

## Helpdesk Report: Mother Tongue Education and Girls and Poor Children

Date: 17<sup>th</sup> November 2011

**Query:** What is the evidence that girls stay in school longer if they are taught first in their mother tongue or home language?

What is the evidence that poor/vulnerable children stay in school longer if they are taught first in their mother tongue or home language?

**Enquirer:** DFID Mozambique

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### 1. Overview

This review shows that there is evidence that girls, poor and vulnerable children stay in school longer if they are taught first in their mother tongue or home language. The language used in schools, is one of the principal mechanisms through which inequality in education is reproduced. The learner's mother tongue holds the key to making schooling more inclusive for all disadvantaged groups, especially for girls and women. Fifty percent of the world's out-of-school children live in communities where the language of schooling is rarely, if ever, used at home. This underscores the biggest challenge to achieving Education for All: a legacy of non-productive practices that lead to low levels of learning and high levels of dropout and repetition.

Section 3 focuses on girls and it shows that girls who learn in familiar languages stay in school longer, are more likely to be identified as good students, do better on achievement tests, and repeat grades less often than girls who do not get home language instruction. This means that they are more likely to enjoy school, experience success, and perceive that schooling is relevant, which will give them the skills and confidence to continue their school careers. Also there are a higher proportion of girls in schools providing mother tongue education, and they are more likely to stay in school longer, greatly increasing the proportion of educated girls.

Section 4 focuses on poor and vulnerable children and shows that teaching in their mother tongue means that they will stay in school for longer. Teaching in a foreign language is highly inefficient, causing repetition, failure and dropout for all but a few. There is inequality of opportunity for those children who speak minority languages because those who speak the language of the school can start learning the first day of classes, while all of the others must first learn the foreign code. Also, it leads learners to have low aspirations for their own educational achievement and participate unwittingly in a vicious circle of dropout and failure. For children who are all learning in a foreign language, for example a European language, better-off children can benefit from bilingualism because a second language added to a rich knowledge of a first language results in complex knowledge networks (*additive bilingualism*). But poor children often have a limited vocabulary in their first language, so a second language may replace elements of the first (*subtractive bilingualism*). Greater parental support among parents of poorer children also lowers dropout rates. One parent stated '*it is important to teach our children to read and write, but it is more important to teach them to be proud of themselves, and of us*'.

## 2. Information on mother tongue education

### **Bilingual Education in Africa: An Exploration of Encouraging Connections Between Language and Girls' Schooling**

By Carol Benson, Centre for Research on Bilingualism, Stockholm University

<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.201.8131&rep=rep1&type=pdf#page=81>

Mother tongue or bilingual programmes come in various forms. The general idea is to provide at least beginning instruction and initial literacy in a language spoken by the student, i.e. the mother tongue – known as the first language or L1 – or a reasonably close second language. Few programmes deny the necessity for children to learn the official language in addition; however, this language – often known as an L2 – should ideally be taught as the second or foreign language that it is, beginning with oral skills and later developing L2 literacy on the basis of transference of skills learned first in the mother tongue. Most programmes involve greater use of the L1 in the early years, with a transition from the L1 to the L2 as language of instruction at some point in the schooling process (see Cummins, 2001 for a review of the principles in operation). In order to achieve the ideal of bilingualism and biliteracy, students need to have continued opportunities to develop L1 skills throughout their school careers.

### **Efficient Learning for the Poor**

Helen Abadzi, World Bank, 2006

[http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=kn62phyvFpwC&printsec=frontcover&hl=fr&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=kn62phyvFpwC&printsec=frontcover&hl=fr&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false)

Many countries have multiple languages and a need to teach in a common language. In countries like Romania or Indonesia, children speaking minority languages must learn the official language of instruction. In many others—including most countries in Africa and the South Pacific—the lingua franca is foreign to everyone (for example, English, French, or Portuguese). The countries with multiple languages have various

language instruction policies. In some countries, students may study in their mother tongues in lower primary grades and then switch to the lingua franca. In others, logistical and political complexities result in the use of the lingua franca for all grades. The latter approach is preferred in much of Africa and impacts some of the world's poorest countries.

Children's developmental window of opportunity for rapid language learning fades at about the time they enter school. Thereafter they need hundreds of hours of *interactive* language instruction and speech samples to mentally compute grammatical patterns. In resource-poor environments, crowding and minimal instructional time can reduce interaction with the teacher, which puts students studying in a foreign language at a permanent disadvantage. Students perform much better if they learn fluent reading and basic concepts in their mother tongues. This is particularly important when the official language of instruction has complex spelling rules (for example, English, French, and even Portuguese). Governments must be helped to overcome the logistical and political obstacles associated with teaching in local languages, including both teacher and parental resistance.

### 3. Evidence that girls stay in school longer

#### **Girls, Educational Equity and Mother Tongue Based Teaching**

UNESCO, 2005

[http://www.ungei.org/resources/files/unesco\\_Girls\\_Edu\\_mother\\_tongue.pdf](http://www.ungei.org/resources/files/unesco_Girls_Edu_mother_tongue.pdf)

This publication argues that language, specifically the language used in schools, is one of the principal mechanisms through which inequality in education is reproduced. It shows how the learner's mother tongue holds the key to making schooling more inclusive for all disadvantaged groups, especially for girls and women.

Benson (2002a) and Hovens (2002, 2003) provide evidence from African contexts that girls in bilingual programmes repeated grades less often and stayed in school longer than girls and boys in "official" all-L2 schooling, and Klaus (2003) reports higher enrolment, lower dropout, and a higher proportion of girls in bilingual schools in PNG. Regarding teaching methods, although it can not be expected that teachers accustomed to rote learning change overnight, the act of switching to a language that students speak at least makes communication and participation possible. Hovens reports that members of one community in Niger actually complained about mother tongue-based classrooms because they were "so noisy," not yet recognising that children were talking about the subject instead of sitting passively, speaking only when it was time to repeat after the teacher.

*More women may become teachers and, thus, role models for girls.* If women are most comfortable and skilful at speaking local languages due to their home experiences, they may be more likely to enroll in teacher education for mother tongue-based programmes. These teachers are likely to come from the same linguistic communities as the learners, meaning that bilingual schools will attract women from rural and previously marginalised groups who may still want to live in those communities. Thus, girls will have not only women, but women from their own groups, to look up to.

Use of the mother tongue already has powerful pedagogical and social justifications, but linking it to improvements in girls' participation may help call attention to the potential of learners' languages to facilitate education for all. To make these links more solid, researchers need to follow Derbyshire's (2002) advice in providing sex disaggregated data (quantitative figures on school enrolment, repetition, dropout, graduation, and so on) as well as gender analytical information (descriptive studies of people's values, attitudes and opinions relative to gender).

### **Mother tongue-based teaching and education for girls: The benefits of mother tongue-based teaching and education for girls**

C. Benson, UNESCO Bangkok: Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, 2005

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001420/142079e.pdf>

Researchers in bilingual education in Africa and Latin America have found that girls who learn in familiar languages stay in school longer, are more likely to be identified as good students, do better on achievement tests, and repeat grades less often than girls who do not get home language instruction. This indicates that a change in the language of teaching and learning can greatly improve opportunities for educational access and attainment for female students.

Mother tongue-based schooling makes the home-school transition easier and, since girls have less exposure to the second language, they feel more comfortable speaking and learning in the L1. They are more likely to enjoy school, experience success, and perceive that schooling is relevant, which will give them the skills and confidence to continue their school careers.

Girls can communicate as freely as boys in their home language so teachers see that girls are more capable than they may have thought previously. Their expectations become more optimistic, and they are more likely to assist girls in their learning, reducing repetition and failure rates.

### **Advocacy brief on Mother Tongue-based Teaching and Education for Girls**

UNESCO Bangkok, 2005.

[http://www2.unescobkk.org/elib/publications/mother\\_tongue/Mother\\_Tongue.pdf](http://www2.unescobkk.org/elib/publications/mother_tongue/Mother_Tongue.pdf)

A linguistic mismatch between school and community creates problems in both access to school services and in the *quality* of those services. First, it is difficult for families to send children to school if that school does not adequately communicate regarding enrolment procedures, dates and times, and what is to be taught. Second, only some of those who attend school will be able to learn the new language well enough to understand instruction and pass to higher levels. Finally, constant and well-founded fear of failure may cause learners to have low aspirations for their own educational achievement and, thus, participate unwittingly in a vicious circle of dropout and failure. The observable symptoms of using a foreign language of instruction are high repetition, failure and dropout rates - all of which disproportionately affect marginalised populations in rural areas and, particularly, girls.

**Girls' own attitudes and experiences:** Girls become exhausted from balancing household tasks with attending school and studying. They may drop out due to lack of female role models, inability to understand instruction, low self-esteem, or feeling that the curriculum is not relevant to their needs or interests.

There is evidence from African experiences that girls in bilingual programmes repeat grades less often and stay in school longer than girls and boys in dominant language schools. Similarly, bilingual schools in PNG have reported higher enrolment, lower dropout, and a higher proportion of girls than in other schools. The key seems to be replacing recitation and rote learning with greater communication and participation, a process which is not guaranteed, but is facilitated by using the L1.

More women may become teachers and, thus, role models for girls. If women are most comfortable and skillful at speaking local languages due to their home experiences, they are more likely to enrol in teacher education for mother tongue based programmes, especially if they are able to return to their home communities to work. If bilingual schools attract women from rural and previously marginalised groups, girls will have women like themselves as role models.

The idea of recruiting female bilingual teachers was taken up by an NGO in Bolivia, which has developed an innovative “pedagogical secondary school” programme for indigenous girls. This programme prepares them to teach in the mother tongue in their home communities, and partially solves the problem of filling posts in remote areas. A similar project for marginalised girls in Rajasthan, India has been successful in increasing the proportion of trained female teachers from the students' communities by creating special residential training schools for women, though it did not specifically target language of instruction. Neither project has provided teacher training through official structures, but both have allowed women from marginalised groups unprecedented access to training and higher profile positions.

### **Optimising Learning, Education and Publishing in Africa: The Language Factor**

Edited by Adama Ouane and Christine Glanz, June 2011, UIL/ADEA/UNESCO

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002126/212602e.pdf>

Often teachers equate lack of adequate proficiency in the language of instruction with laziness, lack of intelligence or an uncooperative attitude on the part of the students. This type of attitude can seriously inhibit students and create anxiety related to language learning and learning in general. To avoid being shamed in front of their classmates, some students refrain from volunteering to answer in class. This attitude is commonly observed among girls in Africa. Female pupils try their best to avoid being ridiculed in the classrooms. Therefore, girls often avoid speaking if the language of instruction is unfamiliar to them. Smith (2003) suggested that corporal punishment and frustration are among the main factors that explain school disaffection among children, and the high drop-out rates in Africa.

### **Zambia**

According to Sampa (2005: 73), “the Primary Reading Programme (PRP) implemented in Zambia is one of the few programmes that have succeeded on a large scale”. Between 1999 and 2002, the Ministry of Education conducted two evaluations to assess the effectiveness of the PRP. Both evaluations showed that children's performances in reading in both Zambian languages and English had

improved. One of the main factors that account for the success of the PRP is an appropriate language policy that uses local languages familiar to children to teach reading and writing.

From 1990 to 1999, the Ministry of Education opened learning centres and distance education courses. 98,701 people received literacy instruction in the national languages. Seventy-three per cent of the participants were women. In 1990, 41.3 per cent of women were illiterate. In 2003, 25.2 per cent were classified as such. This shows that the illiteracy rate among women dropped by 16.1 per cent between 1990 and 2003.

### **The Use of Indigenous Languages in Early Basic Education in Papua New Guinea: A Model for Elsewhere?**

David Klaus, *Language and Education*, Volume 17, Issue 2, 2003

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/09500780308666842>

Papua New Guinea introduced educational reform. A key aspect of the reform is the gradual introduction of local indigenous languages in the early years of basic education, in contrast to a system which in the past (official policy since 1955) used English as the only medium of instruction. At the end of 2000, PNG's Department of Education reported that the country was providing kindergarten (called the "preparatory year") and Grades 1 and 2 in some 380 indigenous languages, plus Pidgin and English.

Access increased because many parents appeared more willing to send their children to school and to make the sacrifices necessary to keep them in school. Dropout decreased. In particular, a higher proportion of girls were in school than was previously the case.

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By Carol Benson, Centre for Research on Bilingualism, Stockholm University

<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.201.8131&rep=rep1&type=pdf#page=81>

Use of the mother tongue affects girls even more positively than it does all children, especially children from rural and non-privileged backgrounds. Instruction in the mother tongue facilitates both teaching and learning for the majority of people, and especially those who lack equitable access to the official ex-colonial languages of their countries.

Many African girls never get to school in the first place. Further, of those who do begin primary schooling, most drop out by the end of the third year.

A sometimes unexpected but welcome outcome of bilingual programmes is often increased parent participation in school affairs, a situation that cannot be divorced from the fact that parents are finally allowed to use the L1 to speak to the teacher. The formerly great distance between home and school, between parent and teacher, is narrowed when the parent is free to speak the language in which he is most competent. Increased rapport between parents and bilingual teachers has added pedagogical benefits, in that teachers are more aware of home situations that may

affect the child's school participation, and parents are more aware of ways in which they may support their child's schooling

#### 4. Evidence that poor/vulnerable children stay in school longer

##### **Efficient Learning for the Poor**

Helen Abadzi, World Bank, 2006

[http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=kn62phyvFpwC&printsec=frontcover&hl=fr&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=kn62phyvFpwC&printsec=frontcover&hl=fr&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false)

For many children, education in another language is more difficult than expected. The deficits in native language development, common among the poor (Chapter 2), may inhibit the rapid acquisition of a second language. Mother tongue instruction is a prerequisite if Education for All is to be achieved, particularly when the official language has complex spelling rules. The official language should be taught to children as early as possible. However, it should become the platform for learning new information only after children know it sufficiently well to process complex sentences and vocabulary. A gradually decreasing percentage of mother-tongue instruction seems to be an effective way to introduce an official language.

Proficiency in a first language predicts success in studying a second. Better-off children can benefit from bilingualism because a second language added to a rich knowledge of a first language results in complex knowledge networks (*additive bilingualism*). But poor children often have a limited vocabulary in their first language, so a second language may replace elements of the first (*subtractive bilingualism*). The reason is not well understood; the result seems to be a limited knowledge of both languages and a vocabulary too limited to make sense of classroom material. It then becomes difficult to build knowledge networks on various topics and attach new information. For example, a child who knows the meaning of "justice" or "honesty" in one language can acquire the terms in another but faces a harder task if she has to acquire both the label and the concept in her second language. In particular, poorly fed students who often have a more limited working memory may need more time to acquire vocabulary.

When students know only limited grammar and vocabulary, it is not even possible to create a basis to which to peg complex concepts, and the classes may get stuck in a simple level of discourse. Instructional languages with orthographic complexities spell trouble. Even if children do not know a language well, they could learn fluent reading when the spelling is simple (as with Spanish, Romanian, Bahasa Malaysia, Armenian, or even Hindi). But official languages have often been written for centuries, resulting in irregular spelling. Children learning to read through English must memorise words spelled unpredictably, but they may not yet know their pronunciation, meaning, or related context (Chapter 5). In French they must learn how to deal with dashes, accents, and endings as they were pronounced about 600 years ago. As a result of these issues, most of the school time in sub-Saharan Africa is taken up with language and spelling instruction, such as putting the right accents on French. Ironically, the neglected African languages tend to be phonetically written and very suitable for reading instruction.

Children in foreign-language instruction need more time but get much less. In principle, language problems can be overcome through increased hours of effective instruction, private tuition, and a wealth of audiovisual materials. Instead, textbooks are scarce, teachers are poorly trained (and may not know the lingua franca well), absenteeism is high, and class time is used poorly. The poor cannot afford private tuition and the national curricula may have insufficient space for both a new language and basic skills.

To make things worse, hours in the crowded schools of some countries (like Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso) have been reduced by about 40 percent to enable more students to attend (a policy known in French as “à double flux” or “double vacation”). Ironically this policy serves to screen students and identify the 2–5 percent who are gifted enough to learn with limited exposure. All these issues create a bar that is too high for all but the most privileged to overcome. With school days lasting at best 2.5–4 hours a day, sufficient knowledge takes years to acquire. Unless students are very bright or well-to-do, their test scores are very low and many simply drop out or graduate from grade 6 functionally illiterate (as is the case in Niger and Guinea).

Teaching basic skills to poor children through language immersion may be detrimental, but bilingual education is a much more effective option. U.S. students receiving instruction in a native language and English at different times of the day were found to make the most dramatic gains in reading performance compared to their English-only peers. This research is pertinent to multilingual low-income countries. The number of years of instruction in the first language is the most important predictor of reading performance in a second language. Poor students who receive only immersion instruction are also more likely to drop out. Socioeconomic status becomes more important when the programme is of low quality, and the poorer students do less well.

Research suggests that a very effective model of language introduction is 10 percent of foreign language in grade 1, gradually increasing to 20 percent, 30 percent, 40 percent, and 50 percent by grade 5. Accordingly, the *pédagogie convergente* of Mali gradually introduces French and reduces the local languages, but also introduces more “student-centered” strategies. Despite a lack of political support, textbooks, and training, students have a much lower repetition rate (3.7 percent versus 18.1 percent of French-speaking classes) and dropout (1.6 percent versus 5.7 percent of French-speaking classes). At the end of the first year, about 69 percent were promoted compared to about 52 percent of French-language schools. *Pédagogie convergente* nominally costs 80 percent more to teach because of materials and teacher training, but it costs 27 percent less when repetition rates are considered.

### **Girls, Educational Equity and Mother Tongue Based Teaching**

UNESCO, 2005

[http://www.ungei.org/resources/files/unesco\\_Girls\\_Edu\\_mother\\_tongue.pdf](http://www.ungei.org/resources/files/unesco_Girls_Edu_mother_tongue.pdf)

Language and marginality link to produce an impact on schooling in a number of ways. In terms of educational access, those who do not speak the language of the school have less of an opportunity to understand enrolment procedures, communicate with school officials, or understand what is being taught. If they do get to school, they receive a poor quality of education, because both literacy and concepts are taught in a foreign medium that few will be able to learn well enough to



understand what is being taught. This process is highly inefficient, causing repetition, failure and dropout for all but a few who are somehow able to break the code, i.e. learn to read and write an unfamiliar language. There is inequality of opportunity because those who speak the language of the school can start learning the first day of classes, while all of the others must first learn the foreign code. Finally, perpetual subordination may cause learners to have low aspirations for their own educational achievement and participate unwittingly in a vicious circle of dropout and failure.

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<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002126/212602e.pdf>

“Fifty percent of the world’s out-of-school children live in communities where the language of schooling is rarely, if ever, used at home. This underscores the biggest challenge to achieving Education for All (EFA): a legacy of non-productive practices that lead to low levels of learning and high levels of dropout and repetition. In these circumstances, an increase in resources, although necessary, would not be sufficient to produce universal completion of a good-quality primary school programme” (World Bank, 2005: [1]).

“You learn only what you understand...without changing the language used to teach, basic education can be neither effective nor efficient. Language difficulties result in higher dropout and repeater rates that cannot be reduced” (Bergmann, 2002: 4).

A further advantage of mother tongue and bilingual education programmes relates to student retention rates: a study in Mali (World Bank, 2005) found that they were 19 per cent cheaper than monolingual programmes due to lower drop-out and repetition rates.

More recent World Bank documents appear to turn towards a less stringent adverse position to mother tongue education, from admitting some value to “local languages” in education (World Bank, 2001), to beginning to fully realise the “Benefits of the Use of First Language Instruction”. There are explicit reference to successful bilingual approaches in Burkina Faso, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Mali (*Pédagogie Convergente*), Brazil, Guatemala, Mexico, Haiti, and Papua New Guinea. First language instruction results in:

- i. increased access and equity,
- ii. improved learning outcomes,
- iii. reduced repetition and dropout rates,
- iv. socio-cultural benefits and
- v. lower overall costs” (World Bank, 2005:[2]).

Macdonald (1990) has shown that students who were switched from first language medium (four years of Setswana medium) to English medium at the beginning of year five were not able to cope with the linguistic requirements of the system at that point.

Heugh (2002, 2003) has shown that:

- 1) Eight years of mother-tongue education in South African schools (1955-75) resulted in increasing pass rates for African language-speaking learners at the final exit point (year 12).

- 2) After a reduction to four years of mother-tongue education from 1976 onwards, the pass rate at year 12 fell from 83.7 per cent in 1976 to 44 per cent in 1992.

Across the continent, fewer than 50 per cent of pupils remain in school to the end of primary school. Repetition and attrition (drop-out) rates are very high, thus it is not immediately apparent to education planners that if they choose early-exit models, they are effectively selecting an outcome in which students can only score 20-40 per cent in the language which is used as the medium of instruction by years/grades 10-12. Without realising the consequences, the education officials of most countries select a model which can only offer limited success, and limited access to secondary school and beyond. Students will not be able to understand or succeed in areas of the curriculum such as science and mathematics if they do not have a sufficient proficiency in the medium of instruction.

If it can be shown that students continue to demonstrate linguistic and academic achievement through the first six years of school, then the prognosis for further success is good. If students' achievement levels start to decline by four to five years of schooling, then it is unlikely that this trend can be reversed without a change of programme design.

The Ethiopian research which tracks students for at least eight years shows very clearly that students who are obliged to study through a foreign language (English) after four years of mother-tongue education are most unlikely to complete primary school successfully and there will be a very low throughput rate to secondary. Any evaluation of an early-exit transitional programme which does not show students' performance to at least year/grade six (i.e. the medium-term resilience of the intervention) is fundamentally flawed or lacking in construct validity.

For socio-economic development, we need to facilitate greater retention, lower drop-out rates in primary, higher throughput to secondary and lower costs in secondary education. If students are going to be able to make progress in secondary school, and if the expenditure on their secondary education is to be cost effective, they must have grade-level literacy and numeracy proficiencies at entry to secondary. If they do not, there is a strong chance that investment will not yield the returns sought or the development objectives.

The overall cost of educating a child using the mother tongue is likely to be less in the medium term, because mother-tongue-medium education reduces repeater and dropout incidence. "...French-only programmes cost about 8% less per year than mother tongue schooling, but the total cost of educating a student through the six-year primary cycle is about 27% more, largely because of the difference in repetition and drop-out rates. Similar results have been found in Guatemala" (World Bank, 2005). The study concludes thus: "Bilingual education in Guatemala is an efficient public investment. This is confirmed by a crude cost-benefit exercise. A shift to bilingual education in Guatemala would result in considerable cost savings as a result of reduced repetition... The cost savings due to bilingual education, even allowing for its higher cost, is estimated at over US\$5.6million in a year. A reduction in drop-out and its effect on personal earnings is estimated as an increase in individual yearly earnings of an average of US\$33.8" (Patrinós and Velez, 1995: 2, cited in Woodhall, 1998: 9).

## **Bangladesh: Ethnic minorities face higher school drop-out risk**

Dhaka, 4 November 2011 (IRIN)

<http://www.irinnews.org/printreport.aspx?reportid=94139>

Ethnic minority children in Bangladesh from the southeast Chittagong Hill Tracts are among the country's least literate and at heightened risk of dropping out of school, say experts and community leaders. Children in this region bordering India and Myanmar face discrimination in government-run schools where they are often badly treated by teachers and students from the country's largest ethnic group, Bengalis, said Saikat Biswas, a programme officer with Oxfam GB.

More than half of all household members surveyed in CHT (55.2 percent) have no formal schooling, according to a recent study by Khondker and others. And for those who start schooling, fewer than 8 percent complete primary education while 2 percent complete secondary education, according to a 2009 study by the Dhaka-based research group, Human Development Research Centre. Children from four to six years old soon lose interest in the classroom and drop out when they cannot communicate with teachers or understand lessons, said Biswas.

"Ethnic minority children communicate in their mother tongue in their house. But, in school, they are compelled to face Bengali text while the teachers are also from the Bengali community. The whole teaching method is in Bangla." Mongching Marma, 7, enrolled in Shishu primary school in Khagrachari District, but left within two years. "In school, we have to read in Bangla language. I struggled a lot to understand the Bangla text," he said. Many of his friends also left before finishing primary school for the same reason, he added.

"Children get a totally different environment in school when teachers are of another community and the text is in a different language," said Sanjeeb Drong, general-secretary of the CHT-based ethnic minority rights coalition, Bangladesh Indigenous Peoples Forum. Most of the country's 45 ethnic minority groups live in CHT. "It is totally impossible to increase literacy rates among the ethnic minority groups if the government cannot introduce primary education in their mother tongue," he added.

Teachers should also come from ethnic minority communities so pupils have a similar environment in school as they do at home, said Drong. Bangladesh's 2010 National Education Policy recommended introducing primary education for ethnic minority groups in their own languages, but Drong said he had seen little progress and no "effective steps" toward implementing the initiative.

But even with little funding, governments can train non-ethnic minority teachers to support ethnic minority students who do not speak the dominant language, said Fred Genesee, a psychology professor at McGill University in Canada, who has researched language among minority children in the Americas. "The tendency is to think there is nothing special that needs to be done with second language learners. This is a huge mistake... A century of research shows that education in the dominant language does not work for many children. These children underperform and drop out at higher rates."

## **Alternative Educational Programmes for English Learners**

Kathryn Lindholm-Leary, San Jose State University Fred Genesee, McGill University, 2011

### **Which programme is best for English learners?**

Most large-scale studies as well as most systematic syntheses of relevant research indicate that there is a benefit from bilingual instruction over English-only instruction (for reviews, see August and Hakuta 1997; Francis, Lesaux, and August 2006; Genesee et al. 2005, 2006; Greene 1998; Rolstad, Mahoney, and Glass 2005; Slavin and Cheung 2005; Willig 1985). A minority of studies report that bilingual instruction is equivalent to, or provides no benefit over, English-only instruction (Parrish et al. 2006). Interestingly, even the synthesis studies of Baker and his colleagues (Baker and de Kanter 1981; Rossell and Baker 1996) that have been used to support English-only approaches “do not state that English-only instruction is more effective, but merely that bilingual instruction should not be the only approach mandated by law” (Francis et al. 2006). This section provides a brief overview of relatively recent syntheses of research and does not report on the entire body of research because of space limitations; see the syntheses of studies mentioned above or specific studies for more detailed findings.

As part of the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth, Francis and colleagues (2006) examined studies that compared programmes that provided literacy instruction through a student’s native language (bilingual program) with programmes that provided literacy and other instruction only through English. Their conclusion was that: Overall, where differences between two instructional conditions were found in the studies reviewed, these differences typically favoured the bilingual instruction condition. This is the case for studies conducted with students in both elementary and secondary schools, and with students possessing a range of abilities (p. 398).

In their synthesis of available research on the achievement of English learners, Lindholm-Leary and Borsato (2006) found that there is strong convergent evidence that the academic achievement of English learners is positively related to sustained instruction that includes their first language. In addition, most long-term studies report that the longer students stayed in the program, the more positive were their outcomes. These results were found for reading and mathematics achievement, GPA, attendance rates, high school completion rates, and attitudes toward school and self (e.g., Block 2007; Cazabon, Nicoladis, and Lambert 1998; Curiel, Rosenthal, and Richek 1986; Lambert and Cazabon 1994; Lindholm-Leary 2001; Lindholm-Leary and Borsato 2001, 2006; Lopez and Tashakkori 2006; Thomas and Collier 2002).

### **Advocacy Kit for Promoting Multilingual Education: Including the Excluded** UNESCO, 2007

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001521/152198e.pdf>

One study using Ministry of Education data from Guatemala compared the repetition and drop-out rates of two groups of Mayan students – one in a bilingual education programme and the other in an L2 (Spanish-only) programme and found the following:

*A shift to bilingual schooling would result in considerable cost savings, as a result of the reduced repetitions, saving the government more than 31 million quetzals (U.S. \$5 million), which equals the cost of providing primary education to about 100,000 students per year.*

Another study using data from Guatemala and Senegal found that the cost of publishing in local languages represents only a fraction of a percent of the recurring education budget (0.13% in the case of Guatemala), and start up costs can be recovered after two to three years.

*We have a few hundred years of evidence that submersion in the L2 is “highly inefficient”, if not downright wasteful and discriminatory, since such school systems are characterised by low intake, high repetition and dropout, and low completion rates. The costs to the individual, who sacrifices productive agricultural and family work time to go to school, only to experience failure and rejection, are high. The overall costs to the society, then, are clearly astronomical, and must be seen as at least partially to blame for the lack of inclusive, participatory governing in post-colonial countries.*

In addition to educational and long-term financial benefits, multilingual education (MLE) programmes serve a wider purpose. Government support for strong MLE programmes demonstrates to all citizens that minority languages, and those who speak the languages, are valued. MLE programmes that help learners to build a good “bridge” between their home language and the official languages help to build national unity without forcing people to sacrifice their unique linguistic and cultural heritage. Experiences around the world have demonstrated that denying or suppressing people’s linguistic and cultural heritage has been a cause for division and strife. MLE supports unity through affirming diversity rather than instead of diversity.

Perhaps the best people to answer the question “Is it worth it?” are the members of the ethnic minority communities themselves. One parent from PNG said:

*When children go to school, they go to an alien place. They leave their parents, they leave their gardens, they leave everything that is their way of life. They sit in a classroom and they learn things that have nothing to do with their own place. Later, because they have learned only other things, they reject their own.*

*They don’t want to dig kaukau [sweet potatoes], they say it’s dirty; they don’t want to help their mother fetch water. They look down on those things. There are big changes in the children now. They don’t obey their parents; they become rascals. And this is because they have gone to school and left the things that are ours.*

*Now my child is in a Tok Ples school. He is not leaving his place. He is learning in school about his customs, his way of life. Now he can write anything he wants to in Tok Ples. Not just the things he can see, but things he thinks about, too. And he writes about his place. He writes about helping his mother carry water, about digging kaukau, about going to the garden.*

*When he writes these things they become important to him. He is not only reading and writing about things outside, but learning through reading and writing to be proud*

*of our way of life. When he is big, he will not reject us. It is important to teach our children to read and write, but it is more important to teach them to be proud of themselves, and of us.*

Minority language learners who must attend schools that use a language they do not know face a host of educational, social and other problems. These include high repetition and dropout rates because they cannot learn in a language they do not understand.

### **Education for All: In Whose Language?**

Birgit Brock-Utne, *Oxford Review of Education*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (Mar., 2001), pp. 115-134

<http://www.jstor.org/openurl?volume=27&date=2001&spage=115&issn=03054985&issue=1>

Children who speak a language other than the language of instruction confront a substantial barrier to learning. In the crucial, early grades when children are trying to acquire basic literacy as well as adjust to the demands of the school setting, not speaking the language of instruction can make the difference between succeeding and failing in school, between remaining in school and dropping out (Lockheed & Verspoor, 1991, p. 153).

### **Swaziland**

There was some discussion about the reasons for the high drop-out rates. Most of the educationists from Swaziland present admitted that the language of instruction might be one of the reasons behind the many failures. They claimed that the official policy required teachers to use siSwati as the language of instruction during the four first years and in those same years teach English as a subject. English should then be used as the language of instruction for the rest of primary and secondary school as well as at the University level. Mr Vilakati mentioned, however, that he was aware of the fact that a good number of schools, especially in the towns and cities, now started with English as the language of instruction in the first grade. On the question of why the Government did not attempt to enforce their language policy, he answered that they did not want to enforce anything and were more in favour of letting parents decide.

### **Uganda**

In Kampala educational officers cited one of the reasons for the high drop out rate from the centres being the fact that the teaching is in English and the text-books are all written in English even for the first grade. This happens even though it is official government policy that the language of instruction in the first grades should be the mother tongue. The textbooks had been prepared by an American firm which had won the competitive bidding round even though the Institute for Curriculum Development in Uganda also had delivered their bid.

### **South Africa**

In South Africa in 1979, the Education and Training Act was passed, reducing mother tongue to four years of primary school followed by a choice of medium between Afrikaans and English. Most schools opted for English medium. The reduction of the use of the mother tongue has coincided with decreasing pass rates which dropped to as low as 48.3% by 1982, and 44% by 1992 (Heugh, 1999, p 304).

## 5. Evidence showing disadvantages

### **Efficient Learning for the Poor**

Helen Abadzi, World Bank, 2006

[http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=kn62phyvFpwC&printsec=frontcover&hl=fr&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=kn62phyvFpwC&printsec=frontcover&hl=fr&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false)

There are definite advantages to learning a second language at an early age. The earlier grammar is learned, the easier and faster it is mastered. The time to learn a language most efficiently is from age 3 to about age 8; then the ability falls off dramatically and steadily until adolescence and then again until adulthood. After age 8, children are no longer in their prime language-learning years, but as their working memory and reasoning ability increases, they can put explicit grammar rules to use. Non-native students in primary and secondary years become fluent in about a year and eventually competently master a language. With help, they may be able to catch up with students studying in their native language, although the latter double their vocabulary every two years between grades 1 and 5, and by grade 5 know 40,000 words. However, the literacy rate among speakers of minority languages worldwide is low, reported at 20-30 percent. If children are poor and also study in an official language they do not know well, how serious are the problems that arise?

Parents with limited or no education may expect a higher status or better family income if their children are educated in the official language. Frequently, the strong objections to local-language instruction are due to concerns that the language may acquire political importance in areas which try to set tribal differences aside.

## 6. Additional information

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