

Mother Language Education and Language Planning Policy: A Case of Hawramani Children in Iraqi Kurdistan

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ABSTRACT: This study underscores the crucial role of mother tongue instruction in language policy planning at different levels due to its impact on kids' ability to grow cognitively. The aim of this research is to study the importance of and challenges associated with using mother tongue in education. The focuses on the Hawrami variety spoken in the Hawraman area of Halabja province, Kurdistan Region/Iraq and explores a range of mother tongue education initiatives, opportunities and challenges in this area vis-à-vis Kurdish language policy. In other words, the study is investigating mother tongue education specifically designed for children in this particular area from a sociolinguistics perspective. This research addresses issues about the real-world implications of mother tongue education for Hawramani children. It has been found that significant efforts have been taken in this direction since ideas of mother tongue education is closely linked to cultural significance. Moreover, learning in one's mother tongue fosters cultural pride and protects legacy. This is crucial for Hawramani children because it helps them develop a strong sense of who they are, connect with their heritage, and feel more a part of their communities.

Keywords: Language Planning Policy, Family Language Policy, Language Right, Language Education, Hawraman, Iraqi Kurdistan.

1. Introduction

Hawramani people reside in the culturally diverse region of Hawraman, situated on the mountainous border between Iraq (approximately 500 km from Baghdad) and Iran (around 400 km from Tehran), spanning three provinces in both countries. While estimating the population of Hawraman at 600,000-700,000, precise figures require consultation of demographic data from the provinces, districts, and villages of both nations. Notably, Kermanshah province houses around 300,000 Hawrami speakers, and Iranian Kurdistan province has about 200,000. Additionally, approximately 60,000 Hawrami speakers reside in Iraq, primarily in Halabja, with an additional 15,000 spread across other provinces. An estimated 25,000 Hawrami speakers are living in Europe (Amin, 2021).

Hawramani people, predominantly Sunni Muslims following the Shafi'i school, also observe Zoroastrianism. This ancient religion, practiced by Hawraman's followers, is annually celebrated in the middle of winter in the district of Hawraman.

Active in various fields such as literature, politics, academia, and governance, Hawramani people contributed to Kurdish civilization influential figures like Sayyidi, Mirza Pavayi, Besarani, and Khanei Qubad. Also, Mustafa Zalmi, an innovative Islamic scholar whose works are widely used in universities worldwide, and who has garnered a substantial following among writers, poets, scientists, and political figures, is recognized globally (Amin, 2021).

Despite a gradual decline in numbers, the Hawramani people persist in using their native dialect, Hawrami, one of the four Kurdish varieties which differs from the main Kurdish language in terms of its corpus, grammar, phonology, and usage. For instance, unlike other Kurdish regional dialects, Hawrami employs grammatical gender (masculine and feminine) reflected in verbs, nouns, adjectives and positions.

In fact, Hawrami as a regional dialect consists of three primary sub-dialects. One of them is called Takht and Shamian which is spoken in villages like Hawraman, Dzli, Marivan, Zalm, and Khurmali on both sides of the Iraq-Iran border. The second dialect is known as Hawrami Zhawaro, and its speakers primarily reside in the Kurdistan province of Iran, specifically in Sanandaj. The communities where this dialect is prevalent include Besarani, Tangisar, Avihang, Huya and Paygalan. Finally, Hawrami Lehon dialect is

spoken in the Iranian province of Kermanshah and various districts in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (Amin, 2021; Amin, 2023).

2 A brief insight into previous studies vis-à-vis Language Policy and Planning

Language policy and planning is a pivotal concept in sociolinguistics and language education policy, encompassing the systematic efforts of government agencies, academic institutions, or private organizations to shape the use, teaching, and perception of languages within a given community (Kaplan and Baldauf, 1997). In our increasingly globalized world, language serves not only as a means of communication but also embodies culture, identity, history, and governance. It regulates the nature and quantity of social situations and power relations. This underscores the crucial perspective of language policy and planning in managing and shaping the use, status, and teaching of languages (Kaplan and Baldauf, 1997). Language policy and planning is a complex idea that covers a number of areas, such as language planning at the state level, language treasury planning, language teaching and acquisition planning, and language dignity planning (Hornberger, 2006).

Assigning roles and functions to languages within a society is known as language planning at the state and authority levels (Cooper, 1999). This can involve making a language the official or national language, choosing the language used for administrative and judicial proceedings in government and authority structures, or setting the language used for instruction in educational institutions. Creating, modifying, and standardizing a language to satisfy changing societal demands is part of the planning process for a linguistic treasury. This could involve modernizing language to reflect new scientific or technological ideas, standardizing spelling and grammar rules, or developing new vocabularies (Haugin, 1983).

In order to facilitate language learning in particular contexts like education, public administration, or immigrant integration, authorities have developed strategies to support language learning (Kaplan and Baldauf, 1997). Planning for language learning or acquisition focuses on how languages are learned and used. In the end, language dignity planning aims to change how society views and values particular languages, frequently through the use of the media, educational institutions, and other social institutions (Eastman, 1983).

Language planning policy has wide-ranging effects as language extinction, the marginalization of linguistic structures, cultural deterioration, and even social unrest can result from misguided or badly executed language policies. For instance, social discord and the loss of cultural identity can arise from the forced adoption of a foreign language in the classroom at the expense of native tongues and official languages (Ricento, 2006). On the other hand, thorough, effective, and methodical language policies and planning can support interculturalism, multilingualism, linguistic diversity, cultural preservation, social cohesion, equality, and social harmony (Hornberger, 2006).

It is essential that language policies and planning be created with a high level of sensitivity, inclusivity, and deliberate decision-making given these possible effects. Language communities, educators, sociolinguists, and other stakeholders should work together to develop language policies and plans that take into account variables like linguistic diversity, cultural contexts, social needs, and the rights of linguistic minorities. Furthermore, it is crucial to continuously monitor and revise policies in light of community opinions, shifting conditions, stages, and needs (Ricento, 2006).

To put it simply, language planning and policy are effective instruments for controlling and reshaping a society's linguistic structure. Language teaching and acquisition, linguistic treasury, state-level and status, and language dignity planning are all intricately intertwined. Research, practice, and vigorous advocacy in this field are required as political and social changes continue, societies move toward globalization, and advanced technology becomes more prevalent. As a result, language policy and planning become increasingly important.

In fact, a country's educational system is greatly shaped by its language policy, which has an impact on both linguistic and cognitive development. The importance of teaching children in their mother tongue for preserving cultural identity has received a lot of attention lately. Studies conducted by Skutnab-Kangas (2000) and Mohanty (1994) suggest that preserving cultural heritage and identity is aided by providing primary education in the mother tongue. Both the vitality of an intercultural society and the life of an individual depend on this relationship. According to Baker (2006) and Cummins (2000), learning a mother tongue at a young age improves children's learning efficacy and makes the transition to learning a second or foreign language easier. This, in turn, promotes better cognitive development and academic success.

Studies by Benson (2004) and Hugh (2009) show a connection between mother tongue education and improved communication abilities.

Additionally, inclusion and equity in education are facilitated by language policies that prioritize mother tongue instruction. Children who do not receive instruction in their mother tongue face discrimination and have worse educational outcomes, according to UNESCO research from 2003. Ensuring equal access to high-quality education is ensured by teaching them in their mother tongue. Some researchers including May (2014) highlight how mother tongue instruction promotes community involvement, which builds stronger support systems and a sense of ownership over education. But it's important to recognize the difficulties and factors involved in putting mother tongue education into practice. Tove-Sorensen (2019) and King and Mackie (2007) stress the significance of having qualified teachers, relevant resources, and an awareness of linguistic diversity.

Studies from Benson and Kosonen (2013) and Trudell (2018) demonstrate a global perspective on mother tongue education and the recognition of its significance in language policies across numerous nations. Even though mother tongue education has many proven advantages, there are still issues that must be resolved. The study conducted by Seid (2016) on children's language acquisition emphasizes that acquiring the mother tongue has a direct effect on enhancing children's knowledge and learning. According to Nishanti (2017), this influence also extends to children's cognitive growth and the advancement of their literary and scientific aptitudes. Additionally, mother tongue instruction strengthens the bonds that bind students, their families, and the school. It encourages parents to get involved in their child's education, which is one of the things that makes the educational process successful.

Additionally, teaching in the mother tongue gives teachers more opportunity to thoroughly explain lessons to students, resulting in a thorough understanding between the two parties. Porswell (2021) emphasizes that teaching mother tongue to elementary school students results in a decentralized curriculum that closely connects with students at different levels and encourages a love of learning and a higher sense of engagement. Acquiring knowledge of grammar and literature in the native language enables pupils to maintain ties to their culture and civilization, offering a significant chance to familiarize themselves with their own ancestry. In the end, teaching primary school students in their mother tongue is not only a democratic and legal right, but it also provides them with the first safe learning environment in which to grow in comprehension, critical thinking, and learning.

3. Method

3.1 Significance of the Research:

In the larger framework of Kurdish linguistic legacy, this research assumes a crucial role as an inventive and trailblazing endeavor committed to the preservation of the Hawrami variety. It stands out as a unique and ground-breaking endeavor, recognizing the rich cultural tapestry woven by the Hawrami people, and is specifically focused on the Hawraman region in the province of Halabja.

In fact, this research aims to promote Hawrami as a priceless linguistic asset, going beyond simple preservation. Through illuminating its unique characteristics and subtleties, the research seeks to reinforce Hawrami's position as a variety with intrinsic cultural value. By doing this, it acknowledges the potential of Hawrami as a catalyst for the advancement and diversification of the larger Kurdish language as well as preserving the linguistic identity of the Hawrami community.

More specifically, this study shines a light on the linguistic diversity of Kurdistan by examining the linguistic subtleties of Hawrami and identifying its distinct contributions to the region's linguistic mosaic. By carefully analyzing the linguistic nuances of Hawrami and its cultural significance in the Hawraman area, the study aims to provide a thorough grasp of the language's historical foundations and current significance. Moreover, the study aims to strengthen ties between the various linguistic groups in Kurdistan by highlighting Hawrami's significance within the broader context of the Kurdish language. Essentially, it both maintains Hawrami's uniqueness and establishes it as a crucial component of the complex web of Kurdish linguistic diversity.

3.2 Research Questions

This paper endeavors to address several pivotal questions:

Q1: What are the significant efforts to promote mother tongue education in Hawraman?

Q2: What are the challenges in implementing mother tongue education for children in Hawraman?

Q3: How do opportunities for mother tongue education contribute to the Kurdish language policy in the Kurdistan Region?

Q4: Is education in Hawrami considered a linguistic right for children in Hawraman?

3.3 Statement of the Problem:

This research delves into a pressing issue – the obstacles and challenges confronting Hawrami education in the Kurdistan Region, particularly within Halabja province, home to the Hawrami community. Recognizing the subjectivity of the challenges, the study focuses on presenting scientifically, academically, and programmatically grounded insights into the impediments faced by the Hawrami education process. Furthermore, it aims to propose viable solutions to address these challenges.

3.4 Data Collection:

A thorough methodology is used in this qualitative study on Hawrami education in the Kurdistan Region's Halabja province. In-depth interviews with important stakeholders – 50 educators among them – are prioritized in order to gather complex perspectives and experiences. In order to provide historical context and comprehend the policy framework, the study also includes a thorough analysis of documents from media outlets, academic publications, broadcasting programs, and educational policies. Engaging in dialogue with diverse stakeholders fosters a dynamic investigation of viewpoints and possible avenues for enhancement. The study assesses administrative and scholarly initiatives in the larger Kurdistan Region, such as curriculum development projects and educational programs run by a committee in both Ministry of Education and Ministry of Culture. Crucially, the opinions of a current Hawrami Education Committee member provide useful and practical viewpoints, enhancing our comprehension of the difficulties and achievements encountered in advancing Hawrami education as a main course for first, second and third grades in primary schools in Hawraman area in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region's Halabja province.

4. Data Analysis

4.1 Efforts to Promote Mother Language Education in Hawraman:

4.1.1 General Initiatives:

Motivated by a desire to preserve the Hawrami variety, Hawraman youth and activists gathered more than 500 signatures in support of the Hawrami variety instruction being included in the education of Hawramani children in the province of Halabja in 2005. They emphasized that their main goal was to get the Ministry of Education and the Kurdistan Regional Government to support the inclusion of Hawrami grammar and literature books in the curriculum. At the same time, a number of initiatives were launched, including Hawrami candidates using the language and their educational goals in their campaign platforms. None of these attempts, nevertheless, were successful in obtaining the required approvals.

It is noteworthy that the Kurdistan Region has experienced substantial changes in its cultural landscape. Highlighting Hawrami culture has been made possible by a number of cultural centers, such as the Hawraman Cultural Center, Zhiwa Organization, Siachemana Organization, Khormal Cultural Center, Khormal newspaper, and Hawraman magazine. A plethora of television shows, including 'Amyan', 'Ba Horami', 'Payami Hawraman', 'Hawargai Hawraman', 'Hawarw Hawramani', 'Hana Rangina' and 'Hana Kekewan' have also made a substantial contribution to cultural initiatives. The cultural initiatives in the area have been profoundly impacted by these group efforts.

4.1.2 Administrative Endeavors:

An important turning point in the efforts to support Hawrami education for kids in Hawraman was the formation of the ninth cabinet of the Kurdistan Regional Government. Initiatives and linguistic rights for the Kurdish language were given new life and a calculated approach under the direction of Minister of Culture and Youth in Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), Hama Hama Saeed. Minister Hama Hama Saeed facilitated discussions and consultations with intellectuals and academics to shape his vision, known as the "Hawrami Education for Children in Hawraman" project. He diligently engaged in political, administrative, and diplomatic efforts, initiating discussions with the Minister of Education to gather perspectives. Subsequently, a Council of Ministers meeting was convened to deliberate on the project. Following extensive debates, the project was deferred to future sessions, and a committee comprising the Kurdish Academy, Ministries of Higher Education, Education, and Culture was formed.

After concerted efforts, in February 2023, the Ministry of Culture of (KRG), established a high-level committee to engage with a corresponding committee from the Ministry of Education, aiming to overcome

challenges and implement the Hawrami education project. The ensuing discussions sought to address the complexities associated with this significant educational initiative.

4.2 Challenges in Implementing Mother Language Education for Children in Hawraman:

The initiation of the mother tongue education project for children in Hawraman by the Ministry of Culture of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) encountered a spectrum of obstacles and challenges, categorized into both scientific and non-scientific realms.

4.2.1 Non-Scientific Challenges:

Despite being a scientific and educational initiative, the Hawrami education project confronted non-scientific challenges. A notable hurdle was the presence of an "unscientific" sentiment among a considerable number of educated individuals who perceived Hawrami education as an attempt to fragment the Kurdish language. This sentiment found expression in numerous articles, social media posts, and public discussions, sparking reactions across various platforms, including media, political parties, government channels, and unofficial outlets. In response, an intellectual has compiled all relevant documents and intends to publish them in a forthcoming book.

4.2.2 Scientific Challenges:

Several scientific challenges were raised during the committee discussions regarding the implementation of the Hawrami education process. These included the creation of Hawrami literature and language, figuring out when to start implementing it, creating a useful evaluation system, and dealing with grammatical, gender, and numerical differences. In order to address these issues, the Kurdistan Region's Minister of Culture and Youth called conferences with a sizable group of scholars and professors from Kurdistan universities, holding in-depth conversations to work through these complexities.

4.3 Opportunities for Mother Language Learning for Children in Hawraman:

A child's identity, cognitive development, and overall academic success are significantly shaped by their language. There are many benefits to teaching kids in their mother tongue that are based in linguistic, cognitive, and sociocultural factors. The maintenance of Hawraman children's cultural identity is one of the biggest benefits of teaching them in their mother tongue. According to Cummins (2008), language is a tool for maintaining culture as well as a means of communication. Children who receive their education in their mother tongue develop a deep appreciation for their cultural background and a strong sense of kinship with their origins. This helps to celebrate and preserve diversity, which is important in the globalized world of today.

Several studies indicate that children who attend school in their mother tongue perform better academically. In a comprehensive study on bilingual education, Thomas and Collier (2002) discovered that students who are proficient in their mother tongue typically do better academically. This is explained by the fact that learning new language and cognitive abilities is facilitated by having a strong foundation in one's mother tongue. In essence, teaching kids in their mother tongue serves as a springboard for additional education, giving them lots of chances to improve their scientific literacy.

For Hawramani children, speaking and thinking in their mother tongue improves communication and critical thinking abilities. According to UNESCO (2003), children who receive instruction in a language that they find most understandable actively participate in class discussions and are able to articulate their ideas and thoughts. They perform better academically and gain valuable life skills as a result of this.

Benson's (2002) research emphasizes how mother tongue-based education raises children's literacy rates dramatically. Children from Hawramani families lay a strong foundation for their future acquisition of literacy skills in other languages when they learn to read and write in their mother tongue. This can significantly lower the rate of illiteracy, particularly in underserved areas. For Hawramani children, mother tongue education fosters social equality and inclusion. In order to guarantee that children from underprivileged or linguistic minority backgrounds have equal access to high-quality education, promote social cohesion, and lessen educational disparities, UNESCO emphasizes the importance of mother tongue education.

4.4 Language education for children in Hawraman as a linguistic right:

A fundamental human right, the right to language guarantees people's and communities' ability to speak, use, and develop their native tongues. These rights are closely related to a society's social, cultural, and

educational aspects. A set of human rights principles known as "linguistic rights" are intended to preserve linguistic diversity and advance equality among speakers of various languages. Several international and regional instruments, including the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (Article 13), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 27), and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 2), recognize these rights. emphasize the value of minority language preservation and linguistic diversity.

One of the most important components of children's language rights in Hawraman is their entitlement to an education in their mother tongue. Learning in the language that Hawramani children are most comfortable with fosters inclusive, equitable, and high-quality education—all of which are fundamental tenets of the UN Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4). According to studies, teaching children in their mother tongue improves their learning. It supports critical thinking, comprehension, and cognitive growth. Furthermore, once a strong foundation in the mother tongue has been established, the transfer to a second language may be simpler.

For Hawramani children, learning in their mother tongue contributes to the preservation of their identity and cultural legacy. It helps kids feel rooted and proud of their cultural heritage by establishing a connection to their heritage. Since it guarantees that linguistic minorities and indigenous communities have equal access to high-quality education without facing discrimination, education in a child's mother tongue fosters inclusion and equity. Promoting mother tongue education helps to preserve linguistic diversity, which is essential for the cultural diversity of communities across the globe.

Even though mother tongue education is important, there are still a number of issues. Marginalized communities and indigenous peoples face limited access to education in their mother tongue, lack of resources, and linguistic discrimination in many parts of the world. Governments should implement policies that support multilingual education, acknowledging and fostering linguistic diversity within their borders. Educational institutions should also work to develop multilingual education policies in order to address these issues.

The right to receive an education in one's mother tongue is one of the fundamental human rights known as linguistic rights. In addition to helping to preserve the Hawramni variety, teaching Hawramni children in their mother tongue is essential to advancing inclusive, equitable, and high-quality education. Societies can take significant action to protect language rights and maintain linguistic diversity by realizing the value of mother tongue education and addressing the obstacles preventing its implementation.

5. Conclusion:

The educational tenets that guide teaching children in their mother tongue are based on a thorough comprehension of language learning, cognitive growth, and the value of cultural identity. The foundation for children's linguistic and cognitive development is education in their mother tongue. This principle acknowledges that teaching language to children in their mother tongue naturally helps them acquire language skills more successfully. Learning the language of instruction helps Hawramani children's cognitive development because it frees them up to concentrate on conceptual understanding rather than overcoming language barriers.

One of the core ideas of mother tongue education, which is closely linked to cultural significance and identity, is that learning in one's mother tongue fosters cultural pride and protects legacy. For Hawramani children, this is a crucial point because it helps them develop a strong sense of who they are, connect with their heritage, and feel more a part of their communities. The idea of mother tongue education is one that is backed by equity and inclusion since it guarantees that kids from different linguistic backgrounds will have equal access to high-quality education. Equity in educational opportunities is promoted and disparities are addressed through mother tongue-based education.

The language used to teach has a significant impact on children's emotions. Teaching in the mother tongue gives kids more self-assurance and encourages them to be more involved and active learners. A comfortable and supportive learning environment is produced by a language that is well-known to the learner.

The development and comprehension of children's language is greatly influenced by mother tongue education. This study explores the finer points of the varied Hawrami dialect that children in the area speak, with a particular focus on Hawraman in the province of Halabja. It is situated within the larger

framework of the Kurdistan Region/Iraq. The research carefully looks at different initiatives, analyzing the difficulties encountered and the chances that have arisen.

A primary inquiry posed by this research concerns the tactical application of Hawrami as a useful instrument to promote Kurdish language policy in the area. By means of an extensive examination, the research aims to demonstrate how mother tongue instruction can act as a stimulant for the preservation and enhancement of language as well as the development of a more robust cultural identity among the Hawrami-speaking populace. The study emphasizes how crucial mother tongue instruction is, particularly given the linguistic diversity of the Kurdistan Region. It highlights the importance of promoting and maintaining native dialects, such as Hawrami, in order to protect cultural identity, improve language proficiency, and support larger language policy goals.

The results of this study shed light on the opportunities and challenges that come with implementing mother tongue education programs, providing insightful information about their complexities. The study concludes by fervently pleading with legislators, educators, and linguists to increase funding for the creation and execution of mother tongue education programs. The Kurdistan Region's other linguistic communities are also included in this appeal, in addition to the Hawraman community. According to the study, more research in this area is necessary to preserve the Kurdish language's rich linguistic heritage, enhance the region's linguistic and cultural legacy, and strengthen it.

6. References

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