

## **Chapter 7**

### **Conclusion and Discussions**

This study has tried to assess the impact of using the national language instead of the learners' mother tongue in primary education. The analysis of the collected quantitative and qualitative data provides the evidence of the impact of language use on teaching and learning. This chapter provides an overview of the study, a summary of the research findings, conclusions drawn from the findings, implications of the findings and suggestions for further research.

#### **7.1 Overview of the Study**

The present study was designed to determine the effect of the language used for instruction in primary education for the ethnic minority learners from a monolingual environment. The challenge of this study was to offer a clear understanding of how children's education can benefit from the use of the learners' mother tongue as the language of instruction. It aimed to achieve this through a twofold approach: firstly, quantitative analysis of test scores was carried out; secondly qualitative analysis of ethnographic data was conducted. The information about the focus area was collected over three separate survey trips: firstly to find the villages which had a similar background in which the effect of language of instruction on education could be observed and in which test scores could be collected; secondly to observe teaching in the classrooms; and lastly to confirm the information regarding the learners with very low tests scores in each class.

Data for the quantitative analysis came primarily from surveys conducted in 19 Sgaw villages in which a Christian organization takes care of the holistic development of the villages. The test scores of the Grade 3 learners from 12 classes in which both the national language and the learners' mother tongue were used as an oral language of instruction and 7 classes in which only the national language was used were collected and, together with the background information on the language of instruction those learners had experience during Grades 1 and 2, was used for the statistical analysis. The statistical analysis was done with the help of Dr. Robert Wyn Owen. The quantitative analysis was done to show the impact of

language used on the learners' achievement. This analysis provided the answer to the first research question: How do test scores reflect the effect of the language of instruction on children's learning achievement in school?

Data for the qualitative analysis was gathered by conducting interviews with the community leaders, school principals, and teachers and by observing two Grade 3 classrooms: one taught by a Burmese-speaking teacher and the other taught by a Sgaw-speaking teacher. The interviews were done through informal discussions with the community leaders: villager heads, pastors, education leaders, teachers, and school principals. Classroom observations were conducted in two Grade 3 classrooms for eight days each. Full details of the classroom process were collected in order to conduct the analysis. The qualitative analysis was done to provide evidence of how language of instruction affected teaching and learning. This analysis provided the answer to the second research question: How does classroom interaction demonstrate the effect of the language of instruction on children's experience of learning in school?

## **7.2 Conclusions from the Findings**

The findings discussed in the analysis chapters: chapters 5 and 6, confirm the hypotheses: (1) The use of learners' mother tongue facilitates greater learning achievement; (2) The use of learners' mother tongue provides a more positive experience of learning. In this section, the conclusions that can be drawn from the analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data are presented.

### **7.2.1 Conclusions based on quantitative analysis**

The first research question was: How do test scores reflect the effect of the language of instruction on children's learning achievement in school? The statistical data revealed that there are numerous contributing factors though the focus of this study is the effect of the language of the teacher on the test scores. There are two types of contributing factors. On the one hand, the unmeasured factors such as teacher proficiency factors and environmental factors. These could not be used to directly assess the effects since appropriate data were not available. On the other hand, the measured factors included class size, student gender, and teacher language. These were measurable and were found to cause significant differences in the achievement of individuals and classes.

The research revealed that gender is a vital factor in predicting student performance for each of the four academic subjects. In almost every case, female learners performed better than male learners. The proportion of failure among the male learners is twice as high as the proportion of failures among the females. A random class effect is shown to be significant for all four academic subjects. This is most likely because of the unmeasured factors such as teacher proficiency and the environmental factors particular to each class. Grade 3 teacher language is shown to be a significant factor for three of the four academic subjects. In almost every case, classes with a Sgaw teacher perform better than classes with a Burmese teacher. The median scores in classes with a Burmese teacher were on the whole lower than the median score for classes with a Sgaw teacher. Class size was also shown to be a significant factor. In almost every case, an increase in class size is associated with a decrease in performance.

Having a Sgaw-speaking teacher has an extremely positive effect on learners' learning. Notably, the most significant effect was seen in the Burmese language subject, which is the most important subject for the learners and the one the most difficult for ethnic minority learners. This gives strong evidence that the learners learn best through instruction in their mother tongue. Though the learners have to learn Burmese vocabulary as well as the abstract concepts in Science and Mathematics, the tests performance of learners with a Sgaw-speaking teacher was still better than the performance of learners with a Burmese-speaking teacher. Therefore the learners really need to use their own language in order to learn the lessons successfully. In the English subject, the learners with the Sgaw-speaking teacher could not do much better than the learners with the Burmese-speaking teacher. Sgaw-speaking teachers could not explain the lessons in the English subject well enough because of their lower proficiency in the subject, not because of their lack of teaching ability. It can be concluded that the Sgaw teachers would benefit from further development of their English language proficiency.

### **7.2.2 Conclusions based on qualitative analysis**

The second research question was: How does classroom interaction demonstrate the effect of the language of instruction on children's experience of learning in school? The analysis of the interviews and classroom observations supported the findings of the quantitative analysis. There are weaknesses in teaching in the national language which the children are not familiar with and there are many benefits of teaching in their mother tongue language. The four important areas where these weaknesses or

benefits were discovered in the data were: teaching strategy; learners' understanding of content; memorizing and answering the tests; and developing confidence and good personal study habits. The quotations from the participants' interviews and the report of the classroom observations give strong evidence of the impact of language choice. The learners with the Sgaw-speaking teacher were positively affected in those areas whereas the learners with the Burmese-speaking teacher were negatively affected. Thus using a language that the learners do not have in common with the teacher as the language of instruction becomes the greatest barrier to learners' academic achievement. The data also shows that using only the national language in the early years in a minority area impedes comprehension. On the other hand, use of the mother tongue appears to promote the development of cognitive skills as well as facilitate both the use of good teaching and learning strategies. Even though Sgaw is not officially allowed to be used in this context, Sgaw-speaking teachers instinctively use it as an oral language of instruction to communicate with the learners, explain the lessons, and give opportunities to learners to discuss in a language they know. If the use of the mother tongue could be officially endorsed and increased in the classroom, it is likely that the teaching and learning processes would be more effective and the learners' academic performance would improve.

### **7.3 Implications of Research Findings**

The findings from the research presented lead to the following conclusions regarding implications for primary education in the learners' mother tongue, implications for planning education with smooth L1-L2 transition, and implications for awareness raising for mother tongue-based education.

#### **7.3.1 Implications for primary education in the learners' mother tongue**

Based on this research, it was found that the use of a familiar language is an essential condition for effective cognitive learning processes and teaching practices. Using a language that is familiar to learners as the medium of instruction from the beginning of the primary level of education provides a strong foundation for acquiring complex knowledge. In this study there is a large amount of evidence on the effectiveness of using the learners' mother tongue in early grades instead of the national language. The greater the proportion of time the mother tongue is used in teaching lessons, the better the scores in the assessment of performance in the second language. The learners from the Sgaw-speaking teachers' classes had higher

scores in Burmese relative to the other three subjects. Therefore, an effective way to lay the foundations for quality education for Sgaw children in this context is to use familiar media of instruction for several years, and to apply effective first and second language teaching methods. Besides, by going through the primary education in their mother tongue, the children can develop appropriate cognitive and reasoning skills that will help them in learning new things throughout their entire education process.

### **7.3.2 Implications for planning education with smooth L1-L2 transition**

Most ethnic minority children in Myanmar attend primary schools where the subjects are taught in the national language which they have never used in their home and daily life before. They have to learn the lessons in the national language immediately after they completed pre-primary in their mother tongue. Even for the children who have had the opportunity to go through Grades 1 and 2 in classes where their mother tongue was used as an oral language of instruction, when they move to Grade 3 they might face the difficult task of learning the national language while they are trying to learn new concepts. They have trouble learning the lessons: understanding the teacher's language, grasping the content of the subjects, answering the tests, and building confidence and good habits of learning. This could lead them to a big failure in their future in life-long learning. So the community educator should develop an education program that enables a smooth transition from the mother tongue to the national language and then to an additional language such as English.

If the children could have a class in their mother tongue outside of the school hours, where they are provided with full discussion of the topics of the subjects, and new vocabulary in Burmese, it would be a great opportunity to acquire the national language and the valuable knowledge in the subjects. In the villages where research was conducted, such an out-of-school program could happen in conjunction with the pre-existing morning chapel where the children currently learn Sgaw language. It would also help them build confidence and feel competent enough to use Burmese in higher grades.

### **7.3.3 Implications for promoting mother tongue-based education**

Although some educators understand the importance of the mother tongue in the early years of children's education, others think that early use of the national language in education is a good idea to help the children learn the lessons better and provide language skills for higher grades. Because of a lack of knowledge about ethnic minority education issues, and a lack of access to the case studies related to those issues, minority children's language learning needs are not realized. Sometimes, educators think that the children are too lazy to do their lessons, or not interested in their homework. They do not recognize that the reason the children could not do well was because of the situation in which the children do not have a chance to learn the lessons in their own language. Therefore, there is a definite need to conduct awareness raising about mother tongue-based education in the wider community by giving proof of how learners' mother tongue can be a suitable language for the children's learning leading to full success.

### **7.4 Suggestions for Further Research**

It is recommended that further research relating to this study be undertaken in several areas. First one is to conduct broader research on the issues addressed in this study and secondly to conduct research on other issues arising from this study.

#### **7.4.1 Further investigation of the present study**

In this study, 19 villages were included out of a possible total of 54 villages in Pathein Township. Though the primary purpose of the study was to find out the effect of the LOI learners' school achievement, there were other factors such as gender and class size that also had a vital effect on the test scores. Therefore, extending the study to those factors would be helpful to better understand all issues involved. The research could also be expanded to the other villages. In addition, follow-up evaluation of test scores from Grades 4 or 5 could also be conducted to examine the effects of teacher language on student performance over a longer time period. Further research could also explore the environmental factors mentioned in chapter 5 to understand whether language and other classroom situation factor or those environmental factors have more effect on children's learning.

### **7.4.2 New topics arising from the present study**

A future study conducting longitudinal research on learners' achievement and learning experience in school from Grade 1 to 11 would be very interesting. By doing this kind of research, it would help the community to gain deeper knowledge of the role of language, including the learners' MT, in educational success. It might give evidence that mother tongue-based education builds a good foundation for acquiring national language and other additional languages as well as learning concepts in the long term education process.

Sgaw Karen people live all over Myanmar. The children in this study live in ethnically homogenous communities, in villages with only Sgaw people. Many Sgaw children also live in urban areas, which are ethnically diverse. They live in communities which, for example, may have equal populations of speakers of different language groups, such as Burmese and Sgaw-speaking people. There are also some children who live in the city where the national language or regional language is dominant in daily life. It would be very interesting to research on the children in those situations to investigate how they cope with studying in the national language and achieve academic success in their education.

There are many other ethnic minority groups in Myanmar. Similar to the children in this study, the children from those groups also surely face difficulties in school because of the language barriers. However they might be in other different complex situations according to their context. It would be very useful to conduct research in other language communities for the benefit of children in those communities.