Advocacy Kit for Promoting Multilingual Education: Including the Excluded

Language in Education Policy and Practice in Asia and the Pacific
Advocacy kit for promoting multilingual education: Including the excluded.
5 booklets.

[content: Overview of the kit; Language in education policy and practice in Asia and the Pacific; Policy makers booklet; Programme implementers booklet; Community members booklet]

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1. Language in Education Policy and Practice in South-East Asia

Brunei Darussalam

It is estimated that 17 languages are spoken in Brunei. Standard Malay is the official language, but the most widely used language in the country is Brunei Malay. Languages used as the medium of instruction are Standard Malay and English. Local languages are not used.

Cambodia

About 20 languages are spoken in Cambodia. The largest ethnic group, the Khmer, make up approximately 90 percent of the population. In Cambodia, the medium of instruction at all levels is the national language, Khmer. Recently, several minority languages have been introduced as the medium of instruction in pilot projects in the eastern highlands. These projects provide bilingual education in both formal and non-formal systems of education for adults as well as children. The draft of the education law of 2003 gives ethnic minorities the right to instruction in their mother tongue. However, the law has not yet been approved.

Indonesia

Indonesia, with more than 700 languages, is linguistically the most diverse country in all of Asia. The official language, Indonesian, is the medium of instruction at all levels of education, yet only about ten percent of the population speak Indonesian as their mother tongue. The constitution and an education act support the use of students' mother tongues as mediums of instruction in the early grades. In practice, however, local languages are rarely used in formal government schools apart from being taught as subjects in some areas. Local languages are more widely used in non-formal education, particularly in adult literacy.

Lao PDR

The estimated number of languages spoken in the Lao People's Democratic Republic is 82. The language of instruction at all levels of education is Lao, the official language, which is spoken as a mother tongue by about half of the population. At present, local languages are
not used in education; nevertheless, they are widely used in oral form in schools in ethnic minority areas.

**Malaysia**

About 140 languages are spoken in Malaysia. Malay is the official national language. Most schools use Malay as medium of instruction. In ‘national-type’ primary schools, languages such as Mandarin, Tamil or other Indian languages are used as mediums of instruction. In Malay-medium schools, Tamil, Mandarin and some indigenous languages can be studied as subjects. Since the late 1990s, several indigenous groups of East Malaysia have begun education programmes using local languages, taught mainly as school subjects. However, these endeavours cannot yet be considered bilingual education because they are not officially used as mediums of instruction.

**Myanmar**

More than 100 languages are spoken in the Union of Myanmar. The language of instruction in the government system of education is Bama (Burmese), the official language, and local languages are not used in the government system of education. However, local languages are widely used in non-formal education and adult literacy by civil society organizations and language communities, particularly in the northern states inhabited predominantly by ethnolinguistic minorities.

**Philippines**

Some 170 languages are spoken in the Philippines. Most languages have writing systems, and there is some literature written in more than 100 of them. English and Filipino are the official languages of education and literacy for the nation. Local languages have been used in some government schools as “transitional” or “auxiliary” languages for initial instruction in early primary grades. However, local languages are mostly used in oral form to explain the curriculum. Local languages are used more widely in the non-formal sector, with a focus on adult literacy. Such education projects are usually run by NGOs and community organizations.

**Singapore**

More than 20 languages are spoken in Singapore, a nation aiming at societal multilingualism and bilingualism among its population. Three quarters of the population are ethnic Chinese speaking many different varieties of Chinese. English is the sole medium of instruction at all levels of education, and three other official languages, i.e. Malay, Mandarin Chinese and Tamil, are taught as second languages called “mother tongues”. Speakers of other languages can freely choose from those offered in the school curriculum, but there is no provision for education in local languages as such, unlike in most nations in South-East Asia.
Thailand

More than 70 languages are spoken in Thailand. Standard Thai is the de facto official and national language of Thailand, and the medium of instruction at all levels of education. In some areas, local language classes are taught in the “local curriculum” slot. Some local languages are used in non-formal education, mainly adult literacy, run largely by local NGOs. Government agencies also support some pilot projects that use local languages in education. None of these projects, however, can be considered actual bilingual education. Since 2004, the debate on the use of local languages in education has increased in the Ministry of Education as well as in the media.

Viet Nam

Approximately 100 languages are spoken in Viet Nam. The national language is Vietnamese, and it is spoken as the first language (or one of first languages of bilingual people) by approximately 90 percent of the population. Bilingual education and the use of local languages in education are strongly supported by various policy documents, yet Vietnamese remains the main medium of instruction at all levels of education, even in predominantly non-Vietnamese speaking areas. Local languages are used in education in some areas, and are mostly studied as subjects, making up as much as 20 percent of the primary education curriculum. Since 2006, new pilots in some minority languages have been started.

2. Language in Education Policy and Practice in East Asia

People’s Republic of China

More than 200 languages are spoken in the People’s Republic of China. Mandarin Chinese is the official language. There are laws and policies supporting the use of ethnic minority languages as medium of instruction in minority areas. However, such policies are not implemented everywhere, and they apply only to the 55 designated national minorities. There is a lot of variation in the use of local languages in education, depending on geographical area and ethnolinguistic group. Some half a dozen local languages are used as medium of instruction from primary school through high school. In these cases, Mandarin is taught as a second language. However, the most common bilingual programmes using local language in China are those which start with the students’ mother tongue, but transfer to Mandarin fairly quickly. In many minority areas, local languages are taught as a subject at different levels of education.

Mongolia

It is estimated that 12 languages are spoken in Mongolia. About 90 percent of the population are Mongols who speak a variety of the official language, either Halh or Khalka Mongolian. Mongolian is used as the medium of instruction at all levels of education, although English is playing an increasing role at the university level. Halh Mongolian is spoken as a second language by practically all ethnic minorities. The constitution of 1992 supports the use of
minority languages as medium of instruction. However, only Kazakh is currently used in bilingual education.

Japan

Two indigenous languages are spoken in Japan, Japanese and Ainu, along with 11 distinct dialects of Japanese-Ryukyuan, regarded by some to be their own family of closely related languages. Japanese is the national language of Japan, spoken by approximately 99 percent of the population. In recent decades, immigration trends have seen an increase in the number of native languages spoken by registered aliens, who now make up 1.4 percent of the total population. The official language of instruction is Japanese. However, recently the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology issued policies aimed at the children of immigrants to Japan and non-Japanese to: improve instruction in Japanese as a second language at schools; provide instruction, where possible, in the students’ mother tongue through team-teaching and other methods; and use the experiences of non-Japanese or returning Japanese children at schools to improve international and cross-cultural understanding between Japanese and non-Japanese students.

3. Language in Education Policy and Practice in South and West Asia

Afghanistan

About 30 languages are spoken in Afghanistan and eight of them are spoken widely: Pashto, Dari, Uzbek, Turkmen, Pashae, Nooristani, Balochi and Shighnani. Pashto and Dari are the national and official languages of Afghanistan and are used as mediums of instruction in all levels of education. Because the Constitution advocates the mother tongue as a medium of instruction for basic education, the Ministry of Education plans to use minority languages in formal and non-formal education, as well as teaching some of the minority languages as subjects.

Bangladesh

Bangladesh is home to around 40 languages. Bangla is the official and national language of Bangladesh, and the medium of instruction at all levels of education. Among the population of more than 140 million, 98% speak Bangla. English is also used as a medium of instruction in tertiary education. In both governmental and non-governmental schools and literacy classes, the medium of instruction is Bangla. There is no provision to use so-called tribal languages in these schools. The languages of some ethnolinguistic minority groups are used orally as “transitional” or “auxiliary” languages to explain the curriculum. For this reason, many minority groups are facing loss of their linguistic and cultural heritage and, simultaneously, lack access to relevant education in a language that they speak and understand.
Bhutan

There are 18 languages spoken in Bhutan. Dzongkha is the national language of the country and is seen as one of the symbols of the kingdom’s unique identity. The medium of instruction in the government school system is primarily English, but Dzongkha is used in some classes. Non-formal education is conducted throughout Bhutan in Dzongkha. The government has commissioned the linguistic description of a number of minority languages, but most language development efforts are directed toward Dzongkha.

India

There is constant dispute regarding the number of languages versus dialects or varieties in India. The 1961 census lists 1,652 languages, while the 1991 census lists only 114. The Ethnologue lists about 430. Presently, 22 languages are listed in the 8th Schedule of the Constitution, with Hindi listed as the official language, and English the associate official language.

Several articles in the Constitution of India concern language. Of note is Article 350-A, which says that “it shall be the endeavour of every state and of every local authority within the state to provide adequate facilities for instruction in the mother-tongue at the primary stage of education to children belonging to linguistic minority groups”.

A complicated “three-language formula” was proposed by the Central Advisory Board of Education in 1957 and was fully endorsed by the chief ministers of the states in 1961. It covered the teaching of three national languages at different grades. Other than in a few states such as Orissa and Maharashtra, the formula was violated more often than it was adhered to.

In the National Curriculum Framework For School Education, which is issued by NCERT every five years, it is stated that the mother tongue should be the medium of instruction “at all stages of school education” (NCERT 2000, p. 76). The Framework acts only as advice, not as legislation.

Education normally takes place in local, regional (Schedule 8) or official languages. It is considered prestigious to have English as the medium of instruction. Political discussions are therefore focused on the choice between major Indian languages and English rather than on use of the mother tongue. Several states with high proportions of so-called tribal people have made attempts to use tribal languages in education. This has been reasonably successful in the states of Assam and Nagaland. Attempts in Rajasthan, Orissa and Andra Pradesh experienced difficulties during the implementation stage, but new attempts are currently being undertaken.

Nepal

Some 90 languages are spoken in Nepal. The language of instruction in the government system of education is Nepali, the official language. Many private schools provide English-medium education. The Constitution of Nepal suggests that the mother tongue can be used in the early stages of education, but in fact there has been little implementation of this
provision at the grassroots level. As a result of external funding, the Text Book Production Centre has prepared some basic elementary readers in nine different ethnic languages, but it is hard to ascertain to what extent these primers are in use. Some NGOs have begun experimental classes using the mother tongue in non-formal education contexts. There is a growing awareness of the importance of mother tongue-based education, but current political unrest makes it difficult to implement changes in local contexts.

Pakistan

Pakistan is a multilingual country with six major and over 57 minor languages. The major mother tongues are: Punjabi (44%); Pashto (15%); Sindhi (14%); Siraiki (11%); Urdu (8%); Balochi (4%) and minor languages (5%). The national language is Urdu, while the official language is English. Urdu is widely used as a second language in urban Pakistan because it is the medium of instruction in most government schools and religious seminaries. It is also used in colleges and universities to teach all except scientific and technical subjects. Urdu is the language of the medium, the lower official domains, commerce and entertainment, and thus it is more useful for employment than any other Pakistani language. The only other language which is useful for employment, though only at the lower levels and then only in parts of Sindh, is Sindhi, which is also used in education, the medium and some official domains. Pashto is used as medium of instruction in some schools up to Grade 5, but is not used in most other domains. Only about 2 percent of Pakistanis speak English competently. Though an additional 15 to 18 percent may have some knowledge of it, it is the language of all elite domains of power: the government, higher bureaucracy, army officer corps, medium, higher education, research, commerce, and so on. English is also the most useful language for would-be emigrants and upwardly mobile people. As such there is a tremendous demand for English courses, which are available to the elite through private English-medium schools or schools run by the armed forces (e.g. cadet colleges). State policies that designate English and Urdu as official languages have put immense pressure on the other languages of the country, to the extent that smaller languages are becoming heavily mixed with more powerful languages or endangered.

4. Language in Education Policy and Practice in Central Asia

Kazakhstan

In Kazakhstan, 48 percent of the population are Kazakhs and 34 percent are Russians; in addition, there are over 120 nationalities. Among them, there are over 800,000 Ukrainians, 500,000 Germans, 400,000 Uzbek, and more than 300,000 Tatars. Kazakh is the state language and Russian is the official language (which is used alongside the state language). There are 3,647 (45%) general secondary schools with Kazakh as language of instruction, 2,122 (26%) with Russian, and 2069 (25%) with both Kazakh and Russian. The other 4 percent of secondary schools are “national-type” schools with Ukrainian, Uighur, Tajik, and Uzbek as the medium of instruction.
Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyz and Russian are the official languages in Kyrgyzstan. In 2001, the Kyrgyzstan legislature declared Russian as an official language, equal in status to Kyrgyz. The population is made up of Kyrgyz (52%), Russian (18%), Uzbek (13%), Ukrainian (3%), German (2%) and other (12%). There are schools with Kyrgyz (66%), Russian (7%), Uzbek (7%), and mixed Russian and Kyrgyz (20%) as languages of instruction.

Tajikistan

Tajik is the state language of Tajikistan, while Russian is the language used for inter-ethnic communication. All ethnic groups have the right to speak their mother tongues. Tajik and Russian are used in the mass media. Most schools use Tajik and Russian as mediums of instruction. However, there some schools for ethnic minorities that use Uzbek, Kazakh, Turkmen and others. Seventy-three percent of secondary school students receive their education in Tajik, but for 24 percent of secondary school students, Uzbek is the medium of instruction, 2 percent in Russian, and others are educated in Kyrgyz, Kazakh and Turkmen schools.

Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan is a multiethnic and multilingual country with more than 100 languages. Based on the provisions of the Constitution of Uzbekistan, equal legal status, rights, freedoms and opportunities are guaranteed regardless of sex, race, ethnic origin, language, religion, social background, convictions, personal or social status (Article 18). The education of children from ethnic and linguistic minorities is an important policy issue. So far, the government has maintained its political commitment to provide basic education in the seven national languages, including Uzbek. At present, over 10 percent of schools in Uzbekistan provide instruction in the languages of ethnic minorities (Russian, Kazakh, Tajik, Karakalpak, Turkmen, and Kyrgyz), accounting for about 15 percent of the total enrolment in basic education.

5. Language in Education Policy and Practice in the Pacific

Papua New Guinea

About 850 languages are spoken in Papua New Guinea (PNG), where pre-school and early primary education are provided in some 350-400 languages. No other country in the world uses local languages as widely as PNG. Previously, the formal education system used English as the medium of instruction, but based on positive experiences in using local languages in non-formal education, the formal system was reformed. In the new system, the first three years of formal education is taught in the mother tongue of the learner. English becomes the medium at later grades. Elementary schools that use local languages are run by local communities. Reasons for the successful use of local languages include strong community participation, decentralisation, local relevance, cost-effectiveness, and the active role of NGOs.
LANGUAGES OF THE WORLD

Each dot represents the primary location of a living language listed in the Ethnologue.

Source: www.ethnologue.com