

# Mother Tongue Medium of Instruction at Junior Secondary Education in Jaffna – Advantages and Limitations

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**Abstract:** Only through the mother tongue a student is able to acquire properly the learning skills like listening, understanding, absorbing, and communicating. Consideration of educational principles and psychology also stress the use of MT medium instruction in education. Now a days the importance of MT instruction has been understood, even though some confusions are there among the people in deciding the MOI at school level. In this respect this study proposes to identify the opinion of the students and teachers at junior secondary education in Jaffna town schools regarding the advantages and limitation of MT medium instruction and it utilizes 155 students and 53 teachers as samples adopting normative survey methodology.

**Keywords:** Mother Tongue, Medium of instruction Junior Secondary Education, Advantages and Limitations

## Introduction

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 school 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 effective 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 build up 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 in Education. 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 multistate 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 thoughts, and 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 mother tongue.

If children learn 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 Deceit, a Peruvian educator states that “those who teach in 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 are important because the growth of our people depends on it.

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 research by psychologists, linguists and neurologists on 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.

- Learning takes place with maximum effectiveness when it is inducted through the language most understood by the learner.

- Learning is effective in proportion to the learner’s competency on the language in which the sources of learning are available.
- 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 centre 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 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 Sri Lanka, English language has advantages over the mother tongue 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.

The above ideas reveal that the necessity for instruction in the mother tongue is being realized today. Most of the educationists, linguists, sociologists and physiologists 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 research emphasized the significance of mother tongue as the medium of instruction.

It is accepted by everyone 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 with satisfaction.

In this regard, the language a student learns from 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 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 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 cannot achieve real stable progress in education which in turn will not pave the way for human resource development. Based on this the objectives of this study are as follows.

### Objectives of the study

- To identify the opinion of the students and teachers with regard to the advantages and limitations of mother tongue medium of instruction at junior secondary level.
- To identify the above mentioned target people’s opinion regarding mother tongue medium of instruction on the key dimensions of Effective Learning, Motivated Learning, Originality and Job Market Value
- To point out comments and valuable suggestions regarding this in the light of the above study.

### Review of Literature

Bambose (1984 – 1991) did a six year primary project in Nigeria. In this project an experimental group used Yoruba as medium of instruction for the duration of the primary school where as a control group used Yoruba as MOI for the first three years and English for the last three years.

The result revealed that the experimental group performed significantly better than the control group in both content subjects and in English.

Lemmer’s (1991) study indicated that if the  $L_1$  will be maintained and promoted as MOI, there will be increase in self-confidence and emotional security can be expected which will have clear educational benefit and the use of English as MOI may lead to a poor self-image, a lack of self-confidence and emotional insecurity.

Bred Bell (1993) found that it is vitally important that learners fully develop their  $L_1$ , because in so doing they also develop their cognitive academic abilities, their ‘thinking skills’ and their academic intelligence. To achieve full  $L_1$  and cognitive academic development, the home language needs to be used as the medium of instruction at least for the first few years of primary school at a minimum level. Without this, learners who enter  $L_2$  education are mentally under – developed, which disadvantages not only their language acquisition, but also their overall academic success and in particular, their Maths and Science achievement.

China the Working Group on Medium of Instruction (1999) Conducted an opinion survey on the medium of instruction policy to gauge views from secondary school principals, teachers, students and parents. The findings revealed that mother tongue teaching enabled classroom teaching to be more versatile made it easier for teacher – student relationship and made classroom discussion more alive.

Amadou Tamba Documbia’s (2000) Research article looked at the teaching of the Bambara language

in comparison with that of French in schools that practice the convergent pedagogy. It is based on three field trips two segou in 1998 – 1999 with classroom observation in the six grades of four primary schools. It states that whereas French is taught in a systematic way, with weight on grammar, Bambara is taught indirectly, through different exercises like memorization of words, reading and writing according to the global method and dictation, Rules to explain mistakes are hardly ever given, and the teachers themselves make mistakes, especially in word segmentation. The conclusion is that though the active pedagogical method seems to work well, the mother tongue instruction lags behind that of the second languages, thus jeopardizing the mother tongue proficiency that is supposed to ease the acquisition of the second language.

Baker (2000) conducted a study on “The importance of bilingual Children’s Mother Tongue”.

The research finding was summarized below: Bilingualism has positive effects on children’s linguistic and educational development. Bilingual children may develop more flexibility in their thinking as a result of processing information through two different languages. The level of development of children’s mother tongue is a strong indicator of their second language development. Children who come to school with the solid foundation in their mother tongue develop stronger literacy abilities in the school languages. Children’s knowledge and skills transfer across languages from the mother tongue they have learned in the home to the school languages. Mother tongue promotion in the school helps develop not only the mother tongue but also children’s abilities in the majority school languages. Bilingual children perform better in school when the school effectively teaches the mother tongue and, where appropriate develops literacy in that language. By contrast, when children are encouraged to reject their mother tongue and consequently, its development stagnates, their personal and conceptual foundation for learning is undermined.

Mamdou Lamine Haidara (2000) made a study related to “The Introduction of National Languages

into the Educational System: The Attitudes of teachers in Bamako. The main conclusion of this study is that teachers are more positive than one would think, and that the main reason for the positive attitude is sufficient information. Other variables like age, experience, level of instruction and geographical and social origin, play a lesser role. The educational authority should therefore initiate campaigns to inform the teachers and the rest of the population of the usefulness of the national languages as means of instruction.

Cummins (2001) explored the effectiveness of the use of the first language in classrooms. The use of first languages means that learners will be able to engage effectively in the negotiation of identity as well as the negotiation of symmetric classroom relationship and it was found vital to educational success.

## Methodology of Research

The present study proposes to identify the opinion of the students and teachers regarding the advantages and limitations of mother tongue medium of instruction at junior secondary level. For this purpose the researcher used normative survey method.

A questionnaire is developed by the researcher herself with the help of the source of data. Construction of tool, sources of data are grouped as follows:

- Research work of individuals
- Books and Journals related to the topic

The questions are common for the both type of respondents. Questions are pertaining to the following information regarding the respondent’s opinion as the advantages and limitation in the use of mother tongue instruction under the following four dimensions

- Effective Learning
- Motivated Learning
- Originality
- Job Market Value

Here the questions are structured and close typed. The questions aim to get response on two point scale (Yes/No) by giving a score of 1 for ‘yes’ and 0

(zero)for 'No'. Based on this score of each respondent for each item were calculated in general and converted in to percentage .The researcher has chosen 155 students and 53 teachers from various Junior Secondary Schools in Jaffna Town area. Descriptive analysis was adopted by the researcher.

## Results and Discussion

Opinion of the students and teachers regarding the advantages and limitations of mother tongue medium of instruction at junior secondary level

Component	Statement	Response (Students 155)Yes 100%	Response (Teachers 53)Yes 100%
1) Effective Learning	1.Maxmium effective learning through MT medium instruction	91.61	100
	2.MT is suitable for concept formation	90.32	100
	3.Learn quickly, understand fully and correctly through MT	79.35	100
	4.Easy learning and grasping well through MT	79.35	100
	5.MT being a competent instrument for education	75.48	100
	6.Learning through MT consumes less time	82.58	100
	7. Lack of standard books in the MT	81.94	75.47
	8. Inadequate number of translation books from English to MT	70.32	75.47
2) Motivated Learning	1.Motivation of learning is easy through MT medium at Schools	75.48	75.48
	2.Integration of knowledge in all fields is easy through MT	75.48	75.48
	3.MT fulfils the purpose of education for live	80.65	92.45
	4.English medium education divides the pupil	76.13	79.25
	1.Development of creative thoughts through MT medium education	77.42	92.45
	2.Improvement of self confidence through MT medium instruction	77.42	86.79

3) Originality	3.Education through alien language affects personality development	75.43	75.47
	4.Robbing and shunting of all originality and growth through foreign language education	75.43	75.47
3)Job Market Value	1.Parents favoring of English medium of instruction because of higher market value	76.75	71.70
	2.Students preference of English because of advancement in professional career	76.75	71.70
	3.English being a second language	80.65	86.79
	4. Necessity of English competence for private sector employment	77.42	86.79

The perception of the students of different schools in Jaffna is almost favourable to mother tongue medium instruction for Effective Learning. Their positive response is above 80% towards mother tongue instruction for the first 6 items which refer to the advantages of mother tongue instruction. Their response is 91.61% in favour of “Maximum effective learning though the MT medium instruction” and 90.32% is in favour of “Mother tongue is suitable for concept formation”. Their overall response is on an average 75% in favour of MT instruction in Education indicate that the students of Jaffna town accept the advantages of MT for effective learning. But at the mean time they are not in favor for the availability of books in Tamil. For the item “The lack of sufficient standard books in Tamil” 81.44% of the students as well as “translation of books from English to mother tongue. 70.32% of the students accept the unavailability of books in mother tongue for further reading.

The perception of the teachers for effective learning is also in favour of MT instruction. Their response is 100% positive for effective learning, proper concept formation, quick and easy learning and less time consumption. The teachers of junior secondary level have shown their top priority 100% for the above said advantages in MT instruction. They have more confidence than the students in the utility of MT education. But like the students, 75.47%, of the



teachers also agree with the limitations of “lack of standard books” and “translation of books in MT from English”.

Regarding to Motivated Learning the views expressed by the students of Junior Secondary Schools are also positive towards the advantages of mother tongue instruction. “Motivation of learning through MT instruction” and “Integration of knowledge in all fields through MT”, their responses of above 75% for each items indicate that they have shown their positive views towards the advantages of MT instruction. For the items of “The purpose of education for life is fulfilled only through the MT” the students’ have shown 80.45% of willingness towards this statement, which emphasis that majority of them accept the advantages of MT medium instruction.

Here the response of the teachers for “Motivation of learning through MT”, “Integration of knowledge through MT” is 75% positive for each statement. With respect to the statement “The purpose of education for life is fulfilled only through MT” 92.45% of the teachers show their overwhelming positive attitude towards the advantages of MT medium instruction. All these indicate that the junior secondary teachers of Jaffna town schools accept the advantages of MT medium of instruction in Education.

The view of schools students regarding the advantages of MT education for the component of Originality is also favourable towards MT medium. Their response is above 77% positive for the advantages of “Development of creative thoughts through the MT in education”. They also agree that “Education through alien language affects personality development of the child”. In the case of “Robbing and Shutting of all originality and growth through foreign language education at schools level”, the students positive response is 75.48% and it shows their negative attitude towards English medium education.

With respect to originality the response of the teachers is 86% positive towards the advantages of mother tongue. Their response 75% agrees with the statement “Education through alien language affects personality development of the child” and “Robbing and shunting of all originality and growth through

foreign language education”. Considering the data it could be observed that the teachers have given their highest priority 92.45% to the advantage of development of creative thoughts through MT medium.

For the dimension of Job Market Value the “Parents prefer English medium because of Higher market value” and “Pupils preference of English because of advancement in professional career” the students response is 76.75%, teachers response is 71.70%, for each statement shows their positive views towards English. But at the mean time majority of the students (80.65%) and teachers (86.79%) have shown their support for the statement “English should be taught as a second language in a proper manner”. Here majority of the both sides strongly feel that role of English as a second language is enough. But at the same time the students and teachers of junior secondary level show their preference of the advantage of English for the statement “Necessity of English competence for private sector employment”. This shows there are some contradiction among them to accept the advantage of English.

Respondent’s comments and Suggesting on making MT medium instruction with quality

- Adopt different type of learning teaching methods to increase more comprehensive abilities among the students 80.65%(S) 92.45%(T)
- Provide enough opportunities for the students to develop creative thinking and better expression 90.32% , 86.79%
- Allow better teacher – students interaction to improve language skills 79.35% , 75.47%
- Provide enough curricular and co - curricular activities to enhance and enrich student’s language competence
- Develop different type of activities to improve soft skills among the students. 77.42%, 75.47%
- Enrich Tamil by writing and publishing necessary books, glossary and other resources to get the latest knowledge .81.94%, 86.79%

## Major Findings of the Study

- The perception of the junior secondary students of Jaffna town Schools on an average of 80% accept the advantage of MT medium instruction for effective learning.
- 90.32% of the students accept the advantage of MT medium of instruction for suitable concept formation.
- 100% of the teachers of Jaffna schools agree with the advantages of MT for proper concept formation, quickly, easy learning and less time consumption.
- 81.94% of the students and 75.47% of the teachers agree with the unavailability of standard books in Tamil.
- Regarding motivation and integration of knowledge through MT medium instruction the students and teachers accept the advantages of MT medium.
- The views expressed by the students and teachers regarding the originality component also agree with the advantages of MT medium instruction.
- More than 77% of the students and 92% of the teachers agree that the MT medium of instruction strongly help creative thinking.
- Students and teachers of the junior secondary educational level accept the disadvantages of English as it disturbs their originality.
- For the dimension of job market value both of them agree with the advantages of English.
- Majority of the students (80.65%) and teachers (86.79%) show their willingness towards English being an effective second language.

To be brief, the findings of the study show that majority of the students at junior secondary educational level are of the views that there are many advantages occur in mother tongue instruction in education. Improving effective learning, motivated learning and originality mother tongue education is

more suited. But there are considerable degree of disagreement as far as job market value component is concerned. Here the opinion of the junior secondary teachers also agree that mother tongue medium is well suited for all the purposes mentioned above. A special mention can be made about the responses of Jaffna students and teachers that they seem to accept the advantages of English only for job market value.

From the result of this study it could be concluded that all the above mentioned issues can be improved through MT medium instruction. It should also be mentioned that for job market value and advancement of career English competency is needed. But it does not mean that this can be achieved only through English. It is already mentioned that proficiency in English is necessary to enhance the skills of learning acquired through MT instruction. But it does not mean that proficiency in English alone will lead to acquisition of knowledge. Therefore the MT medium of instruction can pave the way for the attainments of all the above mentioned advantages of English education.

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