



The use of language in children's education

A policy statement

This paper is about children's experience of basic education and language in the countries in which Save the Children UK works. It is particularly relevant to minority ethnic groups who are speakers of languages or dialects that are often not valued or even recognized by formal structures, including schools. As such, it relates mainly to *children who learn one or more languages at home, but find a new and unknown language at school and in wider society.*

Language becomes an enormous barrier for children when they do not speak or understand the language used by teachers in their schools. Many of these will not be able to enrol in school, turned away because they do not speak the official school language. Some will enrol, but will struggle to take advantage of the education being offered, using all their energies to grapple with an unfamiliar language. Many of them will drop out early for lack of success¹. It is estimated that for half of children out of school, the language used in school is different to that used at home². Minority girls are often particularly disadvantaged, as they are often less exposed to other languages than that of the home and therefore find it harder to cope in school³. Members of many ethnic groups often feel left out from schools, as schools are official places where their language and culture may not be recognised. Parents tend to withdraw from school activities when they feel that their community is not part of the school community.

There is now a great deal of research and evidence available worldwide on how to overcome language barriers in children's education. This paper is based on that knowledge, and outlines Save the Children UK's position on how language should be approached in the education of children who do not speak the official school language. The paper contains key principles for Save the Children programmes to work towards in their own practice, and to share with others through experience sharing, capacity building and advocacy.

Why is Save the Children focusing on language in education?

Save the Children's work in basic education aims to have large scale impact on children disadvantaged by their ethnicity. In recent years, many Save the Children education programmes have increasingly focused on the issue of children who struggle with education because their school does not use the language which they speak. Save the Children teams frequently see this happening in remote rural, often mountainous, settings where the most marginalised groups tend to live. Save the Children UK is working to pilot quality mother-tongue multilingual education for minority language speakers in particularly challenging contexts. Projects in several countries aim to shift school environments towards mother-tongue based education for minority ethnic children. These are taking place in settings where resources to support multilingual education are particularly limited, and where political sensitivities often constrain the space for using minority languages in education.

¹ In Bangladesh's Chittagong Hill Tracts, dropout for minority children is double national rates (Durrnain, 2006).

² Bender et al, 2005

³ Benson, 2005



I. State of the World's Languages

Language is an essential part of who we are. It is central to our individual identity, our personal concept of self, and our group identity. Almost 7,000 languages are spoken in the world today: the existence of different linguistic groups living in the same country is the norm rather than the exception. However a country's linguistic diversity is rarely reflected in its school system.

Different languages carry different status – locally, nationally and internationally. In any multilingual society there are often one or two prestige languages used in education, governance and other official domains (and invariably linked to the elite in the society). Meanwhile other languages often remain without the legal authority of an official language, unused in formal education because they are deemed unsuitable, inferior or lacking modern concepts. These languages are often systematically ignored or marginalised, along with their speakers. Much of the reason for this linked to government's wish to promote a homogeneous national identity as a way of building a stable country.

Approximately 1.38 billion people, often people from indigenous or minority ethnic groups, speak these languages. Today 221 million school-aged children are speakers of local languages – languages that are spoken in their home and in their community but not used formally in their schools (or recognised as national languages).⁴ Three-quarters of girls out of school belong to ethnic, linguistic or religious minorities⁵.

Article 30 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC) states 'children from minorities have the right to have their own culture and language respected.' The second of the Education for All goals for 2015, as agreed at Dakar, calls 'to ensure that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to minority ethnic groups, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality.' Yet manifestos

of international education conferences and pledges say little or nothing about language as a barrier to expanding educational opportunity, particularly for minority ethnic children.

II. Language Acquisition and Education

To explore why language is a problem in education for many children, an understanding of understand how children learn - and particularly how they learn languages - is important. Often the biggest barrier to quality, relevant education is that education planners and policy makers do not have access to information about the building blocks of learning.

Learning from the familiar

Children find it easiest to learn new concepts and information based on what is already familiar to them, working from simple to more complex knowledge. Helping children to connect new situations and information to what they are familiar with is a key role of caregivers and teachers.⁶ Therefore, education needs to be delivered in a way which children can link to the familiar. If children are faced with an unfamiliar language on entering school, it is extremely difficult for them to make those links.

First language acquisition

A large amount of research on language development in various different countries now exists to show that the process of how children learn, and the ages at which certain developments take place, have global similarities.

Oral (spoken) language is learned naturally from birth, requiring a loving environment rather than conscious instruction. From about 18 months to around three years of age, children learn their first language (also known as their home language or mother tongue) in a unique and rapidly evolving way. Children learn their first language gradually,

⁴ Dutcher, 2004

⁵ Lockheed and Lewis, 2007

⁶ Bransford et al, 1999



through constant exposure to it. Literacy is developed after achieving a level of proficiency in the spoken language. Because of this, literacy is most readily acquired in a language the child already speaks - the mother tongue, or first language.

If a child can develop their first language to the point where they can use it for communication, manipulate it and augment it, s/he will have strong capacity to use, control and develop language in general. This capacity provides a foundation for learning other languages, and is considered one of the best predictors of proficiency in second language⁷. Usually children require support from both home and school environments to help them develop this level of capacity in their first language.

Second language acquisition

Research shows that all children can benefit from learning a second language, as doing so brings social and cognitive gains. A second language can be introduced for communication at an early age at home or at school. Some children are exposed to two (or more) languages in their home – many learn both at a comparable pace and consider both their ‘first (or home) languages’. Such children are usually viewed as fully bilingual. However, where children need to learn languages which are not used in their home environment, the learning process is different. Because the second language is not constantly available for them to absorb, children need structured support and time to become competent in that language.

Teaching children a second language

A child can be helped to learn a second language through oral communication, songs etc., either at home or in early childhood education and development environments. Early educational environments aim to build children’s confidence, communication, personal and social skills, conceptual thinking and early literacy. They build on the foundation of language developed in a child’s family and home, but can also introduce a new

language. Second languages can also be taught as a formal subject (alongside other subjects in the curriculum such as maths and history). Literacy in the second language is unlikely to succeed without significant prior oral training and practise in the new language. Teaching second language as a subject must be done in a learner-centred way which allows children to use the language actively.

Second language as school language of instruction

Children from minority linguistic communities are rarely offered either of the routes described above, but are surrounded by an unfamiliar second language from the first day they enter the classroom, without either the constant exposure that their home language would provide or targeted academic support. When one considers that by the time a child starts primary school he or she has had around five years of constantly learning their first language, it is little surprise that many children do not easily ‘pick up’ a new language when they start school, particularly when they have little or no exposure to the second language in their daily life. It is widely agreed that it takes at least five years for a child to have enough vocabulary to use a language for academic purposes; that is, before s/he is considered proficient enough in the use of the second language to learn subject content *through* it. More recent research has suggested it may actually take seven years⁸.

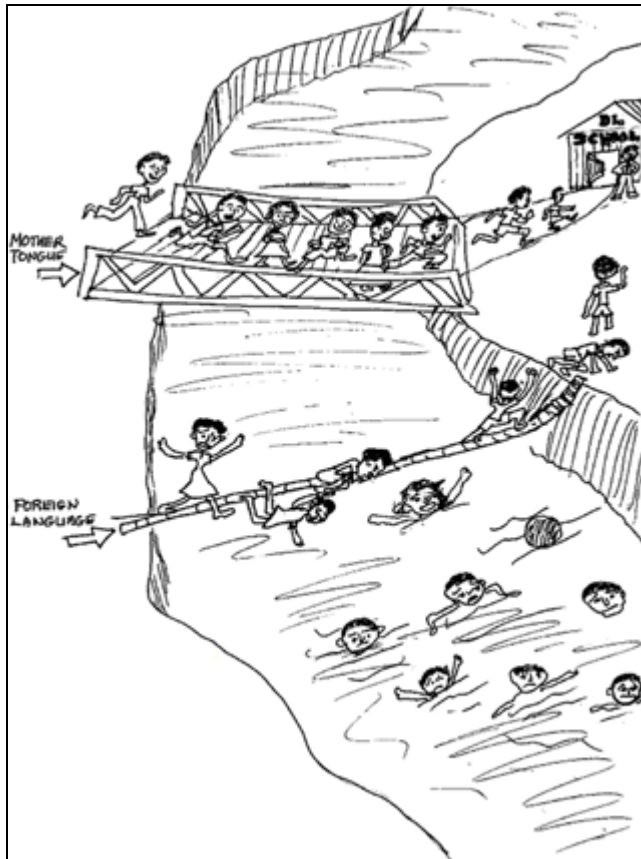
As a child who enters an unknown language environment in their early education does not have this foundation, he/she is being asked to accomplish an enormous task – *learn to communicate* in a new language, *learn literacy* in this unfamiliar language and *learn concepts* in this language – all at the same time. This process is highly inefficient, causing repetition, failure and dropout for all but a few who are somehow able to break the language ‘code’⁹, i.e. those who learn to understand, read and write an unfamiliar language without help.

⁷ Tucker, 1996

⁸ Heugh, K. in Alidou et al, 2006

⁹ Benson, 2005

Comparison of students learning through their first language and an unfamiliar language



© D. Malone/SIL International¹⁰

It is unfair to expect young children to begin learning subject content in a second language. Yet it is impractical to postpone teaching the child until they have acquired second language proficiency. Therefore it is most logical and fair to begin teaching all children in their first language, whilst teaching them the second or additional languages, until they are ready to learn in that second language.

III. Mother tongue bilingual / multilingual education

‘Mother tongue based bilingual education’ means starting with the learner’s knowledge and experiences; providing the child with a foundation in their first language and building a second language on this. Oral, reading, writing and thinking skills are developed in the first language, while teaching the second language as a subject. Exposure to the second language gradually increases, without sacrificing children’s literacy and cognition in the first language¹¹. Additional languages can be added in this way (termed mother tongue based multilingual education).

Children who attend such bilingual programmes are more active in the classroom, and they can easily transfer concepts that were taught in the first language to the second language. Children who become literate in their first language and transition gradually to the regional or national language of instruction perform better academically than minority children who study only in the regional or national language¹². An emphasis on local languages in education does not diminish the child’s chance for further education in a second (or additional) language - in fact it enhances it. Children who are well educated in their first language are more likely to become proficient in national and international languages.

In multilingual settings, adopting a ‘strong bilingual’ education approach is most likely to boost a child’s chances of learning and progressing well through school. Strong bilingual models use the first language as the medium of instruction for several years, with the second language taught as a subject. The changeover to the regional or national language of instruction often happens in lower secondary.

Alternatively, a combination of both first and second languages can be used for instruction to the end of school – with the first language never removed from education as a medium of instruction. However, even limited use of a child’s

¹⁰ Haddad, 2006

¹¹ Benson, C. 2005

¹² Cummings and Tamayo, 1994



first language in school will promote some recognition of the value of the language and identity of the learner.

Bilingual programmes do not disadvantage the development of children in their first language, unless the programmes are minimally bilingual and move children too fast in the direction of monolingual (second language) instruction. Some research indicates that it would be better to have 7 years of mother tongue based bilingual education before transferring to a second language of instruction. As an absolute minimum, experts are clear that instruction in first language should take up 50% of teaching time for at least the first 5 years of a child's education.¹³

Through using and promoting a minority language in school, a bilingual programme will also promote the culture and language of the minority community. As a consequence parents feel a part of the school and children gain self-esteem. There is much evidence, including that of Save the Children's programmes, to support this. When learners can express their full range of knowledge in a language in which they are competent, with their identities valued and used as a basis for instruction, they develop higher self-esteem and greater self-confidence, as well as higher aspirations in schooling and in life. If time is taken to build second language skills based on first language competencies, and if children have an opportunity for continued study in/of their own languages, the result can be high levels of bilingualism and biliteracy¹⁴. Further languages can be added: hence the term 'multilingual education' is often used to refer to this type of teaching.

IV. Challenges in delivering multilingual education

The challenges to overcome in achieving mother tongue based bilingual or multilingual education are significant. Most countries have numerous languages. Many minority languages are not written, having no script. The costs of developing a script for a language and enabling that language to be appropriate for academic use can become a resource-intensive and long-term task, and needs to be done in full consultation with minority communities if the script is to be used. However, many countries have overcome these issues. The process of developing a writing system may continue for several years, but the basic materials to be used for children's initial literacy can be developed quickly.

Recruitment of teachers who speak local languages (or teachers from local language groups) can be a difficult task. Members of minority ethnic groups often struggle to progress through the education system due to language and other barriers, and so in many cases there are few teachers from these minority ethnic groups. Those that have become teachers have usually been educated in the national language and therefore do not have the experience or capacity to teach in their first language. Posts are often located in isolated areas where teachers may not want to live.

In many countries the notion of having one language used in education is key to ideas of national unity. Attempts to bring multiple languages into education can be seen as attempts to destabilise that unity. However, history shows that efforts to replace minority languages with the official language often alienate individuals and communities instead of fostering national harmony. An effective means to challenge such efforts is to demonstrate through pilot projects that the national language is best acquired if children first acquire competence in their first language. Some countries have mounted campaigns to raise consciousness and disseminate information about the results of such pilots.

¹³ Alidou et al, 2006

¹⁴ Cummins, 2001; Thomas & Collier, 2002



Most developing countries are trying to cope with limited budget expenditure for basic education, so naturally fear that adding a bilingual programme would require unavailable resources, such as additional textbooks in local languages and additional teacher training. Although extra investment is needed initially, the cost benefits of enabling all children to benefit from an education are strong: children's dropout rates reduce and their economic and employment opportunities increase, outweighing any initial investment. Several countries have successfully implemented bilingual or multilingual education programmes, including Papua New Guinea, Eritrea, Guatemala, Mali, Nigeria, and Bolivia (see Annex I for more detail).

In areas with less exposure to the dominant language in everyday life, teachers may lack the fluency to conduct all teaching in the language of instruction, so they tend to 'code-switch', going back and forth quickly between languages. This often results in confusion and piecemeal understanding for the children¹⁵. Teachers that are fluent in both languages often spend time translating into local language, reducing the time available for learning actual content. The danger with this approach is that children end up ineffective learners, lacking skills in both their own language and in the language of instruction, and making slow progress through the curriculum.

Where learning a foreign or ex-colonial language such as English is seen as the surest route to a good job and influence in society, parents can demand education in English for their children, sometimes switching from public education in local languages to English-medium private schools. Unless children have both significant exposure to English in their home life and very skilled teachers, teaching the curriculum in English (as opposed to teaching of English as a second language) is unlikely to deliver the competency needed to do well in life or learning. This is not to say that such schools produce no English speaking children, but the

process is not easy, the standards of achievement are not as high as they should be and many children fall out along the way.

In developing countries where bilingual education is in place, many bilingual school programmes use the home language only for the first two or three years of schooling, moving students to instruction in the dominant language abruptly. This model is not backed by theory, nor is it likely to promote strong language and literacy skills. Nonetheless, it may get support from politicians because it gives the appearance of dealing with children's needs without committing to more wide-reaching reform: it gets support from parents because it gives the appearance of teaching the prestige language, which they may believe is the key to their children's success¹⁶.

These 'weak bilingual' approaches are not likely to produce particularly positive outcomes for children's learning achievement. In some cases weak results from weak bilingual education has led to policy makers deciding that bilingual education does not work and returning to a fixed national language of instruction.

¹⁵ Confirmed by Save the Children research in Vietnam (2007), where children displayed a clear preference for using one language at a time in school – ideally their own.

¹⁶ Benson, 2005



V. Save the Children's Position

All children have an equal right to education: all children have the right to have their culture and language respected – this includes ethnic minority children.

No child should be turned away from school, or marginalised within school, because the school does not use their first language.

The use of first language in school, especially in the earlier years, recognises cultural traditions, enhances learning and diminishes educational disparities.

A mother tongue-based bilingual (or multilingual) education should be promoted for all children whose first language is not a national language or a language used in education. This will give children the best possible access to both their own language and the dominant language, ensuring that they are able to learn and function well in school and in society.

Save the Children sees a 'continuum of practice' from one end, where a child's first language is weakened in society and absent from education, through increasing value and respect of his or her language in school to an effective mother tongue based multilingual education programme. Save the Children recognises that in many of the countries where we work, it will take time to move policy and practice towards strong bilingual models of education. However, in each setting there is a variety of possible programme or advocacy interventions to improve learning opportunities for children who do not speak the language of instruction.

Save the Children does not have significant expertise in developing orthography or script. Save the Children's main expertise lies in supporting children's learning - through finding ways to better use children's first language in school, as well as demonstrating improved classroom methodology, supporting teacher training, and developing materials.

Principles to guide Save the Children's programme and advocacy work

1. Early education environments should predominantly be in the child's first language.

Children should have the opportunity to enjoy their first experience of school (making friends, gaining confidence, learning to enjoy learning, building vocabulary, acquiring conceptual skills, becoming familiar with academic terms, learning subject matter) in their first language. Early childhood care and development provides excellent opportunities to support children's communicative and pre-literacy skills in their first language, at a pace appropriate to the child. All children can benefit from learning a second language, which can be introduced for communication in ECCD settings from a young age.

2. Children need a foundation in their first language before learning in their second.

Research shows that it takes at least five years of first language instruction, along with good quality teaching of the national or regional language as a second language, to reach the point at which transfer to national/regional language of instruction is possible without damage to children's learning.

3. Children's first experience of literacy should be in their first language.

Children will enjoy learning to read and write their own language, where scripts exist or are being developed, and they will be quicker to learn. Children who are literate in their first language will more easily acquire literacy in a second language.

4. Teachers should be able to communicate with children in their first language.

Children's first languages should be actively used in their school. When a child's first school experiences are in a second language, the school should employ and support teachers who speak the child/children's first language. Teachers who do not speak the children's language should be encouraged to learn as much as possible of the children's language, and to use it in the classroom.



6. Where there are several minority languages present, flexible approaches are important.

There is a particular challenge where children from several language groups are present in the same classroom. Solutions may range from providing mother tongue bilingual education in the main local language, to grouping children who speak the same language with teachers or other adults from their own language group within the class. Another response is to create multi-age, multigrade classes for each language group within the school. In these cases, as in all educational decision making, it is important to negotiate and develop ways forward with children, community members and teachers.

7. Teachers should be trained in second language methodology and active learning.

Teachers of children who do not speak the language of the school should be trained in second language learning and teaching methodology, as well as methods of active learning and classroom participation. This will enable children to more readily learn the language of the school, as well as progress towards learning subject content in the language.

8. Parents should be actively involved in schools.

Parents should be encouraged to be active participants in their children's education and promote the benefits of first language use in early education. Children should not feel ashamed or shy to use their language in the school. Parents should be encouraged and welcomed in the classroom. Schools should encourage parents to help their children, to read with them and engage in activities that expose children to written and oral aspects of their own language. Engaging with the expectations of parents, particularly explaining that children will be able to do better in both local and official languages if they can learn in their own language, is also necessary.

VI. Policy Implications

An explicitly supportive national policy is needed to enable schools to provide instruction in children's first languages. Save the Children's experience is that where education policies simply do not mention the language of instruction, education officials instruct schools to use the national language – either because they are not aware of the damage this does to minority children's education, or because there is a tacit desire to promote the national language in minority communities. In contexts where the national language is seen as important for promoting national unity, it is particularly important for national government to send clear signals throughout the education system that children should be enabled to learn in their own language as well as learning the national language.

National education policy should guarantee minority children access to the national language through bilingual or multilingual education. Policies should require strong bilingual education approaches, i.e. with at least 5 years of instruction in children's first language, and teaching of the national language before transition to instruction in the national language. In some cases bringing in national language classes would have implications for adding to or replacing some of the existing school timetable for minority children. However, in several settings minority children receive fewer teaching hours than majority children, as minority communities are in more remote schools with shorter timetables. Where this is the case, authorities should be persuaded to resource the education of minority children better and increase teaching hours.

Education sector planning should take into account the possible extra investment needed to shift towards good quality multilingual education over time (such as materials; teacher training and support; and curricular changes). Analyses of cost should be set against projected efficiency savings to the education system of reduced dropout and repetition. Donor agencies should support governments to prioritise and deliver these investments.



Governments must put in place supports within the education system to promote mother-tongue based bilingual or multilingual education. Priorities include:

- Systematic means to ensure that people who speak minority languages are recruited, properly trained and recognised as teachers, and encouraged to work in areas where children speak that language. It is particularly vital that teachers speaking local language are available at pre-school and early primary levels.
- Pre-and in-service teacher training which has a strong focus on inclusion and diversity, with components on multilingual teaching.
- Commitments to ensure that teachers from the linguistic majority working in minority areas have training and support to learn local language so that they can communicate with children.
- Teacher training and curricular development to ensure that teachers of children from linguistic minorities have the skills and supports needed to teach the national language effectively as a second language.

Where countries have accepted refugees from other countries, or where they face movements of internally displaced people who do not speak the local language of instruction, education planners should prioritise mother tongue bilingual education as part of education provision for displaced children. Donors supporting emergency education programmes should recognise the potential need for multilingual education.

VII. Implications for Save the Children Education Programmes

Save the Children programmes are in a good position to demonstrate ways of strengthening children's foundation in their first language, and of improving children's ability to cope with an unknown language of instruction. They can make strong arguments for teaching in first language, and can support efforts to put the capacity in place to provide mother tongue-based bilingual or multilingual education. Save the Children's early childhood/preschool and early primary education programmes can offer crucial opportunities to reduce language barriers in education for minority ethnic children.

As with all our programme work, we should start from the principle of 'do no harm'. None of Save the Children's work should undermine or worsen the situation for children. There are some initiatives that experience shows reliably bring benefits:

- Where scripts exist, making curriculum materials and reading matter available in minority languages will always be beneficial. Some Save the Children projects have worked with minority communities to develop new education materials in minority scripts.
- Bringing minority communities and schools closer together will increase understanding and communication between majority and minority groups. Involving minority adults and children in school management committees and actions; arranging community activities which bring school staff, children and families together socially; and giving teachers simple classes in local language can all have positive effects.
- In some contexts it can help to bring minority adults into the classroom to make the minority language and culture more present in the classroom, to help communication between teachers and children and to make learning activities more relevant to children's lives. Being careful to develop meaningful partnerships between teachers and minority 'classroom assistants' is important.



Emergencies

If children have been displaced by an emergency, they will face greater barriers to integrating into the school system of the host area if they do not speak the local language. Several approaches can help displaced children learn more in their own language, while having access to the surrounding language. These include:

- Involving teachers from the displaced community in schooling – perhaps in partnership with ‘host’ community teachers
- Making learning and literacy materials available in the displaced children’s language
- Encouraging schools to explore and celebrate diversity of culture, including language
- Running supplementary language and literacy classes for displaced children and adults to boost their own language development and help them learn the host language.

Pushing inclusion of minority groups in surrounding schools too fast or without community support may endanger those involved. Special classes or materials distributed for just one ethnic group can reinforce a community’s ideas of discrimination and segregation. If integrated classes are not possible, educational interventions should include activities that bring the targeted groups together within the community, e.g. through sports, art or music.¹⁷

Scripts

Where it is not currently possible for children to learn literacy using their own script, Save the Children teams will need to choose how to respond carefully, depending on their assessment of the local context. We can, for example, work with communities to develop their own script. However, Save the Children has not historically done a great deal of orthography work and other organisations have much greater strengths in this area. We

should only get involved in this type of activity where we or our partners have the necessary expertise, and where there is a good chance that the materials produced will be accepted in local schools. Where it is not possible for Save the Children to work on minority scripts, we should encourage teachers and school leadership to recognise that minority children learning to read and write for the first time in another language should get extra support.

Areas where we should be careful

Education officials in minority areas are usually keen for children to learn the national language, often out of a desire to promote integration with the majority community. This can offer opportunities for NGOs to work with them and demonstrate the value of strong bilingual education. However, we need to be confident that partners are genuinely motivated to boost education outcomes for minority children. Such partnerships must be based on an agreed plan to improve the quality of education for minority children.

If mother-tongue bilingual programmes are ‘weak’ (i.e. literacy in first language is not supported, and there is rapid transition to second language of instruction), children are less likely to perform well in school. This not only undermines the children, but damages arguments for education in children’s first languages – it is then thought that bilingual education does not work.

Save the Children staff should not promote ‘weak’ bilingual education for linguistic minority children as good practice. We must be clear that children should learn in their own language for at least five years, ideally longer. Save the Children staff should not encourage or recommend transition into another language of instruction unless children have achieved a strong level of fluency in that language. We must also be clear that, where scripts exist, children should learn to read and write in their own language.

¹⁷ Adapted from the Interagency Network for Education in Emergencies’ Minimum Standards:
<http://ineesite.org/page.asp?pid=1148>



If the immediate reality is that children's schools use a language of instruction which they do not speak, and that there is no likelihood of change in policy or wider practice in the short term, it is still legitimate for Save the Children projects and programmes to engage with schools, teachers and officials on language and education.

In such circumstances Save the Children should work to move schools towards better practice, using the opportunities available to:

- Explain how children learn, and why 'submersion' in an unfamiliar language does not work for most children;
- Increasingly use more of children's first language in the school environment;
- Draw attention to the benefits children experience from using their own language in education;
- Promote structured, active teaching of the language of instruction rather than expecting children to pick it up.

See Annex 3 for further information on the concept of 'bridging' approaches which aim to gradually move schools towards good practice in multilingual education. 'Bridging' approaches should be implemented alongside influencing to delay the introduction of an unfamiliar language of instruction as long as possible. A bridging method can be used to develop a plan which moves schools or education authorities along a 'continuum of good practice', so that they ultimately achieve a strong bilingual/multilingual education approach.

Promoting active, child-centred teaching approaches will also support the education of children who do not speak the language of instruction. Within that, encouraging teachers to use their body language and faces expressively to convey meaning is particularly relevant to children unfamiliar with the language being used. Supporting teachers to teach the language of instruction as a subject (again, in a learner-centred, active way) can also help children to find school less confusing.

Influencing others

Save the Children staff and partners should always try to inform and persuade education officials and parents that allowing children to learn in their own language will result in better educational progress. We should take every opportunity to raise awareness with our partners and advocacy targets about the language barriers experienced by children in their education. See Annex 2 for ways to respond to some commonly expressed concerns about language and education.

Save the Children staff and partners should also try to convince parents and key players in education that children will learn a second language much more effectively if a) the language of instruction is their first language, and b) the second language is taught (actively) as a subject. This is particularly important in countries where learning a foreign or colonial language is seen as the route to a good job or political influence.

It is always possible to identify adults who did well in education despite not knowing the language of instruction when they entered school, undermining arguments for multilingual education. Save the Children accepts that some children can do well in schools which use an unfamiliar language of instruction. However, we know that many do not, and the poor exam results and high dropout rates experienced by minority children in many countries underlines this. Our advocacy should explain that what we are aiming for is an approach which makes it easy for all children to learn.

Monitoring the results of multilingual education work becomes crucial when many arguments still remain to be won. It will be important to demonstrate that the approach is having benefits for children's education; that the benefits are growing in line with use of the first language/s; and that local languages can be used for learning without destabilising local political relations. Collecting evidence will be important if teachers, principals and education officials are to take on board the arguments for mother tongue based education. Save the Children projects should monitor children's educational progress, and use



evidence of improved outcomes from 'mother tongue only' and 'mother tongue bilingual or multilingual' education in our advocacy, and in advocacy with other agencies. It is important to monitor and compare differences in drop out rates for children who do and don't learn in their first language.

See Annex I for a selection of examples from around the world where bilingual education has resulted in improved educational performance for children.

For further information please contact Helen Pinnock
h.pinnock@savethechildren.org.uk



Annex I: Examples of successful multilingual education programmes¹⁸

- In Zambia, the Primary Reading Programme is a bilingual education approach covering approximately 1.6 million children. Between 1999 and 2002, Zambian reading and writing scores improved on average by 485%, with English scores increasing by over 360% (DFID, 2005; UNESCO, 2005).
- In Brazil, the use of local language as the primary mode of instruction in schools in indigenous areas leads to better acquisition of literacy skills (Chacoff, A., 1989). Several independent studies have demonstrated that the use of children's first language has been successful in raising levels of literacy in both languages, as well as raising levels of achievement in various academic subjects (Alford, 1987).
- In Guatemala, disadvantaged children who began their education in their first language and gradually learned Spanish were compared to children of similar ethnic, linguistic and socio-economic backgrounds taught only in Spanish for the full six years of primary school. The first group achieved better ability to speak and write Spanish, and better outcomes in other subject areas (Patrinos and Velez, 1996).
- In Ecuador, the Bilingual and Intercultural Education Program (PEBI) has had high success rates in achieving literacy in both indigenous languages in Ecuador and in Spanish. Because of this achievement, bilingual education is being implemented across the country (Jones, P., 1994).
- In Burkina Faso, children gaining early literacy in the Mooré language achieved higher results in French and mathematics than students learning in French. The first group also had good mastery of the written form of their language (Florida State University, 1998).
- Mali offers schooling in 9 languages. Individual schools may offer classes in different languages. Its

'convergent pedagogy' program is a late-exit bilingual program offered in parallel to the French

immersion program, reaching about 25% of the total primary school student population. In Mali, the end-of-primary pass rates between 1994 and 2000 for children in a late-exit bilingual program were on average 32% higher than for children in French-only programs (Bender, 2005).

- The "Yoruba six-year project" (Obondo, 1998), demonstrated that learners understood mathematical and scientific concepts better when instructed in the mother tongue, and subsequently in English, and that on English tests, they outperformed their English-only peers.
- After years of conflict, the Government of Eritrea committed to providing public education in all of its languages upon independence. Part of the rationale for this was that the Government believed the choice of just one language would create internal disunity. It was argued that all groups would therefore see themselves as having a stake in making the policy work. Instruction in eight of nine of the country's languages was being offered in Grades 1 to 5 after just two years.¹⁹
- Papua New Guinea has over 800 distinct languages, many of them with dialects, many of them as yet unwritten. Yet with the help of several NGOs, the national Department of Education and the 20 provincial Education Divisions have prepared literacy materials in over 400 languages.
- A cost-benefit analysis of the PRONEBI bilingual education program in Guatemala showed that although the annual per-pupil cost of bilingual education is 5% higher than for traditional education, there were cost savings in 1991 of over US\$5.6 million for a student population of 750,000, due to reduced repetition and dropout (Patrinos and Velez, 1995).

¹⁸ World Bank, 2006 (unpublished material)

¹⁹ Walter, Steve, email communication, 2002



Annex 2: How CARE persuaded education authorities and communities to support bilingual education in Cambodia¹

| | Concerns/Fears | Responses |
|---|---|---|
| National Level (decision makers) | Bilingual education will lead to demands for autonomy by ethnic minority groups | Re-iterate that ethnic minority leaders in Ratanakiri never express aspirations of this kind |
| | Bilingual education will lead to political instability in border areas | Denying access to relevant education, i.e. denying them human rights, will lead to social unrest. Relevant education will make them more inclusive in the country |
| | New script will lead to the tainting of the national language | Establishment of a MoEYS spelling committee which approves books before use in schools |
| | Minorities have less ownership of bilingual education because of their lack of understanding of it | There is a growing understanding of bilingual education, because frequent monitoring trips for MoEYS to the project are organized |
| | Ethnic minority teachers are not capable of teaching the national curriculum (low level of formal education) | Step 1: On-going support for teachers to increase their academic skills is part of the project Step 2: (long-term: Establishment of a Regional Teacher Training College with a special focus on teacher training for bilingual education |
| Provincial Level | Students will be confused by learning two languages, therefore not learning the correct form of national language | Experience in bilingual education does not show this to be the case |
| | Misconception that bilingual education takes twice as long to learn | By using the Khmer script to write the local languages, they only have to learn the alphabet one time. Furthermore, by introducing the whole language approach, proficiency in two languages is increased |
| | Minorities have less ownership of bilingual education because they lack understanding of the approach | Organize frequent workshops for education officials from the provincial and district offices of education |
| | Bilingual education will lead to political instability in border areas | Denying access to relevant education, i.e. denying them human rights, will lead to social unrest. Furthermore, provincial offices of education feel the pressure from national level to meet EFA goals. They are willing to look at innovative ways of improving the education system, because they see that the system is not working in remote and indigenous areas |
| | Bilingual education will be used by organizations as a cover for political/religious activities | By introducing bilingual education into the formal education system and giving the MoEYS a strong monitoring role, hopefully it will bring the realisation that bilingual education is not used as a cover for such activities. Because in many places faith-based organisations have taken the lead in developing orthographies for oral languages and started in non-formal education, a concern has developed. |
| Local Level | Bilingual education will lead to demands for autonomy by ethnic minority groups | Same as at national level |
| | Ethnic minority teachers are not capable of teaching the national curriculum (low level of formal education) | Through the regular monitoring visits at provincial level, they see the positive results of the schools. They recognise the impact of student-centred methodology in the HCEP schools. Moreover many teachers in the state schools are not well-trained. The provincial level receives demonstrations of the methodology HCEP uses. |
| | The national language is more important than the mother tongue | Discussions with elders, teachers and parents to raise the awareness on the importance of the first language transference of perceived importance: The value we place on it has increased the perceived value they had for it |
| | They have misconception of bilingual education that it takes twice as long to learn two languages | This is not something we hear from the villages. However, they undervalue their first language and want their children to learn the national language as soon as possible |

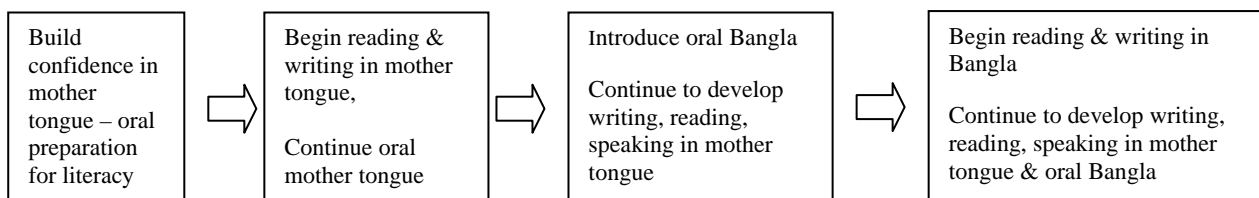
¹ Middleborg, 2005



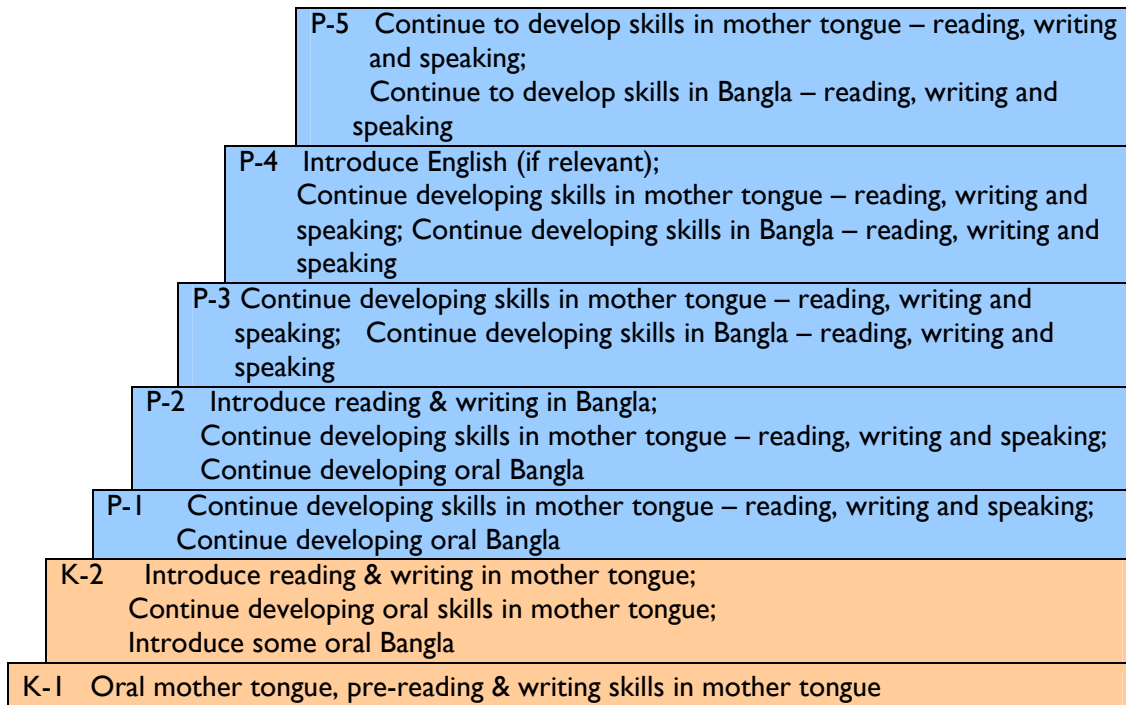
Annex 3: Advice from Save the Children’s Bangladesh programme on developing mother-tongue-based multilingual education at pre-primary and primary levels

'In a mother tongue-based multi-lingual education programme, you begin on the first step with children building their confidence and fluency in the oral mother tongue (speaking). Based on the foundation of oral language, children begin to read and write in their mother tongue and continue to develop oral mother tongue skills. Literacy activities must be meaningful to children linking them to their oral language.

With this strong foundation in mother tongue, Bangla (second language) is introduced orally in the classroom. Children develop confidence and fluency in oral Bangla while continuing to develop their oral and written skills in their mother tongue. Then, children begin to read and write Bangla. At the same time, children continue to build their skills in reading, writing and speaking their mother tongue and spoken Bangla. After this, a third language could be introduced. The diagram below illustrates this transition.



This progression from developing skills and knowledge (*strong foundation*) in mother tongue to developing skills and knowledge (*good bridge*) in Bangla is presented in a possible model below based on the formal education system.



K = pre-primary; P = primary class

In the process, children become successful learners in both languages, their mother tongue and Bangla. By the end of class 5 in the above model, children will be able to read, write, and speak fluently in their mother tongue and Bangla.²⁰

²⁰ Adapted from Durrnian, 2007, reflecting ideas developed by Susan Malone and described in Haddad, 2006



Annex 4: Supporting resources

Alidou, H et al, 2006, Optimizing Learning and Education in Africa – the Language Factor. A Stock-taking Research on Mother Tongue and Bilingual Education in Sub-Saharan Africa, Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), www.ADEAnet.org

Benson, C., 2005. Girls, educational equity and mother tongue. UNESCO, Bangkok
http://www2.unescobkk.org/elib/publications/Girls_Edu_Equity/Girls_Edu.pdf

Bender, P. et al, June 2005. *In Their Own Language: Education For All*. Education Notes Series, World Bank
http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EDUCATION/Resources/Education-Notes/EdNotes_Lang_of_Instruct.pdf

Durrnian, Terry, 2007, Mother Language First, Save the Children UK, Bangladesh programme
<http://www.lcgbangladesh.org/Education/reports/Mother%20Language%20First%20English.pdf>

Middleborg, Jorn, 2005, Highland Children's Education Project: A pilot project on bilingual education in Cambodia. Bangkok: UNESCO Bangkok <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001395/139595e.pdf>

Haddad, Caroline (Ed.), 2006, Promoting Literacy in Multilingual Settings, UNESCO Bangkok
<http://www2.unescobkk.org/elib/publications/100/multilingual.pdf>

Webley, Katy et al, 2006, *Mother tongue first! Children's right to learn in their own languages*, id21 insights education #5, September 2006, Brighton <http://www.id21.org/insights/insights-ed05/insightsEdn5.pdf>

Other references and further reading

ADEA, 1997, *Languages of Instruction and Language Policies - a Synthesis of Research*, ADEA Newsletter Volume 8, No. 4 http://www.adeanet.org/newsletter/Vol8No4/en_n8v4_3.html

Alford, M., 1987. *Developing facilitative reading programs in third world countries: A culturally relevant programme for teaching reading in the mother tongue: The Karajas Indians of Brazil*. Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 8 (6), 493-511.

Auerbach, E., R., 1989. *Toward a social-contextual approach to family literacy*. Harvard Educational Review, 59

Bamgbose, A., 1991. *Language and the Nation: the language question in Sub-Saharan Africa*. International African Institute. Edinburgh University Press.

Bender, P., 2005. *Mali's convergent pedagogy: A case of implementation*. Dissertation. Michigan State University.

Bransford, J.D, Brown, A., Cocking, R.R., (Eds), 1999, *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, And School*, National Research Council, National Academy Press, Washington, D.C. 1999



Chacoff, A., 1989. *Biliteracy and Empowerment: Education for Indigenous Groups in Brazil*. Philadelphia, PA: Working Papers in Educational Linguistics. (ERIC Document Reproduction Number ED 317089)
Cummings, S., M. and Tamayo, S., 1994. *Language and Education in Latin America: An Overview*. HRO Working Papers. World Bank, Washington DC

Cummins, J. 2001. *Negotiating identities: Education for empowerment in a diverse society*. 2nd Edition. California Association for Bilingual Education, Los Angeles

DFID, 2005. Case studies: Zambia Education. DFID web site (www.dfid.gov.uk)

Durrnian, T., 2006 *Education rights-based situational analysis Bangladesh*, Save the Children, Dhaka

Dutcher, N., 1994. *The Use of First and Second Languages in Education. A Review of International Experience*. World Bank, Washington, D.C.

Dutcher, N., 2004, *Expanding Educational Opportunity in Linguistically Diverse Societies (2nd Edition)*, Center for Applied Linguistics, Washington, D.C.

Faingold, E., 2004. *Language rights and language justice in the constitutions of the world*. In: *Language Problems and Language Planning*: 28.1, 11-24

Florida State University, 1998, *Accelerated Literacy for Out-of-school Youth in Francophone West Africa*, ABEL (Achieving Basic Education) Studies, Working Group on Nonformal Education/ADEA. <http://www.adeanet.org/wgnfe/publications/abel/abel6.html>

Gurdin, G.; Salamanca, D.; 1990. *Bilingual Education in Nicaragua*. *Prospects* 20 (3), pp. 57-63.

Jones, P., 1994. *Quichua-Castillian bilingualism in the Ecuadorian Sierra*. *Early Childhood Development and Care*, (102), p. 115-138

Klaus, D., 2001. *The Use of Indigenous Languages in Early Basic Education in Papua New Guinea: A Package of Strategies for Overcoming the Obstacles*. Paper presented at the 2001 CIES Conference.

Lockheed, M. E and Lewis, M. A., 2007. *Inexcusable Absence: Why 60 Million Girls Still Aren't In School and What to do About It*, Center For Global Development, Washington D. C.

Lopez, L., E., 1995. *La eficacia y validez de lo obvio: lecciones aprendidas desde la evaluation de procesos educativos bilingues*. [The efficacy and validity of the obvious: Lessons learned from the evaluation of the bilingual education processes]. In *Revista Iberoamericana de Educación* No. 17, pp. 51-89.

Heugh, K., 2006 *Theory and Practice – Language Education Models in Africa: research, design, decisionmaking, and outcomes* in Alidou et al, 2006, *op.cit*.

Moulton, J., 2001. *Improving education in rural areas*, World Bank



Obondo, M., A., 1998. Bilingual Education in Africa: An Overview. In Encyclopedia of Language and Education. Volume 5: Bilingual Education. J. Cummins & D. Corson (Eds.), pp. 25-32. Kluwer Academic Publishers. Dordrecht/Boston/London

Patrinós, H. and Velez, E., 1995. *Costs And Benefits Of Bilingual Education In Guatemala* HCO Dissemination Notes Number 60, October 23, 1995, World Bank.

Patrinós, H. and Velez, E.; 1996. *Costs and benefits of bilingual education in Guatemala: a partial analysis*. World Bank: Human Capital Development Working Paper No. 74.

Poth, J., 1997a. Language planning in a plurilingual educational context. CIPA, Mons

Thomas, W.P. and Collier, V. 1997. School effectiveness for language minority students. NCBE Resource Collection Series, No. 9. George Washington University.

Thomas, W.P., and Collier, V.P., 2002. A national study of school effectiveness for language minority students' long-term academic achievement. Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence, Santa Cruz, CA, and Washington, DC. www.crede.ucsc.edu/research/llaa/l.l_final.html

Thomas, W.P., and Collier, V.P., 2004, The Astounding Effectiveness of Dual Language Education for All, George Mason University, USA <http://njrp.tamu.edu/2004/PDFs/Collier.pdf>

Tucker, G., R.; 1996. A Global Perspective on Multilingualism and Multilingual Education. In *Beyond Bilingualism: Multilingualism and Multilingual Education*.

Save the Children in Vietnam, 2007. Study of minority children's language situation, Save the Children, Hanoi

UNESCO, 2005. Education For All: The Quality Imperative. EFA Global Monitoring Report.

Walter, S., 2003. *Does Language of Instruction Matter in Education?* In Wise, Headland, and Brend (Eds.), *Language and life: Essays in memory of Kenneth L. Pike*, 611-635. Dallas: SIL International

Yates, R., 1995. *Functional Literacy and the Language Question*. In *International Journal of Educational Development*. Vol. 15, No. 4, pp. 437-447.