Asia-Pacific Regional Forum on Education, Language and the Rights of Minorities

Theme 2- Public policy objectives and practices for education in minority languages

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- **Policy objectives to be guided by a "*human rights-based approach to language issues*"**

- **Main focus of the core language rights (in various treaties, guideline documents) – covered in theme 1**

➢ Dignity

➢ Liberty

➢ Equality and non-discrimination

➢ Identity

Implication of the human-rights approach on policy objectives

According to the 'Language Rights of Linguistic Minorities: A practical guide for implementation' (p.11):

- It must be ensured that the state authorities "**effectively comply with their obligations**"

- "*Laws, policies and processes must recognize language rights within a human rights framework*"

- "*Authorities must integrate these into their conduct and activities and mechanisms must be put in place to effectively address problem areas where they exist and improve compliance*".

- **Hence, nations through their policies and conduct must ensure the following-**

➢an active end to any discrimination, exclusion or any other negative impact based on language ;

➢ an active enabling (*active offer)* environment for preservation of minority languages and opportunities for expression, education and employment.

Issues to be covered in the theme:

- **Policies & measures to check and stop any discrimination on the basis of language**

- **Implementation of models where mother tongue of students coming from linguistic minorities can be their medium of instruction in education programmes aimed at encouraging multilingualism**

- **Identifying or developing MT based practices that strengthen MT while also facilitating learning of other languages (focus on curriculum and pedagogy)**

- **Deliberations on creating linkages between teaching of minority languages in schools and opportunities in higher education and employment**

Asia-Pacific context and experience

The nature and extent of linguistic diversity in the Asian Pacific region (e.g., in countries like Papua New Guinea, India, Philippines, Indonesia and others) and the specific challenge they pose to an-inclusive language policy- for instance:

➢ the linguistic diversity in many of these countries is less due to migration and more due to the numerous indigenous groups with their own language and culture-

➢ the resulting power dynamics that emerges – specific concerns

➢ The multiple layers of language hierarchy- International language ⟶ national language/official language of the nation official ⟶ language of the state/province ⟶ languages of different ethnic-linguistic groups in the province (tribals, etc.) –

➢ Choice between MT based with single language group in a classroom and an MLE model for a multilingual classroom!

➢ Situations where the numerical strength of the minorities is very small.

An example of MLE model from India- Odisha State MLE model

	Class – I	Class – II	Class –III	Class-IV	Class –V
MT language learning	Language in MT-Oral and Written	Language in MT- Developing Fluency	Language in MT	MT as subject	MT as subject
Mathematics	Math in MT	Math in MT	Math in MT	Math in L2 (Odia)	Math L2 (Odia)
EVS	Environmental studies in MT	Environmental studies in MT	Environmental studies in MT	Environmental studies in MT/L2	Environmental studies in L2
2nd language learning		Oral and Written (Odia)	Reading and Writing L2	Developing Fluency in L2	Language in L2
3rd Language learning			Oral English L3	Reading and writing in L3	Reading and writing in L3

Source: OPEPA (n.d.). Multilingual Education for Tribal Children of Orissa: Programme Guideline Document, p.7.

Some concerns & possible recommendations-

C: Whom do we identify as minority language speakers?

➢ **Do numbers alone help identify (E.g., the case of speakers of Javanese in Indonesia, who despite their large numbers are denied right to educate their children in their own language)**

➢ **In countries where English hegemony reigns, is it the national or the official state language, the language of the province or still smaller groups whose languages are often denied the status of language?**

➢ **Also is it possible to nuance the understanding of minority more by locating the same in historical, socio-cultural, political and economic contexts to understand their vulnerability and hence the need for active support**

Some concerns & possible recommendations (contd.)

C: Use of MT "*as far as/ as long as possible/practicable*" has as in case of some languages in India, provided authorities a ready argument to cite 'practicality' to reduce the number of years of MT teaching to as less as till grade III –

Rec: should we then consider specifying a minimum grade till which use of MT must be ensured and thereafter encouraged?

C: Need for reflection on whether use of MT in early years gets restricted to 'transition' aims or does it actually ensure continued enrichment of the language itself?

Rec: In light of the above, it may be important to emphasize the cultural context of the language which must reflect in its use and also a more 'elaborative use of language'

Some concerns & possible recommendations (contd.)

C: An often cited constraint in ensuring use of MT for linguistic minority is absence of higher education and employment opportunities in the languages of the minorities. This is cited not merely by authorities but also linguistic minority communities

Rec: Creation of opportunities of higher education/research in more languages and employment; active exploration of translation initiatives (from majority to minority and vice – versa) and resource generation in minority languages for facilitation of higher education in more languages and also as site for employment!

C: On whom is the burden of being multilingual – only minority language speakers? How does that impact their self-concept, identity?

Rec: Possible reflection on 'multilingualism' as an aim for all schooling (for instance – the three language formula in Indian schools)

Some concerns & possible recommendations (contd.)

C: Linking provision of education in minority language depending on –demand, number and proportion- while ensuring practicality , the possible impact on the most vulnerable (smaller linguistic groups which are not politically powerful)

Rec:??

C: The opportunities of socio-economic mobility and power associated with certain languages have created aspirations and hence demand for them even among linguistic minorities who on occasions may deem introduction of MT as way to hold them back-

Rec: Need for policies to be increasingly informed by research and more interaction with communities to dispel apprehensions.