RESEARCH PROJECT

Problems and Possibilities of the Languages of the Indigenous Groups in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh

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April 30, 2015
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Problems and Possibilities of the Languages of the Indigenous Groups in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh

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Subject: Letter of Transmittal.

Dear Madam,

I am pleased to submit my Research project titled “Problems and Possibilities of the Languages of the Indigenous Groups in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh”. The experiences that I have gathered through this research project will help me enormously in my future career.

I would like to convey my special thanks and gratitude to Bangladesh University for sponsoring this project. I have adequately covered the requisite survey field. I would earnestly request you to overlook deficiency in the process, if there is any unwittingly, and oblige thereby.

I hope you will appreciate my sincere effort.

Thanking you

Subarna Selim
Lecturer, Department of English
Bangladesh University
Declaration

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that this study has been conducted and written by me, under the supervision of Prof. Mustafa kamaluddin, Head, Department of English and Dean, Faculty of Arts, Social Science and Law. It is also declared that, this report has been prepared for purely academic purpose and has not been submitted elsewhere for any purpose.

____________________________________
Subarna Selim
Lecturer, Department of English
Bangladesh University
Certification

I have the pleasure to certify that the Research Report titled “Problems and Possibilities of the Languages of the Indigenous groups in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh” has been prepared under my supervision and guidance. To the best of my knowledge, it is the researcher’s own and original work.

I also certify that I have gone through the draft and final version of the report and I approved for submission to Bangladesh University.

April 30, 2015

Prof. Mustafa Kamaluddin,
Head, Department of English and Dean,
Faculty of Arts, Social Science and Law
Bangladesh University
Acknowledgement

During the course research work I have received invaluable services in terms of advice, guidance, data collection and other related help from various persons and institutions. First of all, my deep regard and gratitude to Prof. Mustafa Kamaluddin, Head, English Department and Dean, Faculty of Humanities, Social Science and Law for providing the required support and advice to carry out the research. I am thankful to the students, teachers, parents and guardians belonging specially to the indigenous groups of CHTs who cooperated with me during my visit. I am specially thankful to Mr. Alomoy Chakma, Headmaster, New Lalyaghana Primary School, Baghaichori, Rangamati for providing me all out help. I am also thankful to Mr. Nuruchsafa Manik, Khagrachhari correspondent of Asian Television who guided me to various schools and colleges in Khagrachari and also the indigenous community people from Bandarban. I am thankful to members of other research team members who helped me collect the necessary field data. Special thanks to Mr. Jiten Chakma, Research Officer, Khudra Nreegosthir Sanskritik Institute who helped a lot with important books about the indigenous people. This study wouldn’t have at all taken place without the support of Bangladesh University which sponsors the research project. I express my deepest gratitude to Bangladesh University to offer me such a challenging opportunity.
Executive Summary

The majority of indigenous people live in CHTs (Rangamati, Bandarban and Khagrachori) of Bangladesh. About forty five indigenous groups live in different parts of CHTs. Among them Chakma, Marma, Rakhain, Garo, Santal, Tripura, Khasi, Murang, Shendhu, Pankho, Hajong etc, are mentionable. Mainly Chakma, Marma and Tripura are great in number in CHTs. Each tribe has its own mother tongues. Most of their mother tongues are oral except the language of Chakma, Murma and Tripura. Most of the indigenous people cannot speak, read or write in Bengali. There are primary schools in different CHTs areas. The government also has taken up non-formal programmes along with formal education. Also the Bangladesh government has committed itself to achieve Education for All (EFA). This means that all children have access to a completely free and compulsory primary education of good quality. But this EFA programme is not properly linked for the indigenous children through their mother tongue to learn normal education in Bengali. As a result the majority of these children enter into the classrooms with blank view as they do not understand Bengali languages. They do not have sufficient text books in their own tribal languages and also do not understand what their teachers say. So, they have only one option that is to drop out the school. According to the data of ADB,2001 the percentage of indigenous children’s dropout is 60 % which is higher than that of the children of the mainstream population. Insufficient number of primary teachers from indigenous group is one of the main causes of the dropout records. There is no specific recruitment policy for the tribal teachers. Also there is no arrangement of boarding school or dormitory for the students who live in the deep forest or far hill areas from the city or Upazillas. Also their school and college
curricula do not adequately reflect local culture, values and language. Discrimination by teachers of mainstream who do not properly take care of these indigenous children. Last of all education system does not recognize the strength in diversity for future development in local, national and international. But if the children of these indigenous groups are taught in Bengali and English through their mother tongues from their pre-primary and primary level they can show their potentiality properly. As this is scientifically proved that a child can learn multi languages effectively through their mother tongue. The government can play a vital role with the help of national and international NGOs for the coverage of education programmes for these indigenous children. Evidences are that if an indigenous child is properly taught through mother tongue-based education, they can effectively learn in Bengali and English and achieve goals and compete with their mainstream counterparts. Because the Mother-tongue based multilingual education helps reduce dropout rate along with other ailments and thus benefit of socio-lingual culture and improve learning.
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1. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to provide the state of affairs of the language teaching and learning of the students of indigenous people of CHTs. Through this research an attempt is made to identify the problems of language learning facing these students. It is generally known that the existing language curriculum promotes social and economic inequality between children of indigenous people and mainstream population. This happens particularly by the intellectual domination of Bangla and English over the neglected tribal languages. Tribal students are often confused about school lessons, and the knowledge they acquire in schools
cannot be useful to themselves, their family and society in large. Indigenous students are reported to be not sufficiently involved in classroom activities and therefore quality education is not achieved for their career development.

For the reasons stated above children of indigenous population of CHTs do not receive quality education. Quality education is very important for decent employment in the competitive globalized world. Quota system and such other measures may provide a relief which is availed by a very small section of the population. The vast majority would end up doing fringe activities or remain unemployed.

This process will further aggravate the existing social and economic inequality between indigenous people and the mainstream population and lead to serious social unrest. The overall societal progress needs harmonious development of all sections of the population. Like the human body which is best fit when all organs constituting it develops harmoniously, Bangladesh’s overall development can be best achieved by proportional development of all sections of its population. For this, the marginalized people of CHTs at large should receive special attention to enable them to upgrade their socio-economic condition. Education particularly the pre-university education of these indigenous peoples’ children is the key area of intervention.

Mother language is important in identity and learning for tribal students, and needs to be encouraged and valued both in policy and practice for the educational achievement of tribal language students to improve. By making their learning activity based syllabus in Bengali and English including their native language tribal students can play a vital role in communication and development of the country.

2. Objective
In view of what has been said above this study purports to assess the teaching and learning condition of the students of indigenous people of CHT. The specific objectives are:

- To see if their mother tongues of the various indigenous groups are sufficiently used in the pre-primary level.
- If the above issue is not adequate, what deficiencies are there?
- To see if the students can safely and timely attend their schools.
- To consider whether occupation of the parents have any bearing on the study of the students.
- To look into whether financial condition of the parents are congenial for schooling of their children.

3. Methodology and Data

For the study under consideration, a field level survey was undertaken. The survey was carried out by using questionnaire. The questionnaire was directed to the students, subject teachers (Bengali and English) and the Head of the institutions of the primary, secondary and tertiary levels.

In all, 74 students were interviewed that is answers from these students were taken according to the questions of the questionnaire. The survey was carried out at three districts – Rangamati, Khagrachori and Bandarban. 3 primary schools from Rangamati, 3 from Khagrachori and one from Bandarban were chosen for the purpose. In all 37 students were interviewed from primary level. For secondary level, 2 from Rangamati, 2 from Khagrachori and one from Bandarban were chosen. At this level 20 students were interviewed. At the tertiary level one class from each of these districts were surveyed. In this case, a total of 18 students were selected for interview.
The Pie-chart below shows Primary students (37), Secondary students (20) and Tertiary students (18) that were interviewed.

The bar-diagram below shows the percentage of Adibasi students (40%) and Bangali students (60%) in the schools visited in Rangamati.

A total of 15 institutions (primary, secondary and tertiary) were visited for the survey purpose. The questionnaires were also directed to 15 Subject Teachers and 15 Head of the institutions and 15 parents to get their viewpoints on the issues.

It should be mentioned that the students from each class were selected randomly. The selection of subject teachers and the Head of the institutions dose not arise because they are predetermined.

By the nature of the survey, primary data (information) have been collected and utilized in this study. Since answers of the problems
and issues raised in the questionnaire were described by the students, subject teachers, Heads and parents qualitatively. The study also uses secondary data which are mainly publication like books and reports. Thus the qualitative data as well as quantitative data form the basis of this study.

4. Work Plan and Data Collection

The study was conducted during August, 2014 - March, 2015. About four extra months were required to complete the study due to political and socio-economic condition of the country. Three data collectors were engaged for data collection and One Research Assistant was engaged to supervise the data collection process. The author herself also undertook visits to Rangamati and khagrachori to get insights of the problems involved.

5. Rigour and Trustworthiness

Following the method of establishing rigour and trustworthiness of conducting the survey (Robinson and Lai, 2006), photographs and audio records of interviews were taken and documented (Appendix C).

6. Survey Results: Discussion

Chittagong Hill Tracts is an inimitable area accordingly politically, ethnically and religiously in Bangladesh. Over the last forty years the indigenous communities have struggled for their recognition and autonomy in Bangladesh. At last the signing of the CHT Peace Accord between The Government of Bangladesh and The Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti. In this signing copy there was a strong recommendation of providing primary education through the mother tongue of the indigenous people of the CHT. Also free education should be provided to all students upto class X.
The survey data have been processed and the results are discussed in this section (The questionnaires are in the Appendix A). Survey results show that teaching and learning of students of indigenous people of CHTs at various pre-university levels have manifold problems. At all pre-university levels the main problem constitutes travel from their home to institutions – they come from long distance, crossing the rivers by boats and moving from hills to hills. As a result a large percentage of indigenous students’ parent stop enrolls due to a lack of availability of schools within appropriate walking distance. In maximum field the quality education is not maintained for the indigenous students. The education programme has failed to recognize the specific learning which is needed especially in their mother tongue. The schools are not providing adequate teaching which is relevant, flexible or inclusive. The teachers emphasizes that with appointing the teachers from indigenous people who are applicable and training them by the various education training of government the quality and required teaching can be provided to the indigenous students.

Since there is no dormitory facilities, Jum cultivation being the main occupations, students are required to travel with their parents for as long as five to six months remaining absent from their educational institutions. There are not boarding schools or dormitory for the children. A few numbers is available where the parents do not want to send their children. They remain confused whether their traditional language would not be spoken by the children and their regular cultural practiced would be hampered if they stay in dormitories. Rather the parents preferred if the supervisor in dormitories are appointed from their locality it would be easy for them to practice their religious and cultural practice without any hamper. Also the government with the help of worldwide recognized NGOs could assist a handsome fund to build boarding school and dormitories in the remote areas of CHT. When parents would get these facilities they will also be eager to send their children for schooling. As a result local interest from the indigenous
community and participation in education will be increased immensely day by day.

Among other problems financial insolvency constitute a major factor of high drop outs at secondary level and particularly tertiary level. Government provides books at the primary level but this assistance is meager compared to their overall needs. NGOs operate only at high school levels supporting the education by providing educational aids like audio visual equipment and books.

At the private colleges there are facilities of dormitory, library, audio-visual aids and the teachers follow the modern teaching methodology because they are trained. But all these facilities are not available at the government colleges. At all levels of the pre-university institutions the language teachers are what is called borga- teachers. This means the main regular appointed teachers who are mainly from the plain land frequently remain absent from the institution and their regular duties are done by the teacher from local indigenous community. So as these local teachers are not trained enough the education of quality suffers.

The issue is effective education at schools and colleges. Children begin to listen and speak in their own mother tongues that is why they feel comfortable and at ease to learn in these tongues. Children generally learn other languages at later stages. So learning requires that the students are taught through mother languages most effectively.

There are as many as 45 indigenous ethnic groups which include Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Mro, Lusai etc. This means that there should be as many as 45 text books on these languages for effective learning of the entire ethnic group students. Except Chakma text books others have insufficient and mostly no such books at all. But unfortunately there is no organized effort to provide text books on local language text books. All these major causes of ineffective language teaching and learning at junior and mid level in CHTs are depicted pictorially below.
7. Conclusion

The study brings to focus some basic reasons which stand in the way of quality education of the children of indigenous people of CHTs. The main reasons are long tedious journey between home and educational institution, lack of dormitory, seasonal nature of parents’ occupation (Jum cultivation), financial insolvency of guardians, lack of text books on mother tongues of the various ethnic groups and the prevalence of borga teacher system (replacement teacher). The teachers answered in the questionnaires that if the teachers are trained and sufficient materials like teaching aids multimedia, projector, video aids are available in the classrooms then they will feel comfortable and confident to teach their students in different languages. Also the students will become curious and attentive to their lessons. There are about 45 ethnic groups. Among them Chakma, Marma and Tripura community people are in great in numbers in CHTs. Parents told in this question that they gradually felt that without learning the Bengali language they cannot communicate with the mainstream population of Bangladesh. The major portion of Bengali people cannot understand them and in case of miscommunication there is a long gap between the indigenous and
Bengali people. Also without learning English as it is an international language they cannot compete the global world. That is why they are bringing their children in schools to learn multiple languages. The curriculum planners (teachers) found that if the importance of multiple language teaching in education is guided properly the students from indigenous community can show their talents.

Students can be made happy to learn different languages if they get proper guideline. Because sometimes they do not get adequate care from the teachers who are appointed from mainstream as students of indigenous groups cannot speak in Bengali. In this case Bengali students who are from the mainstream population can develop their talents properly and can use the talents usefully. As a result, the indigenous students feel very shy and suffer from inferiority complex. Under this condition they feel it necessary to learn multiple languages.

8. Recommendations

The implication of these findings is that these issues need to be addressed. The students at primary, secondary and tertiary levels need dormitory facilities. There is a need of some arrangement to provide informal education when students accompany parents for JUM cultivation. NGOs are particularly required to find out some innovative idea and its implementation. Special attention is required to bring out text books on mother tongues as many ethnic tongues as possible. A strong foundation in the mother language provides a good bridge to learning a second language then Multilanguage effectively. It enables the learners to achieve competence and confidence. The learners of indigenous groups will be able to read and write their mother tongue and Bengali language fluently. They will be able to get access to more information and breaks in life. Simultaneously the learners will understand their own indigenous culture as well as Bengali culture and community.

Teaching aids can be provided through various government and non-government agencies. Activity-based curricula in primary, secondary and colleges should be followed for the learners. The text including clear, large and colourful will be very helpful for
learning. It should also be prepared on the knowledge and experience that children bring to school which will help to remove the negative attitude to learn in Bengali. Parents also should be counseled about the need to learn in Bengali and English of their children so that they also can teach their children through their traditional stories, places and activities at their home.

Fund should be generated to publish the books in their mother tongue and should be included in their curricula.

Also if the students who got good marks can be trained to teach in pre-primary and primary level with their mother tongue. This process will guide the students to learn Bengali and English through their mother tongue.

If the government and with the NGOs come forewarned with greater assistance programs to help build boarding schools in different hilly areas it will be possible to address drop-out problem. If text books on indigenous languages are provided at least up to secondary levels along with lessening financial and accommodation problems, the indigenous children will be greatly benefitted.

Apart from these, problems of barga-teachers (replacement of trained regular teachers from plainland by untrained teachers from ethnic groups) were mentioned.

Reference


Save the Children, (2009), *Shikhoner Pothe*, Save the Children UK, Bangladesh Programme.

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**Appendix A**

**Survey Questionnaire**

The main research focus of this study is to assess the role of languages, particularly tribal languages, in the primary, secondary schools and tertiary level college in CHT. The field questionnaire included the following questions.
1. What might be the supposed importance of teaching in different languages within the secondary language curriculum?

2. How do the Chakma, Marma, and Tripura community leaders recognize the role of language, particularly their native languages in schooling?

3. How do curriculum planners observe the importance of multiple language teaching in education, particularly the role of indigenous languages in education?

4. What do the students think about the role of different languages in their learning?

5. In which way the teachers can stop the dropout rate of indigenous students?

6. Do you think the indigenous students face discrimination in the classrooms?

7. How the parents should be counseled to provide their children proper education?

8. What are the assistances the government should support to teach the indigenous people so that they can contribute their potentiality in the development of the country?

9. Do you think if the indigenous children get the dormitory facilities their own culture will be hampered?

10. How the students can play the important role in development and communication by learning in multiple languages?
Appendix B

Research Team

Researcher: Subarna Selim (Lecturer, Department of English)
Supervisor: Prof. Mustafa Kamaluddin (Head, English Department)


Data Collectors:
Ranel Chakma: Economics 30th batch, Bangladesh University.
Elin Tripura: Sociology 29th batch, Bangladesh University.
Rigan Chakma: Sociology 27th batch, Bangladesh University.
Appendix C

Teachers and students of Khagrachori Govt. Woman College

The Students and Teachers of Bandarban Technical School and College
Research Office: Khudra Nreegosthir Sanskritik Institute and Zabarang Kalyan Samity Office

Students and teachers of Khagrachori Govt. Primary School
Teachers and student of New Lalyaghana Govt. Primary School, Baghaichori Rangamati

Principal, Teachers and students of Rangamati Public College, Rangamati