarding the medium of education is primarily based on the recommendations of the National Integration Council. The Government of India has accepted in principle that Indian languages should now be adopted as media of education at all stages and in all subjects including agriculture, engineering, law, medicine and technology. This will result in realising the creative energies of the people, improving the standards of education, expansion of knowledge and bridging the gap between the intelligentsia and the masses.
7. Mohan Committee of Tamil Nadu - 1999

Tamil or the child's mother tongue should be the medium of instruction up to grade 5 "to retain Tamil in its pride of place and to inculcate in students a sense of belonging to the mother land".

1.18.2. Committees and Commissions of Sri Lanka
1. The Special Committee on Education of 1943 (Kanangara Report)

The English language has for many years been the principal medium of instruction for all forms of education. It was allotted this position not of choice but of necessity as it was not only the language of administration but also that of outside commerce of the island. It has been also adopted as the home language in number of Sinhalese and Tamil homes. With the advent of British rule the adoption of English as one of the media of instruction even by the Sinhalese and Tamil became necessary in the circumstances of the period. Nevertheless it was a wrong choice from the national point of view.

Apart from our historical association with the United Kingdom and, the fact that as far as higher education is concerned, Sinhalese and Tamil have yet to be perfected as competent instruments for requiring modern knowledge. We cannot see any reason why English should be retained as a medium of instruction at any stage in the educational process, except for those who have adoption of it as their mother tongue. We consider that the mother tongue is the natural medium of education and the genius of a nation finds full expression only through its own language and literature. We are therefore of opinion that the ideal should be the mother tongue medium at all stages of education.

2. Committee on “Official Language” – 1956

People cannot be expected to use their mother tongue purely for the sake of love for that language unless they expect economical benefits from it. A citizen should be assured of earning his livelihood, getting promotions and to compete with the others on an equal basis through his proficiency in his mother tongue, Sinhala or Tamil.
3. The Ceylon University Commission of 1958

University should bear in mind the government policy in the pre university stage (Swabasha medium) and adjust its educational system to it. Though the advance in the use of the swabasha medium may vary from subject to subject, process should be made in the policy.

4. The National Education Commission of 1961

Using the English medium for Sinhalese and Tamil children in those particular subjects (mathematics and Science) should cease progressively, starting with standard IX by 31st December 1961 going upto standard XII by 31st December 1964.


A person shall be entitled to be educated through the medium of either of the national languages. The national languages of Sri Lanka shall be Sinhala and Tamil.

6. University of Ceylon Act No 1 of 1972

The university should comply with the government policy on the medium and in the provision of facilities for instruction and study in the national language.

1.19. Conclusion

The above ideas reveal that the necessity for instruction in the mother tongue is being realized today. Most of the educationists, linguists, sociologists and phychologists were inspired and convinced by the universally accepted principle “the mother tongue of a child is the most appropriate medium for a child to learn effectively”. The scientific researches empahasized the significance of mother tongue as the medium of instruction.

It is accepted by every one that language is the vehicle through which man conveys his thoughts and ideas to others. But it does not mean that
language is not needed unless and until we express our thoughts to others. Language is always integrated with thoughts. Majority of the people think in their mother tongue. What is acquired through the mother tongue can be expressed only in the mother tongue. When it is expressed in a language other than their own, many difficulties occur. Many find it difficult to express their thoughts in a foreign language perfectly and satisfactorily.

In this regard, the language a student learns from his childhood is the appropriate language to express his thoughts and feelings. Learning experiences such as listening, hearing, absorbing and expressing are effectively, quickly, fully and critically possible only through such a language.

It is true that proficiency in a foreign language is necessary, but it does not mean that proficiency in a second language alone will lead to acquirement of knowledge. The proficiency in a foreign language is necessary to enhance the skill of learning acquired through instruction in mother tongue, but it is not to be hailed as a medium of instruction.

Such views have led to the conclusion that “a child’s mother tongue is the natural medium of his entire education and all studies should centre around the mother tongue”. If we ignore this principle of education we can not achieve real and stable progress in education which in turn will not pave the way for human resource development.

Such considerations have been instrumental in the formulation of policies regarding the mother tongue in education / higher education in Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu. Educational as well as political influences have played their part in the formulation of the said policies. History of such policies has been different in Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu. The inunciation and implementation of these policies in the two arears are dealt in the following chapter.