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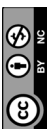
mother tongue and children's culture, bilingualism, Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, early childhood education, Kurds

Abstract:

This article tries to determine the effect and importance of mother tongue on cultural education in primary schools. Using the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, it investigates the relationship between mother tongue and culture. This research focuses on the language and culture of the Kurdish people in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region. The questions of research are: What is the impact of mother tongue on children's culture? Is there a relationship between the mother tongue and the culture, the identity and personality of the children in primary schools? What is more, are the Kurdish language and culture in danger of vanishing? The researcher used mixed methods of qualitative and quantitative, as well as used questionnaires among primary school students in the city of Erbil in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. This study resulted in the conclusion that the first language has a profound impact on the culture of students in primary schools. In contrast, bilingualism has an impact on children's distance from their own culture. In addition, three basic points that are concluded in the results of this article are recommended to the government to be implemented in their policy and the education system. Furthermore, the results of this study show that the Kurdish language and Kurdish culture are in trouble now.

1. Introduction

The mother tongue is the identity of nations, and the language of each nation is the basis for the creation of its culture. Culture is transmitted and practiced through language. Nowadays, countries are paying much attention to their own languages, and trying to make their languages widely available to the people of the world. There are many ways to do this, for instance, through education, technology, business, and politics. Many countries want to control people's minds through their language and then integrate them into their cultures. There is a lot of research being done around the world on the importance of the mother tongue to preserve languages and cultures. The case of this study is Kurdish language and Kurdish culture, and especially education in the Kurdish language in Erbil primary schools and its influence on the Kurdish culture. For the purpose of the presented research, the concepts of language, mother tongue and culture were explored and then a study based on the survey was conducted to determine the impact of the mother tongue on the culture in primary schools in the Kurdistan Region. The paper focuses on these definitions of language, mother tongue and culture that create a kind of relationship between the mother tongue and culture. This paper discusses the links between the mother tongue and culture based on the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis and conducted a questionnaire among Kurdish students in primary schools in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.



2. Language, mother tongue, culture: terminology

2.1. Language

Many definitions of language have been proposed. For instance, Edward Sapir defined language as a cultural, not biologically inherited phenomenon. According to the definition of Sapir, the development of language is not biologically inherited, but it is an act of enlightenment (Sapir, 2014, p. 2). To further clarify this point, we take the views of the great linguist Noam Chomsky. He believes children have a great ability to learn the language before and after birth. It seems to indicate that we are born wired with the basics already present in our brains. Chomsky suggested the language acquisition device (LAD). In his theoretical model, Chomsky elucidates the way children are predisposed to acquire any language in the early years of their age. He stated that learning a language and the significance of using it is a natural characteristic that human beings are born with. As we mentioned above comprise in this inborn knowledge must be details of important attributes of all the world's languages. The term universal grammar has been used to describe the knowledge in the LAD. For Chomsky, language acquisition is carried out through comprehending several universal principles of grammar that are implemented in the child's native language. Additionally, humans are the only species that are born with the abilities described above. Learning and processing language is a feature that can be found only in the human brain, not in non-human brains. To support this opinion, Frederick Froebel says: When a child is born, a set of hidden abilities is transmitted by chromosomes and genes to them by their parents. Furthermore, education and the process of teaching, training, and life experiences become effective factors in uncovering the hidden abilities that children have. The ability to learn a language is also one of the hidden abilities that can be seen at the beginning age of a child's life (Hamad, 2005, p. 15).

Nowadays, some languages are strong and knowledgeable, but some others are in trouble. Based on Chomsky's concept, it can be argued that the reason for this difference is that it is not biologically inherited. There are other reasons related to the teaching of languages in educational institutions that pay attention to mother tongue, and education policy of the governments. When a language is rich in knowledge and literature, it is because its nation has been paying attention and the language has preserved.

2.2. Mother tongue

When a person is born, he or she tries to establish a connection with the people close to him or her. Such connection is either through making sounds or crying, later, according to the stages of language development, the language gradually becomes phase. The first sound that a child hears is his mother's voice because the child in his mother's womb only listens to his mother's voice. This is because the mother used to talk to her baby in her womb, from here, created the language which called mother tongue comes in (Faridy & Syaodih, 2017, p. 194).

Regarding mother tongue, a child acquires it after birth which is spoken by the mother and is used to build social relationships with the family. The meaning of the mother tongue is the language a person has been found to speak from the time they were born. The child's native language is the language utilized to influence the child's life since the child was born. (Effiong, 2013, p. 141). The prominence of the mother tongue to children includes not only the language but also the personal, social and cultural features as well. The choice of words and expressions varies from one culture to another, and asking questions directly in one language is considered annoying and curious in another. This is because language choice in the conversation is well thought ahead of its conveyance. The meaning of language becomes broader as it is not only spoken, but also the child is able to create his or her own personality, social communications, culture, and identity through language.

2.3. Culture

The concept of culture is a broad concept. According Kwsh, culture is all that a person learns for a period including the information, facts, and values which enables him to actively participate in his family and community surroundings. (Kwsh, 2010, p. 25). Moreover, Taylor (1974), an anthropologist, says culture is a comprehensive concept that comprises knowledge, art, law, traditions and morals that someone receives as a part of his society. (Bennett, 2015). As for the holistic definition, culture is defined as an integrated system of all



ideas, ideals, values, beliefs, customs, skills, arts, moralities, laws, methods of atonement, ways of life, heritage, and means of communication or culture refers to several customs in a specific area which is accepted by the majority of people in the society. (The American Heritage, Science Dictionary 2005).

Part of the thinkers and intellectuals gave a more comprehensive concept of culture, considering it the human process of growth, transformation, expansion, and prosperity through creation and production. Its definition includes beliefs, art, ethics, law, and all the capabilities and habits that one acquires as a part of the community (Kwsh, 2010, p. 36). According to Sapir, it is an unconsciousness that culture is described as a system of behaviors and modes. He states that there is a direct relationship between culture and language and believes that the perception of one depends on the other. What is more, language is the mirror of society that reflects the elements of the culture of that society. (Mahadi & Jafari, 2012, p. 231).

3. The influence of the mother tongue on the culture of children's development in early childhood education

Using mother tongue as the language of instruction in the kindergarten and primary school stages greatly facilitates for children to be able to acquire the knowledge. If children are taught in another language, they will suffer a lot. When children come to school, the only language they can speak is their mother tongue. UNESCO mentioned that students learn faster when they are studying in their first language. We must remember that children can express themselves, understand concepts, and subject matter taught in mother tongue (Effiong, 2013, p. 142). In 1953, UNESCO emphasized that children need to be educated in their mother tongue, especially in early childhood education.

This shows that UNESCO fully supports the idea that children to be able to study in early childhood education in their mother tongue (Kosonen, 2005, p. 39).

The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis says, "People from different cultures think differently because of differences in their languages. Language has power and can control how you see the world. Language is a guide to your reality, structuring your thoughts. It provides the framework through which you make sense of the world" (Al-Sheikh Hussein, 2012, p. 642). According to this theory, language made human beings understand life and the world in diverse ways. People think differently because their language is different. Human beings are different in terms of personality, intelligence, and perception of life because their level of language is different from each other. In other words, it means due to the different languages, people have different perceptions of life. The main point in this hypothesis is that humans understand life and see the world through their mother tongue.

In the light of this theory, it has been elaborated that language, especially the mother tongue, has a direct effect on the personality and the way people think. For instance, Kurdish people think differently than Arabic people because their language is completely different from each other. Language has a direct impact on the diversity of cultures. Using mother tongue is the greatest strategy to preserve our culture. Mother tongue benefits us remain related to our culture and our roots (Nishanthi, 2020, p. 77). It is the right of every child to study in his or her mother tongue. 40% of children around the world are not educated in their mother tongue nowadays. (UNESCO, 2016). It has been found that using another language than their mother tongue as the language of education can have a negative influence on children's learning process. Moreover, the children that live in poverty are at greater risk of this phenomenon.

Irina Bokova, UNESCO Director-General from 2009 to 2017, indicated that educating and teaching children in the mother tongue is the main principle at an early stage of the learning process. a multilingual approach has a strong positive impact on the quality of education and the quality of life of societies. She also underlines the significance of the use of the mother tongue in early childhood education everywhere. (UNESCO, 2016).

Currently, there is a considerable risk of the extinction of some languages due to the dominance of other languages. The risk appears to be even higher in Asia, where among the 2,296 languages that are spoken, even 38% are in trouble as parents use the language but the younger generation does not. The lack of intergenerational transmission of "heritage" language (the "next" generation speaks and understands the family) is considered as the main reason for language extinction. Heritage language has trouble to be transmitted owing to

moving away from utilizing mother tongue informal education. In addition, more informal learning centers exist. (UNESCO, 2020, p. 11).

4. The mother tongue in the young Kurds' education – research study

What if you think that some countries are preventing children from education in their mother tongue? For example, Turkey and Iran have a large Kurdish population as they speak the Kurdish language, but are not allowed to study in their mother tongue. The UNESCO Global Education Monitor shows that there is an inequality in learning around the world. To support this point, in Iran, there is a variety of nations but the education system includes the Persian language only. For example, students in 4th grade whose mother tongue is not Persian receive lower results in reading skills than those students who are Persian native speakers. Also, in 2012 in Turkey, around half of students whose mother tongue is not Turkish obtain lower results in reading than those students being Turkish native speakers (UNESCO, 2016). Only in Iran around eight million Kurds live which their mothers tongue language is Kurdish not Farsi. And Only in Turkey around twenty million Kurds live (The Kurdish population, 2017). Unfortunately, lack of access to education on the Kurdish language for the Kurds living in Iran and Turkey has had an enormous impact on the individual Kurdish population in both countries, some of them completely forgotten about the Kurdish language, Identity and Kurdish culture.

Attempts have been made to make individuals feel vulnerable and not-self-confident through the neglect of their mother tongues. It is important to remember, if teaching in the mother tongue will not be allowed, the language will surely become extinct. As the cultural identity and language of the groups fade, the whole nation is at risk of disappearance. The real robbery of culture is done by stepping into the traditions and language of others, replacing them with a different language and different culture, at the same time not allowing to manifesting what an individual remembers from the family home. The current state of affairs is that a large number of Kurds who live in Turkey identify themselves as Ottoman, not Kurdish.

The Kurdistan Region is one of the officially recognized regions in the Iraqi Federal Constitution after 2005. Also Kurdish and Arabic are considered official languages. (Kurdistan Regional Government, 2015). Most of the people in the Kurdistan region speak in Kurdish language (Comparative Constitutions Project, 2021, p. 4). Fortunately, the Kurdish language is one of the languages that are protected from extinction according to the statistic set by UNESCO for the protection of languages. The Kurdish language is one of 108 Google Translate languages.

According to ISO 639-3, the Kurdish language code set is 639-2, 639-3, the Kurdish language identifier is KUR, the Kurdish language status is active, and ISO 969-3 indicates that the type of Kurdish Language is living language, means that the Kurdish language is globally known and protected (ISO 639-3, 2020). But as we mentioned above according to a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization article, 38% of the world's languages are in trouble, we can say that the Kurdish language is one of them.

However, there are several reasons why Kurdish language is in trouble, most importantly, for political reasons. Unfortunately, the Kurds do not yet have their own independent state. That is why there is always an attempt to eradicate the Kurdish language, as we mentioned above in countries like Turkey and Iran. Another reason is the lack of a standard Kurdish language that all Kurds speak everywhere. There are several Kurdish dialects, the most important of which are Kurmanji and Sorani (McDowall, 2004, p. 52). Religion is another reason. Because most of Kurdish people are Muslims, the Arabic language has become an essential language and sometimes been considered more sacred than the Kurdish language. The Kurdish language seems to have been slowly losing its value to education in the English language due to a lack of awareness of the importance of its native language and a general phenomenon of globalization that affects most parts of the world.

The Kurdish language in Kurdistan Region is at risk. One fact to prove this statement is the neglect of the importance of the Kurdish language in academic and educational institutions especially in early childhood education. Furthermore, not using mother tongue can create a big gap between the individuals and the nations they belong to. According to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, language is a powerful tool that dominates our perspective of the world. Using English language as the medium of instruction in early childhood education in Kurdistan region can create this gap and put Kurdish language at risk.



5. Cultural preferences of primary school students in Erbil

To demonstrate the relationship between the mother tongue and the culture, as well as the importance of mother tongue for building culture in early childhood education, the researcher conducted a questionnaire on primary school students in the Kurdistan Region primary schools. The aim of the research is to explore the link between the language experiences of primary school children and their cultural preferences in Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The study addressed the following research questions:

1. What elements of English and Kurdish material culture are preferred by children studying at school in their mother tongue and in English?
2. What elements of spiritual/symbolic culture from the English and Kurdish language context are chosen more often by children studying in primary school?
3. What are the differences in cultural choices between children learning their mother tongue and English in primary schools in Kurdish Region?

6. Research methods

The researcher used mixed methods of qualitative and quantitative to investigate the issue. The researcher collected both quantitative and qualitative data and analyzed both together to provide answers to the given questions. During analyzing the outcome of the questionnaire, the researcher has been using quantitative data to inform the analysis of the qualitative data.

The questionnaire: the questionnaire consisted of tests under the title: (A Test of Children Preferences) for students of primary schools in the city of Erbil in the Kurdistan Region. Two cases were taken from the school system for this test, the schools in which the medium of instruction is Kurdish and the schools in which the medium of instruction is English.

Based on the concept and meaning of culture, in this test, several elements have been identified that are part of the cultural elements, such as (food and clothing, villages that are part of the tradition, songs and stories that are part of art and literature, the way children do greetings which is part of behavior, as well as watching TV or YouTube and which alphabet children like more). Sixteen Elements of Culture are selected for students to choose from which were consisted of one "English culture element" and one "Kurdish culture element." The test of preferences includes elements of material (clothes, food) and spiritual (watching TV, song, stories, greetings, alphabet) culture. Based on the choice of these elements, students describe their choices of everyday life which has an impact on the overall culture of a society.

252 students (male and female) have been selected from four primary schools. There were 126 male and female participants from two primary schools in which the medium of instruction is English. In addition, another 126 students were selected from two primary schools in which the medium of instruction is Kurdish.

7. Children's cultural preferences in the Kurdish region of Iraq – results

According to the statistics from the Ministry of Education of the Kurdistan region, there are currently 420 kindergartens, primary, secondary schools, and non-governmental institutes. Of these, 209 are English-language primary and secondary schools. These schools are privately owned. In terms of buildings, staff, and other parties, they are better than public schools, and this makes parents of students more attracted to private schools. Day after day, the number of such private schools in which the medium of instruction is English is increasing. Regardless of what connection the language has with culture and identity. For this purpose, to further prove the impact of the mother tongue on the culture in the primary schools of the Iraqi Kurdistan region, the researcher has done this test. The results of this test shows that the effectiveness and importance of language in introducing culture to children.

Table 1. Percentage of student's preference)

English Primary school					Kurdish Primary school				
Culture	Number of students	%	Culture	%	Culture	Number of students	%	Culture	%
Fast food	126	86	Kurdish food	34	Fast food	126	38	Kurdish food	62
YouTube	126	92	Kurdish TV	8	YouTube	126	51	Kurdish TV	49
European village	126	50	Kurdistan village	50	European village	126	37	Kurdistan village	63
Queen & king's clothes	126	37	Kurdish clothes	63	Queen & king's clothes	126	19	Kurdish clothes	81
English songs for children	126	75	Kurdish songs for children	25	English songs for children	126	44	Kurdish songs for children	56
English story for children	126	71	Kurdish story for children	29	English story for children	126	21	Kurdish story for children	79
English alphabet	126	75	Kurdish alphabet	25	English alphabet	126	48	Kurdish alphabet	52
Greeting In English Language (Hi)	126	74	Greeting In Kurdish Language (Silaw)	26	Greeting In English Language (Hi)	126	37	Greeting In Kurdish Language (Silaw) سل‌او	63

The Education system and the medium of instruction in English have affected the children's desire to choose the type of food, for example, 86% of the students like to eat fast food. Conversely only 34% of students like to eat Kurdish food. But if we look at the data from public schools, 38% of students would like to eat fast food, the rest (62%) would like to eat Kurdish food.

The test also shows that the relationship between the Education System in the English language and children's desire to watch YouTube, where 92% of the students like to watch YouTube in English, which is a vast number. Conversely, only 8% of these students like to watch Kurdish television and channels, and Kurdish TV and channels are an important source for introducing the Kurdish language, culture, tradition, behavior and, literature. But if we look at the relationship between primary education in the Kurdish language and children's preferences for the same item, we can see that 51% of the students like to watch YouTube, conversely 49% of these students like to watch Kurdish television and channels.

If we look at the difference in the amount of rate between the two types of education systems, for watching YouTube by students, we see that the desire of children to watch YouTube in Kurdish schools has reduced to 51% compared to English school which was 92%. This shows that teaching in Kurdish and the mother tongue have had an impact on children, with all the development of technology nowadays but still students are interested in watching Kurdish TV.

The impact of the education system in the English language has had affected the interest of children, with 50% of the students preferring European villages. The villages of Kurdistan are rich in Kurdish culture and life, but 50 percent of the children who study in English do not like the villages of Kurdistan. The relationship between Kurdish language primary education and children's desire to the same election, we will see the difference in this rate: 37 %of the students like European villages. Conversely, 63% of these students are interested in Kurdish villages.

The English language primary education has affected the children's desire to wear the Queen and King Costumes foreigner, which 37% of the students like to wear. Conversely, 63% of these students like to wear Kurdish traditional clothing. If we look at the relationship between the Kurdish language primary education and children's desire to the same election, we will see the difference in this rate: 19% of the students like to wear the Queen and King Costumes foreigner. On the other hand, 81% of these students, who like to wear Kurdish cultural clothing, have chosen to wear Kurdish traditional clothing.



The English language primary education has affected the children's desire to children's songs in English, with 75 % of students like children's songs in English. If we look at the relationship between the Kurdish language primary education and children's desire for the same election, we will see that the difference has been made in this ratio: only 44% of students like children's songs in English. Conversely, the rate has risen to 56% of students who like Kurdish songs.

The English language primary education has affected the children's desire for children's stories in English, 71% of students like children's stories in English. Conversely, 29% percent of these students like children's stories in Kurdish. If we look at the relationship between the Kurdish language primary education and children's desire for the same election, we will see that the difference has been made in this ratio: 21% of students like children's stories in English; it seems that the rate is exceptionally low. On the other hand, 79% of these students like children's stories in the Kurdish language.

The English language primary education has affected the children's desire for the English language, for example: 75% of students like the English alphabet, conversely only 25% of the students like the Kurdish alphabet, if we look at the relationship between the Kurdish language primary education and children's desire for the same election, we will see that the difference has been made in this ratio: 48% of students like the English alphabet. Conversely 52% of these students like the Kurdish alphabet.

The English language primary education has had a significant impact on how to greet which is a part of the culture and behavior: 74% of students would like to greet each other in English and use the word «Hi» (Harvest Index). Conversely, 26% of these students would like to greet each other in Kurdish and use words (SILAW) (سل او), if we look at the relationship between the Kurdish language primary education and children's desire for the same election, we see a difference in this ratio: 37% of students would like to greet each other in English and use the word "Hi", and 63% of these students would like to greet each other in Kurdish and use the word (Silaw) (سل او).

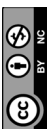
The results show that the impact of language differences on the choice of children and cultural elements on children in primary schools, children who study at English primary schools are more interested in foreign cultures and traditions than children who study in the Kurdish language in primary schools. However, the education system in the Kurdish language has shown that children are well acquainted with Kurdish culture. Studying in the mother tongue at school can lead children to like the Kurdish alphabet and listens to Kurdish songs and Kurdish stories, and to love Kurdish villages, and to enjoy Kurdish food. Unfortunately, this test indicates that the impact of the English language on Kurdish children is somehow they do not like Kurdish culture, customs, tradition, and language, it also has a negative impact on the lives and personalities of individual Kurds and distances them from their feels of nationality and identity. It is important for the Kurdistan Regional Government to pay more attention to the Kurdish language education system, to provide the best teaching methods and activities for teaching the Kurdish language in all stages of primary school. The mother tongue plays a vital role in the development of all aspects of students' lives, that's why its important Kurdish children know very well Kurdish language.

8. Recommendations

The role that the mother tongue plays in the education process of children is extremely crucial. It supports the progress of a child's awareness in terms of personal, social, and cultural matters. Speaking the native language is helpful to increase critical way of thinking skills well as the ability to write and read more critically. Supplying comfortable environments for the students is of great importance as well. When children are taught in that language used by their families at home, they can progress their self-esteem and confidence to build social bonds that is why UNESCO and several other studies have emphasized the need for children everywhere in the world to have studied in their own language, especially in Early Childhood Education.

It is especially important that

- Early childhood education should be practiced in the mother tongue.
- Education policies should recognize the importance of the mother tongue learning not another language.
- Encourage parents to send their children to schools in their mother tongue.
- Government policy and the education system should be given more prominence in the development of schools in the mother tongue.



9. Conclusion

The mother tongue has an enormous impact on the culture or creation of cultures. Studying in mother tongue at an early childhood education will have an impact on how children think and feel. Students from the same country are different in their thinking and culture due to the differences in the language of their education system. Children who study in the Kurdish language (mother tongue) are more familiar with their culture. But Kurdish children who study in the English language are more interested in a foreign culture and stay away from Kurdish culture and Kurdish language and identity. It is clear that language and culture are closely related. Thus, these children who study in their mother tongue do not have a social problem of self-adjustment within their society.

Furthermore, the mother tongue is an enormous power for the preservation of nations and cultures. It is often through the elimination of languages that attempts are being made to eradicate other cultures and nations. However, when the mother tongue is pushed out of education, it threatens the cultural coherence of the nation too.

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