# The Mother Tongue Teaching as a Multicultural Category: Impacts and Consequences (A Synthesis Study)

**Abstract**

**Purpose**: Mother tongue is considered as an important part of the human identity. The objective of this study was to investigate mother tongue training as a multicultural category and its impacts and consequences.

**Methodology**: This study was applied in terms of the objective, and descriptive and research synthesis in terms of method. The study population was studies on mother tongue, mother tongue training, multiculturalism, cultural diversity and systematic training in the last ten years. Among them, 183 studies were selected by purposeful sampling method after investigating the inclusion criteria and entered the final synthesis. The data were analyzed by content analysis.

**Findings**: The results showed that most of the studies had a positive view of multiculturalism and believed that the rights of minorities and individual differences should be taken into account. Regarding mother tongue training or training in the mother tongue can help strengthen national solidarity. The structure of curricula in some places requires more revision and flexibility. The teachers, learners and parents had a positive attitude towards training in the mother tongue, and teachers should have special competence to teach in multicultural education centers, for which in-service training can be used. Training in the mother tongue improves psychological and social conditions, academic performance, self-confidence, learning, writing skills of learners in the training environment and even easier learning of second and third languages.

**Conclusion**: Regarding the impacts and consequences of mother tongue training as a multicultural category, professionals and planners should look at mother tongue training or training in mother tongue as a necessity and plan to implement it.

**Affiliations:**

1. PhD student, Department of Curriculum Planning, Tabriz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tabriz, Iran.
2. Associate Professor, Department of Curriculum Studies, Allameh Tabatabai University, Tehran, Iran. (Corresponding Author). mostafaghaderi5252@gmail.com
3. Assistant Professor, Department of Educational Sciences, Tabriz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tabriz, Iran.

**Introduction**

Bilingualism and multilingualism are global phenomena, and it is almost impossible to find a country where at least a small part of it does not speak two or more languages. For this reason, in many countries, in addition to the official language, there are other languages, accents and dialects that are used for training and learning of students. Another important point is that studies show that 70% of the world's population is bilingual or multilingual, statistics on the bilingual population of Iran are different and some studies have reported up to 75% in students (Karami, Aliabadi, Sahrayi and Delavar, 2018) . Language as a source of knowledge and information includes a set of signs that are in the minds of individuals since childhood and usually formed by the family (Luo, Pace, Levine, Iglesias, De Villiers, Golinkoff et al, 2021). Language is a tool for conveying messages and communicating between people and allows people to convey complex ideas and concepts (Awopetu, 2016). Language is one of the most important tools for conveying culture, using which one can express one's feelings, emotions and desires, and each language has its own parables and charm, and if it becomes another language, it loses some of its charm (Hopp, Vogelbacher , Kieseier and Thoma, 2019).

The lingual ability means the human knowledge of their own language and a set of structural rules and a set of words that human beings acquire at different stages of learning their mother tongue (O'Brien, Yussof, Vijayakumar, Mohamed and Leong, 2020). Training in the mother tongue is a successful gateway to learning other languages, and learning a second language, in addition to learning and mastering the mother tongue or a first language, depends on how language learners are taught and understood (Piper, Zuilkowski, Kwayumba and Oyanga, 2018). The human usually communicates with the environment and situations in the first language that constitutes his mental structure i.e. mother tongue (Frutos Izquierdo Rus and Habib Allah, 2017). Mother tongue is the language through which a person first learns to speak, communicate, and express the thoughts he or she has in mind to others (2018). Mother tongue forms the human identity, conveys culture to the future generation, and is the most important and effective way to train concepts and skills to children (Chicoine, 2019). Article 15 of the Iranian Constitution states that the official and common language and script of the Iranian people is Persian. The official documents, correspondence, and texts and textbooks should be in this language and script, but the use of local and ethnic languages in the press and mass media and the teaching of their literature in schools is free in addition to Persian. Also, Article 19 of the Iranian Constitution is called the principle of ethnic equality and it is explained that the Iranians, regardless of their ethnicity and tribe, have equal rights; and color, race, language and etc. will not cause privileges. In Iran, there is no systematic system for giving a role in native languages or teaching them in education and higher education, all textbooks are in Persian, and in Iran there is no textbook for other language groups such as Azeri, Kurdish, Arabic, Turkmen, Gilaki and etc. (Moradi and Seifollahi, 2012).

Today's world is a multicultural world that can only be understood from a pluralistic perspective, a view that combines cultural identity, global networking and multidimensional politics, and the most important features of this world is the cultural, social, political, and linguistic diversity and multiplicity (Gharibi, Golestani and Jafari, 2016). Multiculturalism is a situation in which different cultures coexist for a variety of reasons, and the objective of multicultural education is to design and develop curricula according to different cultural characteristics (Zanchetta, Cognet, Rahman, Byam, Carlier, Foubert et al., 2021). In general, the objective of multicultural education is to institutionalize the philosophy of cultural pluralism in the education system, which should be based on mutual respect, acceptance, understanding and moral commitment. In fact, multicultural education is an idea or philosophy that emphasizes ethnic and cultural diversity and affects all parts of the education system (Paul-Binyamin and Haj-Yehia, 2019). Today, language and education are considered as multicultural issues. According to such an approach, students with different and diverse approaches, cultures, races and ethnicities have entered the educational system, and this system should pay attention to these differences and provide a balanced education with no ethnic discrimination (Kang, 2021). One of the characteristics of today's societies is cultural, racial, ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity, which, along with the opportunities and capacities provided for growth, can be the cause of many problems and challenges if neglected (Ng, Syn, Hussein, Ng and Kow, 2020). The multicultural education is the result of a multicultural society and a solution that can be effective by empowering students in terms of having the

knowledge, attitudes and skills to live peacefully in a multicultural society (Geerlings, Thijs and Verkuyten, 2019).

Sometimes lack of knowledge or low knowledge in educational settings prevents students from expressing their thoughts using language, which has a negative impact on their success and performance, which can be helpful in preventing mother tongue training. In multilingual societies, the role of the mother tongue in education is very important. In such societies, a language is recognized as a national language, while this language is considered a second language for a part of society, so its position as an official language always faces with many challenges and has implications and consequences. Undoubtedly, resolving cultural defects in the education system is very difficult and neglecting its multiculturalism can have many negative impacts and consequences. Because resolving cultural defects is more difficult than resolving educational defects, and cultural issues are more vulnerable than educational issues. In addition, few studies have been conducted on mother tongue training as a multicultural category, and no study has investigated its impacts and consequences by research synthesis. Therefore, regarding the education system as a multicultural category and mother tongue training can be effective on improving the situation. As a result, the present study was conducted aimed to investigate mother tongue training as a multicultural category and investigate its impacts and consequences.

**Methodology**
This study was applied in terms of the objective, and descriptive and research synthesis in terms of method. Research synthesis is the selection of studies on a subject and review, organizing and combining them in such a way that it deals with investigation and analysis of requirements related to the knowledge according to different and at the same time related questions. In this method, the data of various and perhaps scattered studies and researches that can be related to specific needs are gained which are related to each other, and a dataset is designed, evaluated, organized and re-interpreted in a format appropriate to current needs. Thus, this approach emphasizes not only putting together previous knowledge, but also the combination of various results in a specific framework representing new relationships.

The study population was studies on mother tongue, mother tongue training, multiculturalism, cultural diversity and systematic education in the last ten years. For this purpose, the above concepts were investigated in four national sites and four international sites. The national sites included Sid, Magiran, Irandoc, and Civilica, and the international sites included Eric, Scopus, Springer, and Science Direct. Among them, 183 studies were selected by purposeful sampling method regarding the inclusion criteria and entered the final synthesis. The inclusion criteria included having Persian and English languages, not being part of the gray literature, having a full text and related to the research topic, and exclusion criteria included international articles other than English and not having a full text. The following six stages were used to conduct this study by research synthesis. The first stage includes identifying the need, conducting a preliminary search and clarifying the need. The second stage includes conducting research to retrieve information. The third stage includes selecting, sorting and organizing studies. The fourth stage includes the perceptual framework and its adaptation to the information obtained from analysis. The fifth stage includes processing, synthesis and interpretation in the form of tangible results. The sixth stage includes presenting the results.

The validity and reliability of the results were investigated. So that the validity of the results was confirmed by the members and the reliability was confirmed by the agreement coefficient method between the two coders with a value of 0.86. As a result, the rate of agreement among evaluators on coding was 86%. The data were analyzed by content analysis.

The flowchart of evaluation and screening of studies extracted from national and international sites is presented in Figure 1.
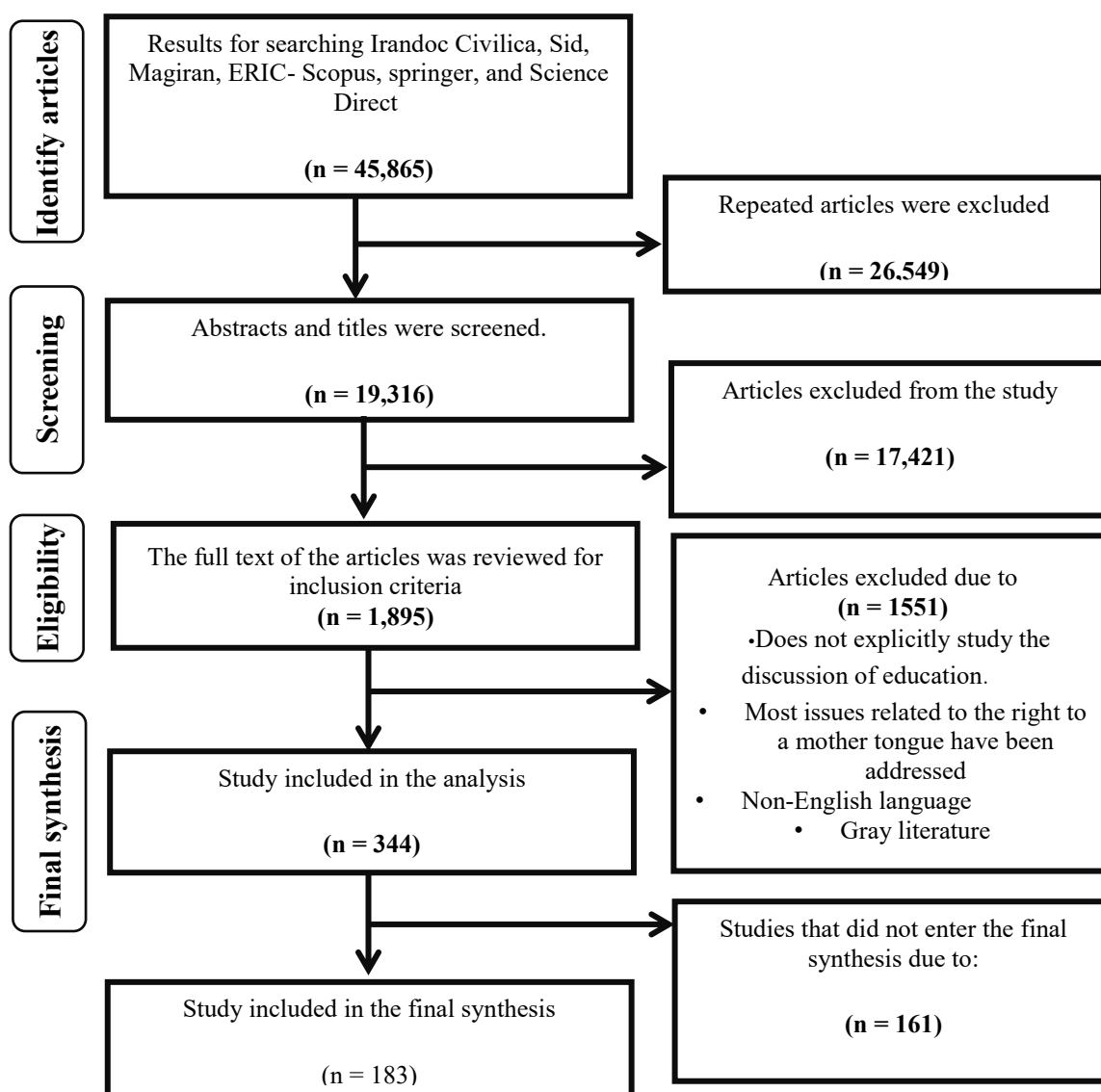
**Figure 1.** Flowchart of evaluation and screening of studies extracted from national and international sites

According to the results of Figure 1, among 45865 cases, after excluding inappropriate and repeated cases, 183 cases were selected for use in the research.

Results

In general, the results of the number of studies of national and international sites were presented separately in each site in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Number of studies of national and international sites separately for each site

| language | site | No. | % of national and international sites | % of total sites |
|----------|------|-----|--------------------------------------|------------------|
| Persian | Sid | 25 | 2.55 | 0.05 |
| | Magiran | 297 | 30.24 | 0.65 |
| | Irandoc | 583 | 59.37 | 1.27 |
| | Civilica | 77 | 7.84 | 0.17 |
| total | 4 national sites | 982 | 100.00 | |

| English | Eric | 8988 | 20.03 | 19.60 |
|---------|------|------|-------|-------|
|  | Scopus | 4621 | 10.30 | 10.0 |
|  | Springer | 11914 | 26.54 | 25.98 |
|  | Science Direct | 19360 | 43.13 | 42.21 |
| total | 4 national sites | 44883 | 100.00 |  |

According to the results of Table 1, a total of 45865 references were investigated as primary references (982 national cases and 44883 international cases).

The most important studies of national and international sites were presented in Table 2 by titles, researchers (year), type of study and results.

**Table 2**. The most important studies by titles, researchers (year), type of study and results

| No. | title | Researcher (y) | type of study | results |
|-----|-------|----------------|---------------|---------|
| 1 | Necessities of multicultural education and analysis of the elements of the components of multicultural education | Mostafazadeh, Keshtiaray and Gholizadeh (2019) | Qualitative (content analysis) | While identifying the needs of multicultural education (social realities of Iranian society, human dignity, the need to respect the culture of all human beings, lack of multicultural education in the current education system, globalization and its educational requirements and the need to train teachers familiar with multicultural education) it was shown that regarding multicultural curriculum in education is an unavoidable necessity and the most important components of multicultural education include anti-racial discrimination education, acceptance of diversity and pluralism, peaceful coexistence with other groups, observance of educational justice, flexibility in curricula, diversity in teaching methods, diversity in teaching methods, diversity of using educational materials and the right to preserve minority languages |
| 2 | Training in the mother tongue in the formal education system of the country: an opportunity or a threat? | Karami et al. (2019) | Qualitative (content analysis using inductive approach) | Experts considered the four categories of cognitive development, mental health, national unity and the expansion of democracy as the most important opportunities for training in mother tongue, and those in charge of development, improving academic performance and manpower as the most important opportunities and poverty of language resources as the most important threat to training in mother tongue |
| 3 | The place of multicultural education components in | Ahmadi & Mokhtari (2019) | content analysis | The most important components of multicultural education in the pictures of primary school textbooks included familiarity |

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| | the pictures of the elementary school textbooks during the academic years 2019-2020 | | | with tribes (49.8%), cultural heritage (38.6%), religion (10.4%) and race (0.1%) |
| 4 | Impact of form and meaning based training on mother tongue mediation on oral performance of English language learners | Valadi, Hemmati, Ghahremani Ghajar and Nemat Tabrizi (2018) | Quasi-experimental | The results showed that the average level of English language training with mother tongue mediation had a great impact on the accuracy and fluency of verbal expression and in this regard, a clear and significant difference was observed between mother tongue mediation training and English language. Mother tongue training, at an advanced level, also made a significant difference in the accuracy of speech, but this difference was not significant in the field of fluency. |
| 5 | Impact of multicultural situations on the teaching-learning process; analysis of the experiences of human factors in Ahwaz Petroleum College | Eidi and Nourian (2019) | Qualitative (narrative research) | The results indicated that there were six themes, all of which are factors that lead to racial discrimination in the classroom and, consequently, in society. The teachers have great power to increase values and can avoid ethnic prejudices and respect ethnicities, customs, language and culture |
| 6 | Multicultural education in Persian textbooks (reading) in Iranian primary education | Havasbeigi, Sadeghi, Maleki and Ghaderi (2018) | Qualitative using inductive approach | In this study, five categories were extracted, which included introducing and regarding mother tongue of the tribes, introducing celebrities, reflecting the style of cloth the tribes, the cultural traditions of the tribes, and introducing the cultural heritage. Other results show that only traces of culture can be seen in the textbooks |
| 7 | Investigating the factors affecting mother tongue use on EFL: A mixed approach | Behjat, Dastpak and Taghinezhad (2018) | Mixed (qualitative and quantitative) | The results showed that students found the use of mother tongue useful in the classroom and its use saves time, is more effective, reduces anxiety and increases motivation |
| 8 | Bilingualism in the Iranian educational system (Overview of | Shademan, Baykan and Gorji (2016) | Theoretical review | The results showed that the need to train mother tongue has been studied from three perspectives. The scientific approach explains the necessary conditions for bilinguals to enjoy the advantages and |

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| academic performance, identity and adaptation to educational systems of other countries) | | | positive impacts of bilingualism. The second approach addresses the responsibility of cultural language policy makers in ecology. The political approach, by investigating the two categories of national and international challenges, points to the close relationship between language and politics, which emphasizes the need to review language policy and educational justice |
| 9 Providing a model for multicultural education in the higher education system: analysis of the views of experts in this field in Iran | Mohammadi, Kamal Kharrazi, KazemiFard and Pourkarim (2016) | Phenomenology | The results showed that in order to establish a multicultural approach in the higher education system, it is first necessary to provide the necessary infrastructure and preconditions, including multicultural policy-making and multicultural manpower, and then relying on macro and micro training strategies to meet the diverse cultural needs of students from cultural minorities. Macro-strategies include designing specific disciplines for cultural minorities, providing optional and general courses for students of each subculture, designing courses to familiarize cultures with each other, and equipping library and academic information references with references from different cultures and languages. Micro-strategies included providing cultural examples, defining classroom projects or research and dissertations in the form of specific cultural issues and finally the use of participatory teaching and learning strategies |
| 10 Design and accreditation of a multicultural curriculum model for general education in Iran | Abdoli SoltanAhmadi and Sadeghi (2015) | Mixed (qualitative and quantitative) | The most important features of the multicultural curriculum model included being indigenous, regarding the characteristics of the audience, being scientific, simplicity, originality, educational look and active approach in teaching and learning. Of course, using this model required regarding a systemic approach to multicultural education, teacher training and regarding structural and organizational issues. |
| 11 Lingual ideology in language training: Investigation of the position of mother tongue in learning and | Ghafar-Samar, Mokhtarinia, Akbari and Kiani (2013) | Quantitative (survey) | The results showed that the first factor showed the negative impact of using Persian language on the quality and speed of learning English and teaching pronunciation and speaking skills. The second factor showed participants' attitudes to the negative impact of learning English on the syntactic, lexical and pronunciation structure of Persian language. The third factor showed respecting |

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| | using English in Iran | | the Academy of Persian Language and following its suggestions. The fourth factor showed the necessity of not using English words when speaking Persian in public and mass media. The fifth factor showed the non-speaking of English language teachers in Persian. The sixth factor showed the necessity of translation English words and texts to Persian in language classes |
| 12 | Cultural literacy in mother tongue education: An action research | Bal and Mete (2019) | action research | Mother tongue training increased the cultural literacy of the participants. Accordingly, it can be said that learning cultural literacy skills and basic language skills are related |
| 13 | Multicultural education implemented in elementary schools | Villegas (2019) | descriptive | The results indicated the importance of multicultural education in the classroom that can affect different aspects of students' life. Multicultural education in school can be useful for both teacher and student and provide a good setting for them to interact |
| 14 | Multicultural education and approaches to teacher training | Acar-Ciftci (2019) | systematic review | The results showed that immigrant children face a number of educational challenges including communication problems, and discrimination due to lingual and cultural differences. For this purpose, the use of multicultural education can be useful, for the realization of which teachers and policy makers can offer solutions based on philosophical positions |
| 15 | The teaching of mother-tongue based multi-lingual education of pre-service teachers: Basis for a training program | Maria, Caterial, Balane and Tantoy (2019) | theoretical | The results showed that the use of mother tongue should be included in the curriculum, which includes impacts such as evaluating and strengthening the curriculum, formulating strategies and specific activities, guiding teachers' practice, and developing the teaching profession |
| 16 | Barriers and bridges between mother tongue and English as a second language in young children | Seneka and De Witt (2019) | qualitative praxeological | The results showed that as long as English means gaining opportunities or improving economic, there will be prejudice against those whose first language is not English. The problem of learning English is also an issue of equality, access and compensation for past injustices. |
| 17 | The impact of mother tongue instruction on the | Ganuza and Hedman (2019) | cross-sectional | The results showed that training in the mother tongue has a significant impact on comprehension, participation, reading and |

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| | development of Biliteracy: Evidence from Somali-Swedish Bilinguals | | improving the academic performance of 6-12-year-old bilingual Sui-Somali students |
| 18 Multilingualism and multiculturalism in the education system and society of Botswana | Mokibelo (2019) | descriptive | The results showed that language learners are barred from their lingual and cultural diversity in the classroom, while evidence shows the role of culture and lingual diversity in society and various events such as national language day and cultural days. Therefore, it is necessary to change the view and attitude to spread lingual and cultural diversity in the classroom so that language learners can take responsibility for their own life and play an effective role in the development of their country |
| 19 Perceptions on mother tongue (Kurdish) based multicultural and bilingual education in Turkey | Aydin and Ozfidan (2014) | qualitative | The results show that Turkey should immediately reform its mother tongue training and develop special programs and approaches that will help improve and compensate students whose mother tongue is Kurdish or who have little understanding of allowed to speak Kurdish. Other results show that the Turkish government should develop a multicultural curriculum that helps students, faculty and personnel become advocates of multicultural awareness |
| 20 Students with different mother tongue and cultural backgrounds in Estonian schools: attention, awareness and support at school level | Magi and Nestor (2013) | thematic | The results showed that significant differences were between schools in terms of mother tongue in Estonia for training immigrant students. Also, various measures are taken to meet the needs of immigrant students, but many schools lack the resources and skills to provide appropriate training and help to the immigrant student population. The teachers' skills are not adequate for teaching in multicultural classrooms and should be improved and developed. Therefore, it is necessary to allocate separate budgets for it and design programs for schools with more flexibility |

According to the results of the analysis of 183 national and international studies, some of which were reported in Table 2, it can be said that the following impacts and consequences for mother tongue training as a multicultural category can be mentioned. Most of the studies had a positive view on the category of multiculturalism and believed that the rights of minorities and individual differences should be taken into account. Regarding mother tongue training or training in mother tongue can help strengthen national solidarity. The structure of curricula in some places requires more revision and flexibility. The teachers, learners and parents had a positive attitude towards training in their mother tongue, and teachers should

have special competence to teach in multicultural educational centers, for which in-service training can be used. Training in the mother tongue improves the psychological and social conditions, academic performance, self-confidence, learning and writing skills of learners in the educational settings and even easier learning of second and third languages.

**Discussion**

The results of studies on the role of mother tongue in education are different, and given that mother tongue is a multicultural category, since multicultural curriculum in education under current national and international conditions is an inevitable necessity, educational justice can be observed to some extent. The present study was conducted aimed to investigate mother tongue training as a multicultural category and its impacts and consequences.

In this study, among 45865 national and international references, finally 183 references on mother tongue training as a multicultural category were analyzed, and since language is a multicultural category, it can have different impacts and consequences. Most of these studies were conducted in countries with high ethnic and cultural diversity or high immigration rate. Also, investigation of upstream documents of countries such as Iran and Botswana showed documents about mother tongue, but investigation and analysis of textbooks showed that they did not pay proper attention to and address the role of mother tongue.

According to the results of the present study, most of the studies had a positive view of multiculturalism and believed that the rights of minorities and individual differences should be taken into account. Regarding mother tongue training or training in mother tongue can help strengthen national solidarity. The structure of curricula in some places requires more revision and flexibility. The teachers, learners and parents had a positive attitude towards training in mother tongue, and teachers should have special competence to teach in multicultural educational centers, for which in-service training can be used. Training in mother tongue improves psychological and social conditions, academic performance, self-confidence, learning and writing skills of learners in the educational settings and even easier learning of second and third languages. For example, Abdoli Soltan Ahmadi and Sadeghi (2015) reported that students expect the education system to design programs for individuals that develop their skills to understand the world and pluralistic and diverse societies so that human beings can tolerate multicultural societies and live there with no worry. Therefore, in formal and non-formal education, especially through curricula, teachers and other educational staff must take effective steps to pay attention to mother tongue and multicultural acceptance. In another study, Okoye-Jahnson (2011) reported that if multicultural classrooms are implemented, students in multicultural classrooms will be less harmed by racial and cultural differences and will avoid educational and non-educational injustice and inequality.

The students enter the education system with different and diverse cultural views, races and ethnicities, but do not know how to establish an ideal society with a culturally balanced educational system and away from ethnic differences with this cultural diversity that is among their peers. In multilingual societies, the role of mother tongue in the educational process is very important and in most of these societies a language is known as a national or standard language, but since this language is considered as a second language for some students, so its position as the official language of education has always faced a cognitive threat. This bilingual cognitive threat is a reduction in which the student enters a learning setting in which the language of education and learning and the media of communication are very different from his or her mother tongue before mastering mother tongue as a basic cognitive language. The experience of immigrant-welcome countries around the world, such as the United States and Canada, has shown that the exclusion of the mother tongue from the educational process has led to many harmful psychological, social and educational impacts. In foreign countries, many studies have been conducted on mother tongue, its use in in education and the opportunities and threats arising from it, and in these countries, appropriate indigenous models have been designed, developed and implemented based on theoretical and empirical research to maximize the capacity of lingual diversity in formal education systems. For this reason, few studies have been conducted on bilingualism and multilingualism in the country to identify the challenges and opportunities of using mother tongue so that they can take a practical step towards implementing Article 15 of the Constitution.

Bilingualism has a positive impact on the students' lingual process and academic development. When elementary school students develop their abilities in two or more languages, they gain deeper understanding of the language and how to use it effectively. If they practice both languages in the process of learning at the same time, especially when they increase the level of literacy in both languages, they can actually organize and even compare both languages. Another important point is that bilingual students have higher flexibility in processing information due to their fluency in different languages.

According to the results of the present study, it is suggested to hold multicultural education courses for teachers and professors to deal the differences in the cultural, religious, ecological and other fields of individuals with a deeper understanding. For multicultural education, the use of celebrities and prominent scientific, religious, historical, and cultural places of countries and different cultures can be effective. Regarding the impacts and consequences of mother tongue training as a multicultural category, professionals and planners should look at mother tongue training or training in mother tongue as a necessity and plan to implement it. Another suggestion is for librarians and administrators to use books that fit different cultures, and hold conferences on different cultures in schools and universities using local languages and costumes for this purpose.

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