



Concept Paper

MOTHER TONGUE - BILINGUAL EDUCATION

Photo: Eva Køngerskov

The IBIS Education for Change strategy states the overall objective of IBIS' work with education as follows: 'Poor and marginalized children, youth and adults are empowered through quality education, and civil society organisations are strengthened in order to promote, claim and achieve their individual and collective rights to formal and non-formal quality education, thereby enabling structural, political and social change'. The strategic lines of action are: 1) Quality Education and 2) Education Policy and Financing, and all of IBIS' work in these two areas is closely linked.

This series of IBIS Education for Change Concept Papers defines IBIS' understanding and approach in key areas of the EfC strategy.

Each paper contains the following sections:

- A) **Justification** for IBIS' work on the issue
- B) Brief overview of relevant **theories and definitions**
- C) Presentation of **IBIS' approach** supplemented with lessons learned
- D) References to **further documentation**.

JUSTIFICATION

The linguistic boundaries between rich and poor in countries that have been former colonies are usually quite clear. The elite speak the language of education, governance and other official domains. These languages are generally European languages introduced by the colonial powers. The marginalised people (especially women) speak languages that are often not valued or even recognised outside their communities. These groups are often called “linguistic minorities”, even though these groups in many countries in fact outnumber speakers of the dominant/national language. The question of language thus has huge implications for participation, governance, citizenship, fulfilment of rights and the distribution of power and resources. In IBIS’ *Education for Change Strategy*, the question of languages used in education occupies a central position and IBIS seeks to promote *Mother Tongue - Bilingual Education* in all programmes. Emphasis is put on learning both the Mother Tongue and national languages through Bilingual Education in order to give all citizens the opportunity to develop linguistic skills in both Mother Tongue and second language.

Mother Tongue education results in a number of advantages in terms of quality and efficiency in the provision of education. The advantages include: increased access and equity (also related to gender); improved learning outcomes; reduced repetition and drop-out rates; socio-cultural benefits, and lower overall costs. Mother Tongue education helps students to develop not only the Mother Tongue itself but also their skills in the majority education language and research shows clearly that a second language is learned best when a first language has been learned well. Bilingual students perform better in school when the school teaches the Mother Tongue effectively and, where appropriate, develops literacy in that language. When students develop their abilities in two (or more languages) throughout their education, they gain a deeper understanding of language and how to use it effectively. They have more practice in processing language, especially when they develop literacy in both.

Mother Tongue - Bilingual Education is in many contexts a controversial and contested issue. IBIS stresses that *Mother Tongue - Bilingual Education* should be considered a right, closely linked both to the universal right to quality education and to people’s collective cultural rights. But much advocacy remains to be done for this to be globally accepted. IBIS works with *Mother Tongue - Bilingual Education* at programme level and seeks to include it in all education programmes for children, young people and adults. Also based on this programme evidence, IBIS seeks to influence national and international policy in favour of *Mother Tongue - Bilingual Education*.

THEORIES AND DEFINITIONS

Bilingual Education is an education that includes both Mother Tongue and second language education. *Mother Tongue – Bilingual Education* is when students have access to both education in their Mother Tongue and the second language (e.g. English, Spanish, French or Portuguese). It is important that Mother Tongue as the main language of instruction is taught as such for the first 5 years at least, while the second language might be introduced as a second language (with the appropriate methodology and well trained educators) during this period.

DEFINITIONS OF MOTHER TONGUE, SECOND- AND FOREIGN LANGUAGE

MOTHER TONGUE (L1)

Language(s) one learns first, identifies with, and/or is identified by others as a native speaker of; sometimes also the language that one is most competent in or uses most. There may be a change of mother tongue during a person's lifetime according to all other criteria except the first. A person may have two or more mother tongues ("bilingualism/multilingualism as a mother tongue"). Indigenous or minority mother tongues are sometimes called heritage languages (often when children do not know them well) or home languages (implying that they are/should not be used for official purposes).

SECOND LANGUAGE (L2)

Is the language learned after acquiring the mother tongue, or learned and used in the environment, often in addition to school (as opposed to foreign language).

FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Is the language(s) learned mainly in the classroom, for reading texts and/or communication with its speakers (e.g., English in Bolivia, Chinese in Mozambique, German in Nicaragua or French in Ghana etc.)

MOTHER TONGUE – BILINGUAL EDUCATION HAS A RELATIVELY WEAK STATUS AS A RIGHT

The Human Rights Complex is divided on the language issue in relation to education. The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)* paragraph on education (26) does not refer to language at all and the *UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1976)* omits reference to language or language groups in its educational article (13). On the other hand, the *Convention of the Right of the Child (1990)*, educational article (29) agree that the education of the child shall be directed to the development of respect for the child's parents and his or her own cultural identity and language. The two other main treaties relating to educational linguistic rights are article 28 of the *ILO Convention 169 concerning the collective rights of indigenous people to an Intercultural Bilingual Education (1989)* and the article 13 of the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007)*. In the framework of the *Education for All (EFA) goals of Dakar (2000)*, it is clear that *Mother Tongue – Bilingual Education* is not well represented, as it is only mentioned in the Expanded Commentary of Goal 6 (point 43). Here it says that successful education programmes have different requirements,

one of which is “*a relevant curriculum that **can** be taught and learned in the local language...*”. Likewise the *Millennium Development Goals* (MDGs) have no mention of *Mother Tongue – Bilingual Education*. The weak status of *Mother Tongue – Bilingual Education* is in part grounded in power holders’ lack of political will to invest the necessary resources in quality education and, on the other hand, in the fact that only a few people are aware of its positive effects on learning, self-esteem and intercultural understanding. This knowledge is often not available to learners themselves, nor to parents, educators, decision makers and education planners. In the following, a number of advantages of *Mother Tongue – Bilingual Education* are highlighted.

MOTHER TONGUE - BILINGUAL EDUCATION AS A MEANS TO IMPROVING CHILDREN’S LEARNING AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Language models in both Africa and Latin America are failing; the majority of bilingual children with another Mother Tongue than the language of instruction score between 20-40% by the end of the educational intervention, because they only have 10% of the vocabulary needed to learn. This means failure across the curriculum. Research points out that only a very small fraction of the population benefits from education systems that use the language models currently applied in Africa and Latin America. This means an immense waste of resources as the education systems too often only benefit a small elite. However, if learners are taught in their Mother Tongue, learning outcomes are considerably improved.

MOTHER TONGUE - BILINGUAL EDUCATION AS A MEANS TO EFFECTIVE LEARNING OF AND IN THE SECOND LANGUAGE

Bilingualism has positive effects on students’ linguistic and educational development. Through Bilingual Education students will gain a deeper understanding of language and how to use it, they will have more practice in processing language and they will be able to compare and contrast the ways in which their two languages organize reality. When schools provide students with a quality education in their primary language, they give them two things: knowledge and literacy. The knowledge that students receive through their Mother Tongue helps them make the second language more comprehensible, and literacy developed in the primary language is transferred to the second language. It is easier for a student to learn to read in a language that is understood - and reading skills from one language will be transferred to reading skills in another language.

MOTHER TONGUE - BILINGUAL EDUCATION AS A MEANS OF EMPOWERING VULNERABLE GROUPS AND GIRLS AND WOMEN

Being forced to learn a new language before learning how to read and write in one’s Mother Tongue creates an educational challenge that should not exist. The middle-class and elite may overcome this problem, but it grows exponentially when it intersects with poverty, hunger, disability, remote rural conditions, social marginality – or simply the fact of being born female. There are strong connections between ethno-linguistic background, girls’ school participation and educational opportunities. And one of the groups most affected by injustices in language policy is women and girls, unless they work in urban zones. Girls and women are much less likely (than boys and men) to be exposed to the national language because their lives are more often restricted to the home and family in rural zones where the local language is spoken. This means that girls and women are less likely than boys and men to understand school instruction and are therefore to a greater extent than the boys marginalised in the education process.

MOTHER TONGUE - BILINGUAL EDUCATION AS A MEANS OF EMPOWERING INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES

The involvement of parents and communities in the educational process and the life of the school is strengthened when education is conducted in the language of the community and the learners. Studies have showed that a beneficial aspect of Mother Tongue education is the improvement of communication and interactions in the classroom and the integration of cultures and indigenous knowledge systems into formal education curricula. A direct result of the use of a language the parents share is a greater involvement of the parents in the school and its management, above all in what pertains to both community support to the children's learning and stronger cooperation between parents and teachers. This involvement leads to a growing desire on the part of the parents for a better quality education, which in turn leads to greater demands being made of the school and the education system. Mother Tongue Education is equally important for youth and adults taking part in non-formal education.

MOTHER TONGUE - BILINGUAL EDUCATION AS A MEANS TO CULTURAL AWARENESS AND SELF-WORTH

It has often been the 'minorities' (who are in some African and Latin American countries actually the majority) themselves and their characteristics, including bilingualism, who are seen as the problem. In a monolingual education system, the bilingual learners are often made to feel ashamed of their Mother Tongues. This might not be done directly, but rather through making the learners and their parents believe in the superiority of the language of instruction. This often unconscious provocation of feelings of shame affects the way that people look upon themselves, their languages and their culture. But to reject a language is to reject the learner. When the message, implicit or explicit, communicated to learners is to leave their language and culture outside the school door, learners leave a central part of who they are (their identities) outside the educational process. When they feel this rejection, they are much less likely to participate actively and confidently in the teaching/learning process. But it is not enough for educators to passively accept linguistic and cultural diversity; they must encourage learners to use their Mother Tongue and affirm the learners' linguistic identity by developing an environment where their linguistic and cultural experience is actively validated.

MOTHER TONGUE - BILINGUAL EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT

The language question is not a mere education issue; it is about the development of just societies and active citizens. The communication gap in African and Latin American societies is one of many reasons for underdevelopment. True participation can only take place through communication in languages mastered by the people. Language-in-education policies are in this way placed at the core of development. In the bilingual approach, both the relevant local language and the official/foreign language must have their appropriate place and methods for teaching. An important object for policy-makers and educators is to develop a national identity in a way that the rights of all citizens are respected, including their cultural and linguistic rights. In a multicultural state, it is essential that every citizen has the right to have another language than the official language as their Mother Tongue and has the right to make use of this language - not only in a classroom, but also in society as such.

MOTHER TONGUE - BILINGUAL EDUCATION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF INDIGENOUS/ LOCAL LANGUAGES

When indigenous/local languages are not used in public spheres and in the education process for discussions on scientific and intellectual levels, they do not develop the necessary vocabulary. Languages are not static, but develop when used. Both at a global and national level states, hereunder universities and other scientific institutions have to take a much bigger responsibility in prioritising research into indigenous/local languages and ensuring that higher education in the different languages is possible and available. Only this way will stigmatisation eventually disappear and the status of the languages be regained. A minority or indigenous language will never have the same status as an official language if it is not a language of instruction. It will be seen as a language which may be used for communication at a local level, but not for communication of knowledge and skills at an academic level. This will also influence the relation to indigenous /local languages of persons who have the official language as their Mother Tongue.

IBIS' APPROACH

Without *Mother Tongue - Bilingual Education, Quality Education for All* will neither be achievable nor desirable.

- Not achievable because the many children still out of school, (especially the girls) will not be reached when education is available only in a language that is foreign to most of the rural, marginalised populations.
- Not desirable, because IBIS is interested in more than education conceived as simple schooling or instruction that merely transfers knowledge from the teacher to the learner.

IBIS is interested in *Education for Change*: education that transforms and develops people's abilities to analyse their own situation and to find solutions to their problems. IBIS is interested in promoting and working for the kind of education that develops whole persons as conscious democratic citizens, critical and creative in driving their own development. This will not happen in a language that is so unfamiliar that it leaves no room for anything other than simple rote learning, copying and reciting. IBIS' interventions include both the integration of *Mother Tongue - Bilingual Education* in education programmes and advocacy to promote the teaching and recognition of *Mother Tongue - Bilingual Education* at national and international levels.

PROMOTING AND SUPPORTING CLASSROOM IMPLEMENTATION OF FORMAL AND NON-FORMAL MOTHER TONGUE OR BILINGUAL EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

SHARING KNOWLEDGE OF MOTHER TONGUE - BILINGUAL EDUCATION

It is often said that parents know what is best for their children and that they have a choice. In most parts of rural Africa or Latin America, they have chosen and they want their children to learn in the dominant language. Some parents are suspicious of Mother Tongue - Bilingual Education teaching/learning programmes because they worry that these programmes take time away from the majority instruction language. These parents are often not given reliable information as to the long-term consequences of monolingual education in the dominant language. Instead, in many places, educational alternatives are presented to them as a choice between Mother Tongue and traditional

identity, or the dominant language, supposedly leading to jobs and social mobility. Learners and communities need to be informed and engaged in dialogues on the benefits of *Mother Tongue - Bilingual Education* and on how this can be implemented in their specific context. In many cases, the authorities, the school directors and even the teachers have just as little basis for making a qualified choice as to the system to adopt - multilingualism, Bilingual Education or the long term consequences of the state language policies in education. What is lacking are living examples so people hear, see and feel what is going on in bilingual classrooms and in Mother Tongue based programmes. IBIS seeks therefore to pilot *Mother Tongue - Bilingual Education* programmes in order to create and share evidence on how it can be done.

DEVELOPING TEACHER TRAINING AND CURRICULA FOR MOTHER TONGUE AND BILINGUAL EDUCATION

The best Bilingual Education programmes include both Mother Tongue instruction and second language instruction provided by bilingual educators with a good knowledge of second language acquisition. The educator should preferably be able to teach in the learners' own language (and where relevant also the national language as a second language) and have the skills to manage multilingual and multicultural classrooms. The educator should also learn how to promote respect among different language groups and to use the linguistic and cultural differences among learners to teach them about valuing and appreciating differences. *Mother Tongue - Bilingual Education* should be included both in formal and informal teacher training curricula and in educator supervision schemes for continuous learning and improvement. IBIS pilots both educator training models for *Mother Tongue - Bilingual Education*, and also engages in the development of multilingual teaching material and curricula.

ADVOCACY FOR MOTHER TONGUE AND BILINGUAL EDUCATION

INFLUENCING NATIONAL LANGUAGE AND EDUCATION POLICIES

IBIS' experience in African and Latin American countries has shown that there is a lot of interest from educational stakeholders in *Mother Tongue - Bilingual Education*. There is an opening in many countries, and in some countries the official policies are in favour of much greater attention and priority to language in education issues. IBIS works through advocacy to influence national education policies, language in education planning and costing, involving the main donors of the countries of operation. In many education thematic programmes, IBIS is involved in curriculum development and training of teachers. This platform is used to influence curriculum development of the basic schools, of the teaching training institutions and of the adult literacy programmes. Moreover, where IBIS is involved in education in emergency programmes, the organization uses this as a testing ground to show how *Mother Tongue - Bilingual Education* could be directly integrated into the formal school curriculum.

INFLUENCING INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS DECLARATIONS

The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)* does not refer to language but promotes free universal basic education, full development of the human personality and the rights of the parents to choose the kind of education that their children should receive. Generally human rights declarations and conventions refer to individual rights and those that refer to language rights are mostly minority rights and still individual (i.e. referring to *persons* belonging to minorities and not minority- or language *groups*). The rights that refer to language are overt non-discrimination rights, but there are few positive rights concerning language in education. IBIS seeks to use its international platform and local examples to advocate internationally for strengthening the position of *Mother Tongue - Bilingual Education* as a human right.

FURTHER DOCUMENTATION AND REFERENCES

- *Mother Tongue-Based Bi-Multilingual Education. Key extra-mural conditions of successful implementation in Southern Africa.* Address delivered by Alexander Neville, International Conference on Bilingual Education in Mozambique, Maputo, 2006.
- *Optimizing Learning and Education in Africa – the Language Factor. A Stocktaking research on Mother Tongue and Bilingual Education in Sub-Saharan Africa,* Alidou Boly, A., Brock-Utne, B., Diallo Y.S., Heugh, K., & Wolff, H.E., Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), 2006.
- *Intercultural Bilingual Education in Latin America: Balance and Perspectives,* Lopez, Luis Enrique and Wolfgang Küper, 2000.
- *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* Paolo Freire, 1970.
- *In their own language... Education for All (Education Notes),* The World Bank, 2005.
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- *The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,* UN, 1976.
- *The Convention of the Right of the Child,* UN, 1990.
- *The Convention 169 concerning the collective rights of indigenous people to an Intercultural Bilingual Education,* ILO, 1989.
- *The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,* UN, 2007.

ABOUT IBIS EDUCATION FOR CHANGE CONCEPT PAPERS

IBIS Concept Paper: Mother Tongue - Bilingual Education, version 1, June 1st, 2014

This series of IBIS concept papers was introduced June 1st 2014, with the target audience being IBIS staff and management as well as partners and stakeholders. The papers have been developed through a participatory process by IBIS Global Education Group, and they are living documents to be revised whenever needed. Further concept papers are in the process of being developed.

At this point the series includes the following concept papers:

- Quality Education
- Transformative Education
- Educator Professional Development
- Youth Education and Training
- Mother Tongue - Bilingual Education

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