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**GUIDANCE**

**Closer to home: how to help schools in low- and middle-income countries respond to children’s language needs**

Helen Pinnock  
 Pamela Mackenzie  
 Elizabeth Pearce  
 Catherine Young

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Save the Children campaigns for long-term change in addition to providing immediate support to improve children's lives. In 2010, over 11 million children were reached by Save the Children's education work. Save the Children undertakes extensive national and international research on education, and is a partner in the Young Lives long-term international research project investigating the changing nature of childhood poverty.

Save the Children is an active member of the Global Campaign for Education, an international coalition of charities, NGOs, civil society organisations and education unions that mobilises the public to put pressure on governments to provide the free education for all children they promised to deliver in 2000.

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## List of key terms

<b>Basic education</b>	The range of educational activities taking place in various settings that aim to meet basic learning needs. According to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), basic education comprises primary education (the first stage of basic education) and lower secondary education (the second stage). In developing countries in particular, basic education often includes also pre-primary education and/or adult literacy programmes.
<b>First language</b>	The language which people use most frequently in their home lives.
<b>Fragility</b>	A fragile state is a low-income country characterised by weak state capacity and/or weak state legitimacy.
<b>Local language</b>	A language that is used as a first language or lingua franca by communities, but which is not generally used nationwide or internationally.
<b>Lingua franca</b>	A language regularly used for communication between communities (often a second language for all).
<b>Instruction/language of instruction</b>	The main language used to conduct most or all teaching and learning activities in education. This may be determined by an official policy, or it may be the language chosen by educators in response to perceived demand.
<b>Mother tongue</b>	The main language used constantly from birth, to interact and communicate with a child by their carers, family, friends and community. (If more than one language is constantly used in this way throughout childhood, a child can be considered bilingual.)
<b>(Mother tongue based) multilingual education</b>	Learner-centred, active basic education which starts in the mother tongue and gradually introduces one or more other languages in a structured manner, linked to children's existing understanding in their first language or mother tongue. Teaching predominantly in the mother tongue for at least six years, alongside the development of other languages, enables this approach to deliver high quality learning outcomes, including in a second language.
<b>Native speaker (of a language)</b>	A person who has used the language from early life and can use it easily.
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organisation.
<b>School language</b>	For the purposes of this guide, 'school language' means 'the main language or languages used to teach and communicate between teachers and children'.
<b>Second language</b>	A language which is different from a person's mother tongue, and which therefore requires structured support for them to learn it effectively.

## Part 1: Overview of challenges and solutions for improving school language

“In many multilingual countries, teachers, families and governments know that the way language is used in education is not working.”

### 1.1. Introduction: finding a better approach to school language

Why are children's learning levels in many countries so far below expectations? Why do so many children fail to complete school, despite efforts to improve the quality of education? Many children around the world find education impossible because they are taught in a language which they do not understand.

School language is one of the biggest barriers to quality education in the majority of developing and middle-income countries (UNESCO, 2009). An estimated 221 million children worldwide are speakers of local languages not used for teaching (Dutcher, 2004).

What can be done to transform education so that language is no longer a barrier to learning? There is plenty of new evidence on better ways to use language in children's education. However, ways to improve school language have not received enough attention from national governments in linguistically diverse countries, nor from the international community.

These guidelines are for anyone active in education in low- or middle-income countries where school language is causing problems for children's learning. In particular, Ministry of Education officials and staff should find this guide useful. Education experts working for universities, donor agencies, and international, national or local NGOs will hopefully also find useful information and guidance.

The guide offers advice on how to make school systems in low- and middle-income countries work better in today's multilingual world. This means bringing the languages that children understand and use at home into school, and using these as the basis for learning new and unfamiliar languages.

Bringing education closer to home in this way will make learning familiar and straightforward for children, boosting learning outcomes for all. In

many cases taking such an approach will involve several changes to school systems over time. This guide provides practical and realistic ideas on how these changes can be made.

### School language problems and solutions

In many multilingual countries, teachers, families and governments know that the way language is used in education is not working. They know that many children learn very little because they do not understand the language used for teaching or reading. The evidence is overwhelming that language is one of the main reasons for achieving poorly in examinations or dropping out of school (Smits, Huisman and Kruijff, 2008; Martin, Mullis and Foy, 2008; Mullis, Martin, Kennedy, and Foy, 2007). Teachers and education officials often see that these problems are worst in rural areas where children do not use the school language in everyday life.

Children know this best of all, struggling through hours at school trying to make sense of a torrent of unfamiliar words, or taking a test they will not pass because they do not understand the questions. Some children never go to school, knowing that their language and identity will not be welcome.

There are well documented teaching approaches which give children good access to national, regional and international languages, without damaging their education or their linguistic rights and heritage (World Bank, 1995; Patrinos and Velez, 1996). Robust evidence from several countries shows that children who do not use mainstream languages at home need to learn in their own language for at least six years, at the same time as being introduced to new languages that they will need later in life (Alidou *et al*, 2006; Save the Children, 2009). There is increasing demand from national governments for better ways to help children learn their own language and other languages (ADEA, 2010).

### How these guidelines were developed

These guidelines are based on a research and learning project supported by CfBT Education

*“ This guide provides advice on how to progressively move schools towards good practice in low- and middle-income countries that do not currently teach in children's first languages. ”*

Trust and Save the Children. A group of Save the Children staff had been working with several school based programmes which introduced learning in children's mother tongues, and promoted learning of other languages. The team decided that, with CfBT's support, they would document and learn from these experiences to help increase knowledge on how to overcome language barriers in children's education.

The programmes had been successful, but progress towards good use of language in schools outside the programmes was slow. Education officials and policy makers seemed unsure whether they could put elements of the programmes into action across the school system. Each programme already had an advocacy and scale-up strategy, but the research team wanted to do more to find out what more could be done to introduce the good practice demonstrated by each programme into the wider school system. The team took an action research approach, and tested ways of strengthening their work so that more improvements could be made in the wider school system. The team also looked into whether there were any particular issues associated with scaling up multilingual education that were distinctive, or more challenging than in other types of education programme (Pinnock, 2010).

The research project assessed learning from programmes in Bangladesh, Vietnam and India. It also captured experience and opinions from a range of experts worldwide who had experience of introducing multilingual education into schools in low- and middle-income countries. This guide is based on learning produced during the research project. The guide provides advice on how to progressively move schools towards good practice on a large scale in low- and middle-income countries that do not currently teach in children's first languages.

#### **The structure of this guide**

The sections in this guide explain how school authorities and education leaders – within government and outside government – can move along a 'continuum of good practice' (Webley, 2006) towards positive use of language in teaching and learning. Actions that can be taken at national and community levels are described. The advice focuses on areas which need the greatest emphasis in order to

get schools supporting multilingual learning for the children who need it most.

Part 1 of the guide offers a quick introduction to the main issues and evidence around school language in multilingual countries, and a brief summary of learning from experience and research. Part 2 provides more detailed advice based on the research team's learning. Each section can be read separately.

The advice offered is intended to be flexible enough to be applied in a variety of contexts, including settings with very low capacity and resources. It will not be possible or relevant to put all the advice into practice in every context. Instead, it is recommended to try out the advice that best fits the opportunities for change in your current situation. As progress is made, it should be possible to implement more changes over time. Expectations should be kept realistic, as securing dramatic improvements in learning outcomes on a large scale may take several years. However, even small changes now will make many children's learning experiences better, and will lay the foundations for much more positive change in the future.

#### **1.2. Why a better approach to school language is needed**

Most countries are multilingual, with different groups of people speaking a diverse range of languages. Usually one or more languages in a country is particularly valued and used for business and/or government. In most low- and middle-income countries, many children grow up without using these 'dominant languages' in their everyday lives, especially in rural areas. This creates problems – how can children be given the language skills that they and their country need to do well?

In many settings it has been decided to use school education to give children these language skills by teaching the curriculum in the national language or an international language such as English or French. Unfortunately, the evidence is now clear that the way in which schools have been asked to use language has made it impossible for many children to gain the right language skills, and has undermined many children's education (UNESCO, 2009; Pinnock, 2009).

## Language and how children learn

BOX 1	Key points about language and learning
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Many children fail to 'pick up' a national or international language from primary education, and do not understand their lessons. There is large scale evidence that children studying or reading in a second language perform far worse on learning outcomes than children who are studying or reading in their first language (Save the Children, 2009). This poor performance includes the second language the children were learning in.</li> <li>2. Children develop literacy skills most easily in their first language. Learning to read in an unfamiliar language carries the risk of children only reciting or copying text, instead of understanding it. Literacy data from countries where learning to read usually takes place in a second language, such as Pakistan, is very poor (ASER Pakistan, 2010).</li> <li>3. The damage done by unfamiliar school language is worst in poor rural areas of low- and middle-income countries. Large numbers of children in these places drop out of school because of language (Smits <i>et al</i>, 2008).</li> <li>4. Denying people educational success because they do not speak the language used for teaching is linked to conflict and fragility (Save the Children, 2009).</li> <li>5. Money – from taxes, international aid and school fees – is being wasted if children are taught in a language they do not understand (Save the Children, 2009).</li> </ol>

Traditional approaches to school language treat children as if they naturally understand the language of teaching, when they do not. These approaches have ignored the way in which children learn. Children learn from the practical and social context which surrounds them all day. Language is interwoven into this context in social interactions between children and adults; in business and trading that children witness; in play between children; and in everyday interactions within the family. From birth, all of these exchanges help build young children's language skills, allowing them to work out the meaning of language, and gradually practise and expand it.

In many schools, children sit in classrooms and a teacher mainly speaks or asks children to copy text. There is often little practical context to help the child make sense of the language being used. When the teacher is using a language which a child does not already understand from daily life, a lesson becomes a torrent of words which the child cannot make sense of. Children spend their school time struggling to piece together some meaning from this unfamiliar language, taking up time and energy which should be used in understanding the educational content of

their classes. Literacy becomes an exercise in copying and reciting text, rather than understanding or communicating.

The local language which children use at home often stays at the level of informal everyday interactions if it is not used for education. As a result, children can become stranded between two languages, with only very basic skills in each (Shaeffer, in Save the Children, 2009). These children never achieve the level of learning and communication they need to get basic education qualifications and do well in later life.

This is partly because children need to build up good understanding and vocabulary in their first language if they are to get good at learning other languages. The biggest predictor of competency in a second language is development of one's mother tongue (Cummins, 2000). If you do not understand an idea in the language in which you already think and communicate, it is difficult to learn the second language words for that idea.

Family and social interactions often do not use children's first language in the more abstract ways needed to take part in a science or history lesson. Early education needs to use the



“The study found that even children who had been learning the second language as a subject for three or four years dropped down to low levels of performance within one or two years...”

language which children already speak in ways which gradually build the cognitive and linguistic skills needed for learning academic subjects.

### Children need more time to learn second languages

Early-exit bilingual teaching policies in many Sub-Saharan African countries start preschool or primary education in children's first language, and transfer to education in a second language after two or three years. Unfortunately, these have been shown not to work. In 2005 a major study of school language in 14 African countries looked at children who transferred from first-language instruction to second-language instruction after two to four years. The study found that even children who had been learning the second language as a subject for three or four years dropped down to low levels of performance within one or two years (Heugh, in Alidou *et al*, 2006).

These poor results are usually because the primary school curriculum requires children to know a great deal of language, especially by the time they get to Grade 4. Kathleen Heugh describes how, in many parts of Africa, most children manage to learn only about 500–600 words in the second language by the end of Grade 3. Active knowledge of about 5,000–7,000 words is needed for a child to be able to understand the whole curriculum from Grade 4 of school (Heugh, 2005). Heugh's research shows that no early-exit model has succeeded in Sub-Saharan Africa. Three years is not long enough for children to learn enough of the second language, and the change of language is too sudden.

In a good quality, well resourced teaching system it takes at least six years of learning a language as a subject before a child can cope with that language being used to teach the curriculum. In a setting where teachers are less well supported and schools not well resourced, it is expected to take eight or nine years (Heugh, 2005; Cummins, 2000b).

### School language causes problems for education and national development

Language problems affect an estimated 221 million children worldwide who are speakers of local languages not used for teaching

(Dutcher, 2004). Effects range from early drop-out from school to failing exams and repeating grades (Heugh, 2005; Alidou *et al*, 2006; Martin *et al*, 2008).

These effects have been shown to be most severe for rural children in poor areas of developing countries (Smits *et al*, 2008). This is probably because children in poor and remote or rural areas are far less likely to have dominant languages in their daily lives. Radio, newspapers, books and television are not likely to be easily available. Also, teachers' capacity to teach interactively and build learning on the contexts that children inhabit is likely to be weaker in poor rural areas (Heugh, 2005).

It is now understood that economic development and stable, peaceful development will not take place unless everyone gets a good basic education. This basic education is expected to continue till at least early secondary school, and needs to deliver a strong set of skills to every child – not only the ability to read, write and use numbers, but the ability to interpret information and develop strong social values (Chiswick, 1996; Easterly and Levine, 1996; DFID, 2008). Language barriers in school keep children's achievement levels down, holding back the nation's development.

If a group of people is denied the chance to do well in education because their children do not understand the language used to teach, economic and social inequity is likely to result for them. This will cause strong resentment, which can lead to problems for peace and stability in the country. In countries where ethnic or linguistic groups are denied education in this way, significant economic and social divisions between ethnic and linguistic groups arise. Such divisions can mean that fragility and conflict are not resolved and the nation's economic and social growth is held back (Alesina and Wacziarg, 2003).

Several countries' governments are making plans to improve education, but neglect the central area of language. Other governments are making choices about school language based on immediate political concerns, rather than balancing these with the country's long-term education needs. See Box 2 on page 10.

**BOX 2**

**Which countries are most exposed to risk around poor use of school language?**

In 2009 Save the Children conducted analysis which identified countries at greatest risk of negative consequences if they did not take more action to make it possible for children to learn in languages which they use and understand.

These were countries with substantial populations of children who did not use the language of school at home, and where there were significant divisions between linguistic and ethnic groups that were likely to contribute to fragility and delayed growth, unless opportunities could be offered more equitably.

Countries that scored highly were judged likely to face major delays to education and stable growth if they did not shift towards teaching in languages which more children understand. 36 countries scored highly, and were sub-divided into two groups: high risk and highest risk.

20 countries appeared in the 'highest risk' category: Afghanistan, Benin, Bosnia, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Thailand and Uganda.

16 countries faced a high risk of problems associated with the language of school: Algeria, Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Ghana, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Mexico, Morocco, Peru, Uzbekistan, Vietnam and Yemen (Pinnock, 2009).

Many of these are priority countries for reaching the education Millennium Development Goals and Education For All goals, with substantial numbers of children out of school. Reducing educational barriers should be a priority for all stakeholders in education in these countries.

It is, however, possible to find the right balance between political, economic and educational imperatives.

**Which factors show that school language practice should be changed?**

- A country has significant rural or minority ethnic populations.
- In these communities the language currently used for teaching is not used frequently in children's lives outside school.
- There are disappointing learning outcomes from primary education, especially in rural areas.
- There are high rates of school drop-out or repetition, particularly in rural or minority ethnic areas.
- There is a history of conflict, instability, or divisions between ethnic and linguistic groups.

**1.3. Analysis: structuring school systems for a multilingual world**

**What type of schooling is best for multilingual societies?**

If children are expected to be multilingual, schools should become multilingual, supporting children to develop the language they already speak and to learn new language. In an ideal world, basic education that gives everyone the right language skills should have the characteristics listed below. Progress towards good language practice will be made if any of these characteristics can be strengthened or introduced.

**Core principles governing education**

- Development of the language that a child has used at home since birth is a crucial factor in the child's ability to learn and to do well in school and society. That development must be supported by schools as part of the child's journey from the home into wider society.
- Teaching and learning is done on the principle of building on what children already know, with new knowledge and language gradually added and linked to existing knowledge and language.

- Linguistic and cultural rights are valued, in a context of national unity which respects diversity.
- Schools respect and utilise the cultural, physical and social characteristics of children's everyday lives.
- Children's first language is the main language of teaching for at least the first seven years of education, with gradually increasing amounts of second language being introduced.
- Children continue doing teaching and learning activities in their first language throughout primary and secondary education.
- Children learn national and international language that is useful for daily life, education and economic activities.
- Children are supported to understand and use what they learn in school.
- Languages which children do not already know well are introduced gradually, and linked to objects, places, ideas and words that children already know well.
- A second language is introduced to children after a new concept to which it relates is introduced and practised in their first language.

### ***Learning to read and write***

- Children learn to become literate in a language that they already know well, so that they understand what they are reading and writing.
- Reading and writing a new language is introduced some time after children have got used to reading and writing their first language.
- Children have access to graded reading and learning materials in their first language and in national and/or international languages.

### ***Principles for practice in preschool and early childhood care and development***

- Children start preschool in a language which they use frequently in daily interactions. Wherever possible, this is the child's mother tongue.
- A key aim of preschool is to stimulate children's cognitive and social development. It is recognised that one of the best ways to do this is by developing children's mother tongue.
- Teachers use simple language which children already know at first, and gradually support children to use more complex and abstract language.
- Languages which children do not already know well are introduced gradually, and linked to objects, places, ideas and words that children already know well.

### ***Principles for practice at primary school level***

- Children start primary school in a language which they use frequently in daily interactions. Wherever possible, this is the child's mother tongue.
- Teachers use simple language which children already know at first, and gradually support children to use more complex and abstract language.

### **What are the ideal characteristics of a school system which supports good quality multilingual teaching and learning?**

#### ***Teacher training and capacity***

- Teachers have a good understanding of child development and child-centred teaching methods.
- Teachers' local, national and international language skills are recorded by teacher training and management institutions.
- Teachers are trained and encouraged to use local languages for teaching.
- Teachers in rural areas are trained in a local language and are given support to acquire a second language effectively.
- Teachers are trained and encouraged to teach national or international languages as second languages to children who are not native speakers of these languages.

#### ***Teacher management and supervision***

- Teachers are placed in areas where they speak the same language as children.
- Teachers are encouraged to collaborate with local community members to promote communication and learning for children.

## ***Learning and literacy materials***

- Reading and learning materials in children's first languages are produced and distributed to schools.
- Second language materials and media are designed to be used by learners who do not speak that language as a first language.
- Where possible, ministries concerned with indigenous groups support the development of writing systems and materials for local languages without scripts.

## ***Assessment and testing***

- Tests and examinations for most subjects are conducted in local languages.
- Language tests focus on communicative skills and understanding.
- Tests and examinations record when learners are not mother tongue speakers of national or international languages.

## ***Central support and direction***

- There are clear policies, guidelines and budget lines to support efforts to implement multilingual education.
- Research, piloting and investigation take place to address challenges to good quality multilingual basic education.

## **Which elements of existing school systems often make multilingual education difficult?**

### ***Pressure on schools and teachers***

- There is pressure on preschools to get children fluent in national or international language by the time they enter primary school – even though research shows this fluency will take at least five to seven years (Cummins, 2000b).
- The desire for prestigious international language is so strong that it is introduced as the language of teaching at the beginning of primary education, in an effort to give children maximum exposure.
- Many low-cost private schools offer 'English medium teaching' (or French, or Spanish) which appears attractive to parents but is unlikely to lead to strong second language skills for children in poor rural areas.

- Choosing one local ethnic group's language for teaching may cause resentment among children and adults from other groups, so a 'neutral' foreign language is often chosen.
- Examinations are often conducted in a national or international language, with vocabulary that is too demanding for non-native speakers (Afitska and Clegg, 2009). It is then difficult to encourage teachers to use local language for teaching, because they worry that children will not understand the test.

## ***Challenges with policy and finance***

- Policies are not clear, not supportive of good practice or not implemented with clear guidelines, resources or leadership.
- It is not clear what budgets can be used to support improvements to school language, or whether international donors to education will support better school language.
- Resources for education in general are very low.

## ***Teacher capacity and training***

- Many teachers do not speak the same language as their pupils. This is often because very few speakers of local languages survive education well enough to become teachers, and because teachers are not posted to schools on the basis of whether they speak the local language.
- Many teachers who speak local languages are not encouraged to use them for teaching.
- Many teachers in rural areas are not well supported to use communicative, child-centred teaching in practice, and fall back on rote learning which does not focus on meaning.
- Teachers are often weak in international language, but teacher training is often in international language – meaning that teachers struggle to understand the content of their training and do not effectively improve their second language skills.
- Teachers often lack training and skills in basic good practice. If teachers are unable to use child-centred, active teaching methods, they will not be able to follow good language practice.

**Literacy**

- Even if teachers can use local language, they often have to teach reading and writing using an unfamiliar second language. This tends to create copying and recitation without understanding.
- Several local languages do not have writing systems.
- There is little publishing of material in local languages.
- Materials in national or international language are produced as if all learners are mother tongue speakers of that language, often using over-demanding vocabulary (Clegg, 2010). See Box 3 below.

**Making progress along a continuum of good practice**

There are big gaps between the ideal multilingual school system and the current reality in many contexts. So what can be done? The best approach is probably to move along a 'continuum of good practice' (Webley, 2006). This involves getting a good understanding of what evidence says about good practice, and then identifying how far away the conditions in our context are from this. Then we can plan a series of changes which will gradually move practice in our context towards the best practice.

Each change will make learning easier for children. For example, if it is not possible to use

<b>BOX 3</b>	<p><b>Which aspects of language and education are most sensitive?</b></p> <p>Language in education has particular tensions which make it a sensitive area for change. Fears that the strength and identity of some groups will be threatened if their language is used less in education can mean that people resist changes to school language. Deep distrust between some communities and government can mean that changes promoted by education authorities are seen as negative. Religious divisions and mistrust of minority groups' cultural identities sometimes lead to reluctance among educators to bring children's linguistic and cultural contexts into learning materials and teaching content.</p> <p>As school language is so crucial to children's learning and to national progress, these sensitivities should not be allowed to block change towards better practice – but they must be recognised and addressed. The histories of relationships between different language groups must be recognised. The likely fears or concerns of government and communities should be made a key focus of efforts to convince people of the need for change. Evidence should be produced to show that changing school language will not lead to instability; and balance must be found between political concerns and children's learning needs.</p>
	<p><b>Will improving school language make education more expensive?</b></p> <p>No. Any extra costs of moving towards a more multilingual approach to school language will be more than repaid, through efficiency savings from reduced school repetition and drop-out. In Guatemala, for example, a study found that mother tongue based bilingual schooling created savings of US \$5.6 million a year through reducing drop-out and repetition, despite higher initial costs for introducing new materials and teacher training (World Bank 1995; Patrinos and Velez, 1996). Investment in improving school language is essential to make sure that other investments, such as teacher training and enrolment campaigns, result in improved learning outcomes.</p> <p>To put multilingual education into practice on a large scale will require initial funding for changes in textbooks and literacy materials, teacher training, and other capacity support. On the national scale, this is estimated at between 5 and 10% of the national education budget (Heugh, in Alidou <i>et al</i>, 2006).</p> <p>International donors should be asked to fund multilingual education efforts wherever possible. The more requests are made for this funding, the more donors will have to respond. Investment in improving school language is more effective than spending government or donor funds on approaches that damage children's learning.</p>

“It is not difficult to give children an education they understand, at the same time as helping them learn the national or foreign languages which they need.”

the mother tongue of every child in a school, moving from English to a local lingua franca for teaching will be easier for all children to help each other with learning, communication and linguistic and cognitive development.

Taking a 'continuum of good practice' approach will be much more effective than sticking with an education approach which has already failed and will continue to fail.

#### 1.4. Summary: the biggest priorities for action

It is not difficult to give children an education they understand, at the same time as helping them learn the national or foreign languages which they need. This section contains a brief summary of key learning about what can be done to improve school systems so that they support multilingual teaching.

Experience indicates that the following changes to school systems should be prioritised:

1. Clear policy, stating that preschool and primary school children in rural areas should primarily learn in a language they are familiar with at home. Policy should provide for children to receive second language teaching of national or foreign languages, and should reduce testing in second languages during primary education.
2. Instructing teachers to help children use and develop their mother tongue in school.
3. Allocating teachers to schools based on the local language that they speak.
4. Training teachers to use 'mother tongue based multilingual teaching' approaches which build up children's skills in their first and second languages.
5. Encouraging local languages to be written down and used for introducing literacy.

Any of these changes can be made separately or together. The more that can be done, the greater chance there is of children making dramatic improvements in school attendance and performance, and building better national skills, stability and growth.

#### Some of the most important actions that can be taken by different people

##### What should parents and the public do to improve school language?

- Ask that private schools use mother tongue based bilingual education, not 'English medium'.
- Ask government and donors how much money is being spent on teaching children in a language they do not use at home or in their communities. This money is at risk of being wasted.
- Ask government to provide mother tongue based bilingual education, especially in rural areas.

##### What should teachers do to improve school language?

- Encourage children to use and develop their mother tongue in school, no matter what the official language of teaching is.
- Do their best to make sure children understand their lessons and the texts they are reading, especially if these are in a language they do not use at home.
- Ask for training in mother tongue based bilingual education.
- Explain to parents that children's mother tongue or a local language should be used for teaching, combined with good teaching of other languages as second languages.

##### What should national governments do to improve school language?

- Provide guidance to schools and teachers that they should support children to use and develop their mother tongue at school.
- Review and redevelop education policies and teacher training processes for rural areas, to support mother tongue based multilingual education.
- Adapt examinations and assessments for primary school, so that more local language is used for giving tests, and any second language used is simplified.
- Incorporate language into teacher allocation systems, so that teachers can be matched to schools where they speak the local language.

***What should donor agencies and donor governments do to improve school language?***

- Find out what money is being spent on teaching in a language rural children do not use at home. This money is at risk of being wasted.
- Request that early grade reading assessments record whether or not children are being tested in their first or second language (see section 2.7 for more detail).
- Ask contractors or partners to show how they are enabling rural children to learn in a language they use in their communities.
- Ask contractors or partners to show how they are enabling rural children to learn a national or international language as a second language, rather than teaching the curriculum in it.

***What should NGOs or multilateral agencies do to improve school language?***

- Change the design of rural education programmes in line with evidence on good language practice.
- When measuring learning outcomes, record whether children are being tested in their first or a second language.
- Share good practice and evidence on school language with all stakeholders.
- Promote local language literacy and multilingual teaching in rural areas.

## Part 2: Advice for taking action

“Explicit policy support for greater use of local languages and multilingual teaching is valuable at both national and local levels.”

### 2.1. Building a strong policy foundation

Experience in different countries indicates that clear policy is very useful to enable positive change in the way schools approach language. Explicit policy support for greater use of local languages and multilingual teaching is valuable at both national and local levels, even if change is only needed in part of a country.

#### Steps to establishing the right policy

- Review the commitments in the country's constitution and other legal statements on language and education. Consider which commitments are supported with resources and guidelines, and where there are gaps to be filled.
- Consider what languages and levels of language are needed nationally and locally.
- Assess available information on the language situation for children. What languages do children have in their daily lives?
- Assess available information on the education situation for children, especially in rural areas. What capacity do schools currently have to deliver good quality education in languages that children understand?
- Review existing language policy and education policy. Are there any contradictions?

- Decide how well current education policies perform in relation to the learning needs of children and the language situations in the country.
- Identify opportunities for building better school language into current efforts to improve education.

See Box 4 below and Annex 2.1.1. on pages 17 and 18 for more detail on the issues to consider in language policy analysis.

Consult with the following people to make sure any new policy reflects their prime concerns for education and language:

- Political leadership of the country and in areas where language is an education barrier
- Representatives of all linguistic groups
- Linguistics experts in national universities
- Teachers, headteachers and local education officials from areas where language is a big barrier in education – in both private and government schools
- Parents and children from areas where language is a big barrier in education.

Intensive advocacy and awareness-raising may be necessary to encourage political and educational leaders to prioritise policy to improve school language. It will be important to provide data that indicates how mother tongue based multilingual education can improve educational participation and improvement.

#### BOX 4

#### What do children need to learn languages for?

Policy review and development should ask what languages the majority of children will need in adult life, and to what extent. This should help determine policy on how much second language should be taught at different stages.

For example, if a learner needs to have a good enough English vocabulary to read academic papers at university, he or she should be given until the end of upper secondary education to achieve that level of English. If a child leaving lower secondary school will need enough national language to be able to get a job speaking with national language speakers, and will need to write basic reports or letters in the national language, curriculum policy should aim to give children those language skills by the end of lower secondary education. This is likely to require less second language vocabulary than would a Grade 5 science lesson (Heugh, 2005), meaning that the language burden on schools can be reduced.



**Annex 2.1.1. Policy analysis framework: fictional worked example**

The table below, presented as a worked example from a fictional country, may help as a framework for how to assess the current policy situation and which areas should be prioritised for policy change.

**1. Situation analysis**

<p><b>Children's education and language situation:</b> Which languages do children use at home before entering school? Which languages are used for teaching? How is children's educational performance in different areas of this fictional country?</p>	<p><b>Language situation:</b> How many languages are used? By whom and in which settings? How many are used for official business? Which languages are used for trade?</p>	<p><b>Political and economic concerns:</b> Role of language in trade, conflict, access to political power; concerns of parents around school language</p>	<p><b>Status of relevant policies:</b> Do they explicitly support children learning in their first language? Do they promote gradual introduction of second languages with realistic learning targets?</p>	<p><b>Most urgent issues for policy to address:</b></p>
<p>Most children use local languages at home. In most urban and some rural areas, especially in the south, multiple local languages are used and children often grow up using their mother tongue and, increasingly, a local lingua franca.</p> <p>In the north, most children grow up in monolingual communities speaking one local language.</p> <p>In all areas, but particularly in the north, there is high drop-out from school at Grade 4 after English is introduced as the language of instruction.</p> <p>There are high repetition rates after Grade 2. There are significant divides in achievement between rural and urban groups, and between the north and the south.</p> <p>Poor access to secondary education, which is in English.</p>	<p>There are at least 10 recognised local languages and approximately 30 more unrecognised languages. Approximately half have writing systems, mainly used by older people.</p> <p>Urban elites use English regularly.</p> <p>English is used for government in all areas, and as a business lingua franca in areas with multiple local languages.</p> <p>Most teachers in the north speak the same language as their pupils.</p> <p>Most teachers in the south do not share the languages of their pupils.</p>	<p>Disadvantaged rural groups want their children to learn English to get better paid jobs in the city or in local government; many parents are increasingly turning to English-medium private primary and primary schools.</p> <p>English is considered a neutral language useful in the post-conflict and reconciliation period.</p> <p>English is also needed for students to access higher education overseas and to increase trade opportunities.</p> <p>A scarcity of jobs in rural areas means parents are keen for education to bring access to professional jobs.</p>	<p>The Constitution protects all ethnic groups, with rights to maintain and develop their languages.</p> <p>There is no guiding policy on how to support these rights through education.</p> <p>School districts are required to teach in English from Grade 4 of primary school onwards.</p>	<p>Need for decisive action to improve retention and learning outcomes.</p> <p>Strong parental preferences for English medium in the south.</p> <p>Lack of literacy and education materials for over half the country's local languages.</p> <p>Lack of writing systems for approximately two-thirds of local languages.</p> <p>In the south, choosing a local language for schools where communities use multiple local languages may contribute to instability and disunity.</p>

*continued...*

2. Priorities for action				
<p><b>Children's education and language needs in most educationally disadvantaged areas</b></p>	<p><b>Society's language use needs</b></p>	<p><b>Who may be concerned about a perceived shift away from (English) as a medium of instruction? What arguments would help to reassure them?</b></p>	<p><b>What changes may be needed to the current policy?</b></p>	<p><b>Which issues should be tackled first in the policy implementation process? Which actions can be taken easily? Which issues need urgent attention?</b></p>
<p>Teachers to use language which children can understand throughout primary education, reducing drop-out and repetition rates. Assessment processes should be changed in order that progress is assessed on the basis of their knowledge of the subject content, rather on their ability to interpret the language of a test paper. English language teaching should be improved so that more children learn to use English effectively.</p>	<p>Choice of school language in multilingual areas with history of inter-ethnic friction should be subject to clear and transparent process.</p>	<p>Parents will need reassurance that their children will learn English well through the adoption of more effective teaching methodologies. Influential people from elite groups may feel that their advantages are being threatened by more effective access to English for others. Arguments about the greater stability of society when educational opportunities are more equitable may be needed. Communities in the south may be concerned about schools in multilingual areas privileging one local language over another by choosing it as a language of instruction.</p>	<p>Articulate the rights of all to maintain and develop their languages and use these languages to deliver the basic education curriculum. State that effective teaching of the curriculum is more likely when second language skills can be introduced using a multilingual approach. Commit to transition to primary schools being able to offer teaching predominantly in the language which children use at home, as well as offering good quality second language teaching to boost skills in English and other key languages.</p>	<p>Guidance to teachers, particularly in the north, that speaking to children in the language they use most at home is good practice, as is encouraging children to use their home language throughout the school day. Engaging with teacher training institutions to ensure they understand good practice and can start to adopt multilingual teaching into their pre- and in-service training services.</p>

“Recognise children's need to learn through a language which is already familiar to them.”

## A supportive policy foundation for multilingual education

Education policy should have the following basis, to give it the best chance of supporting improvements in school language:

- Recognition of the multilingual nature of the nation
- Clear articulation of rights for all communities to use and develop their mother tongues (whether or not formally recognised as official languages)
- Recognition that support for maintaining and developing children's mother tongues through education is important to enable linguistic, cultural and educational rights
- Commitment to equitable opportunities for people to learn national and international languages considered important for national unity and economic growth
- Post-conflict reconciliation agreements which include strategies for meeting the main language, cultural and educational priorities of all groups.

If such commitments can be expressed within national policies or legal frameworks, it will be easier to develop and deliver more detailed policies and procedures for improving school language. If not, it will still be important to develop policy for language in education. Those involved in developing language policies for education should try to get agreement from top government leadership on the key issues listed above. Then the policy can serve national interests more effectively.

## A good language in education policy should...

- Identify links between education policy and constitutional or legal instruments on language in relation to equity, diverse cultural identities, human rights and peaceful national development.
- Support communicative and child-centred methods for teaching which prioritise communication and understanding.

- Communicate a strong commitment to giving children useful skills in national or international languages.
- Recognise children's need to learn through a language which is already familiar to them.<sup>1</sup>
- Emphasise that preschool education must always be in children's first language.
- Commit to moving towards multilingual teaching, which will give children skills in national or international languages and will teach the main primary curriculum in languages which are familiar to children.
- Agree to work towards removing abrupt changes in the language of instruction before Grade 7 of education.
- Recognise that deaf children and their families also need support to use and develop sign language through education.
- Recognise a need to extend and strengthen early literacy learning periods for children who will be learning to read and write in languages they do not use at home.
- Commit to working with minority language groups over how their languages and cultural knowledge will be used and developed for children's learning and literacy.
- Require government to produce a funded language in education plan which will progressively deliver actions against the policy framework within a long-term timeframe.
- Commit to reviewing assessment and testing, to increase the use in testing of languages which children understand and use in daily life.
- Identify who has responsibility for making multilingual education available to children.

Flexibility should be left in policy wording, so that any issues which cannot be addressed in the short term can be worked on at a more appropriate time in the future. Policy makers should set a date when the policy will be reviewed and updated, as language and education needs may change over time.

<sup>1</sup>If a language is not officially recognised, or is seen as a dialect, or is an informal version of a language such as Arabic, children may still only use this language in their lives and therefore find other languages difficult. Therefore policy should attempt to recognise and reflect children's actual uses of language.

“A language policy should not be implemented across the whole country at the same time...”

## 2.2. Implementing policy to improve school language

### 2.2.1. Set the priorities and parameters for implementation

Information on the links between language and children's educational access and achievement will help identify areas in which language policy should be implemented most urgently. International development partners could be asked for help in providing this data or in supporting its production. If learning outcomes assessments or baselines are being conducted, questions should be included about which languages children use at home and whether there is evidence of children having problems with the language of school.

Evidence about the costs and benefits of piloting and replicating multilingual education approaches will need to be reviewed, so that implementing agencies can assess the investment required and can add cost estimates to wider national education improvement efforts.

Leaders of a new education programme or policy initiative should decide whether to start implementing policy in a particular region as a pilot, or whether to select several sites together. A language policy should not be implemented across the whole country at the same time, as it is not likely to be possible to achieve the quality and consistency needed to make a strong improvement in children's learning. Areas of the country which have been identified as having big language problems, or where educators are more able and willing to move forward with change, should be supported to move forward first.

Clear guidelines for education authorities will be important. These should be provided as soon as possible, to enable local education authorities to plan.

Set a timetable for when changes will be rolled out; establish which action will take place each year. Do not set an end date for this work unless it is unavoidable, as large scale implementation will take several years. Set various interim dates for achieving key targets instead.

For a large scale multilingual education programme, take one year for preparation. Roll-out should be planned grade by grade, working from early years education upwards to upper primary or lower secondary. Technical support to roll-out, such as curriculum adaptation, should be organised on that basis. Preparation should include formation or orientation of support groups like minority organisations or parents' groups; initial orientation of local officials, teacher trainers, teachers and headteachers; and curriculum redevelopment, orthography and materials development for the first grade of school. Thereafter, activities should be delivered at school and training level each year. At the same time preparation for the following grade's uptake of the approach should be completed.

Arrange to document, monitor and evaluate policy implementation, to create evidence of the value of multilingual education, and to identify improvements that can be made. See Box 5 on page 21.

### 2.2.2. Secure resources for implementation

Ministries of Education and Finance should be asked to allocate funding and staff to roll out multilingual education for areas where evidence indicates that language is a key factor in poor school achievement and retention.

It will be important to establish a clear budget heading for delivering against policy. A central fund to help local education agencies take action will probably be needed.

Centrally allocated costs are often needed to: capture baseline information on children's language and education situations; reorient teacher training and recruitment; adapt curricula and curriculum materials to a multilingual approach; develop learning and literacy materials in local languages; develop structured, utility-focused literacy and learning materials in a second language; and change the language of exams and tests.

The leaders of any plan to implement language policy should decide whether resources should be targeted at areas where the initial results of mother tongue based multilingual

<b>BOX 5</b>	<p><b>What if it isn’t possible to teach in every child’s mother tongue?</b></p> <p>It is possible to start teaching in one or two local languages, and gradually expand to tens or even hundreds. This is being done in settings like India, Bangladesh, Papua New Guinea (with over 800 languages) and Vietnam.</p> <p>In the short term, or in situations where capacity and resources cannot support this expansion, the second best answer is to use a local language which is actively used for communicating among children and adults locally. This will require consultation and awareness-raising with parents.</p>
	<p><b>Can a policy in support of multilingual education be fully delivered within a typical government term?</b></p> <p>Probably not. Delivering an effective, responsive language policy on a national scale will take time. If the education system is responding to conflict or post-conflict challenges, transition may take longer. A government term should allow several important foundations for multilingual schooling to be laid, however. This could involve initially supporting the systematic development of multilingual education in one part of the country, or progressively implementing some elements of the policy, while continuing to build awareness of the need for multilingual education nationally.</p>

education will be more quickly seen, or to areas where learning outcomes are worst. If there is likely to be significant resistance to policy change, it may be more appropriate to choose the first option, as effective community and stakeholder support contributes significantly to effective programme development and implementation.

Any national or regional programmes to improve quality or access in basic education can offer a good source of funding or support for upgrading school language. Improved education quality, equity and access will result from more effective language use in schools.

Even if there is very little funding for improving education, include language work as a priority heading in plans and budgets. Decide which things can be done at little cost (such as issuing good practice guidance to teachers or distributing policy summaries to schools), and include more expensive changes in requests to donors or central government for funding. See Box 6 on page 22.

**2.2.3. Establish an implementation team**

A lead team will need to be established to ensure systematic implementation of multilingual education policy, or the development of a multilingual education programme.

Structuring the team as a network, with linked ‘nodes’ at different levels from the school upwards will be helpful. These teams should be given clear information about what changes are proposed, and what benefits should result – in a language which all can easily understand.

Collaborative planning is important between agencies who can support local language education initiatives at national, regional and local level. Meetings and exposure visits between people in all these contexts will be very helpful. Interpreters should be used to make communicating and understanding easier. Visits to help education officials and teachers see good practice in schools should be arranged.

**People to involve**

- A core group of project managers to lead and be accountable for progress in implementation of mother tongue based programmes. Programme leaders with strong experience of minority language issues may need to be given exposure to the challenges facing the national school system. Managers from dominant language groups may need to gain understanding of the challenges experienced by children in minority communities.

**BOX 6**

**Areas of funding**

Financing of change towards multilingual education should focus on progressively setting up teaching and learning conditions that will support good practice. Resources should also be used for awareness-raising, to minimise resistance to change.

Funding should support different stakeholders to contribute to change and maintain key priorities for education. Key categories include:

- translation of key teacher training materials into local or regional languages
- adaptation of pre-service and in-service training curricula to a multilingual version including second language teaching methods
- database (paper or software) set up to capture teachers' language skills
- support to encourage teachers and trainee teachers to develop and reproduce local language teaching materials
- adaptation of learning and literacy materials already in national or international languages so that they can be taught as second languages rather than simply delivering curriculum content
- adaptation of examination texts to ensure that language used to set tasks is not above students' expected level of language competency
- adaptation of national basic education competency standards to reflect realistic expectations of how much second language children can master by certain points, and what type is most appropriate
- support to language networks and meetings for literacy development in local languages
- engagement with the publishing sector and textbook publishing regulators. Ask them to promote print and distribution of materials in local languages, as well as graded second language materials. These should be designed for non-native speakers in order to help children build literacy gradually, without relying on other media which they may not have access to.

- National political leaders, who can affirm and support transition to mother tongue based multilingual education in basic education.
- Mother tongue speakers of community languages who can become teachers or teaching assistants.
- Local language speakers who want to participate in planning and implementing mother tongue based multilingual education for their communities.
- Organisations such as school management committees or parent-teacher associations, which include parent and community representation.
- Linguists, ideally from national universities, to provide technical support, particularly in the development of writing systems.
- Trained teachers, teacher trainers and teacher supervisors or inspectors who can monitor practices in schools.
- Curriculum developers who can ensure that the multilingual education curriculum is aligned with national learning competencies.

*It is sometimes necessary to clarify who is ultimately responsible for managing education, and who a delivery team would need to work with. For example, in Bangladesh's Chittagong Hill Tracts, a multilingual education programme had to ask government to establish that the indigenous local government was responsible for managing education, rather than Bangladeshi officials. This then cleared the way to building the capacity of the indigenous authorities to take forward mother tongue based multilingual education work.*

“Language is a sensitive and important issue for many, particularly in children's education.”

### Useful learning on implementing school language policy or programmes

1. Teachers are central to change, in terms of recruitment, training, and placement. Motivating teachers through recognition, reward and assessment is vital.
2. Not having enough personnel who understand the principles and processes needed for improving school language has been a key reason for failure to implement language-in-education policy. Lack of strong awareness building is often a key reason for failure of multilingual education programmes.
3. National and local publishing capacity for literacy and learning materials in local and second languages will need to be reviewed.
4. It is important to understand the degree of flexibility currently possible in adapting and delivering the national curriculum, and to encourage greater flexibility so that schools can be allowed to adapt teaching to meet local children's needs.
5. International agencies and donors should be asked for support in improving school language as a core part of education improvement plans. Some donors do not proactively offer such support in case they are seen as interfering in a sensitive political area, but would be able to if approached.
6. Consider what resources (people, materials, coordination, guidance, expertise, demonstration sites) are available: in the area and in neighbouring areas; from previous times in history; and from other types of organisations. Try to make links with these sources of support. If pilot multilingual education programmes have already taken place, set up opportunities for the people involved to share their experiences.

### 2.3. Communicating to gain support for change

Language is a sensitive and important issue for many, particularly in children's education. In many cases there is likely to be resistance to changing the language of school. Most resistance is likely to be because people are concerned that changes will make children less likely to learn a second language well, or that changes might break up national unity.

When a new project or initiative is planned to improve school language, communicate frequently with key stakeholders about what is being attempted, why, and what improvements are expected. Focus communication strategies on the issues which interest those with the power to make change, and those with the power to resist change. Make changes that address people's concerns, without losing the principle of increasing children's learning in a language they already understand.

#### Common concerns

Parents may be worried that their children's already limited access to national or international language is being taken away from them if the school no longer teaches in that language. They may feel that this change is denying their children a chance to get the opportunities that children have who can access national or international languages in everyday life. Making more second language reading materials and radio programmes available would be one way to address this.

Parents and teachers may be concerned about social relations. For example, if a school is asked to move from using English to a local language for teaching, and some children in the school do not use that language in their daily lives, this may set up a sense of injustice among children and adults from that linguistic community.

Some political leaders may not have a strong interest in improving education provision for people from different ethnic groups. However, they are likely to be interested in saving money through making efficiency gains in education;

in increasing the international prestige of the country or organisation through adopting good quality teaching approaches; or in reducing any threats to stability and safety from uneducated, underemployed young people who have been failed by schools. Explain that they will have opportunities to review the process and to input their ideas, so that they can build trust in it.

### Some important messages to communicate

See Box 7 below.

*It will be important that messages of support for the changes come from high level people who are respected. When new plans for helping tribal children to learn in their own languages were promoted in Andhra Pradesh in India, the support of well respected and high profile national experts such as Dhir Jhingran made a big difference in convincing senior officials to authorise changes.*

<b>BOX 7</b>	<b>Potential responses to parental resistance</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching in our country is out of date and our children are being denied the chance to learn languages that children in other countries are being given.</li> <li>• A better way of teaching languages in school is being brought in. This will mean that children will no longer learn (English) badly by the age of eight, but they will learn it better by the age of 12 or 13.</li> <li>• This is still (English) education: but it's better than (English) medium, which only works well if you already speak (English).</li> <li>• Ask your children if they like school and understand their teacher; then ask them after six months of trying this new approach.</li> </ul>
	<b>Arguments to convince senior leadership to continue supporting multilingual education</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High performance in education and key languages is vital for national development.</li> <li>• Education can only be effective when it is based around how children learn.</li> <li>• Most rural children's only chance of learning a second language well is to have multilingual basic education, rooted in a language they use in daily life.</li> <li>• Money spent on upgrading teachers' performance will be wasted if teachers cannot be understood by students.</li> <li>• Equity in education is vital for stability and growth – without teaching in languages children understand we will never achieve it.</li> <li>• Resentment due to ethnic or linguistic groups being denied success in education can lead to serious political disturbance.</li> <li>• Multilingual education can be done well in our context, if we build it into ongoing education reforms and take a long-term approach.</li> <li>• There is funding to support multilingual education if we request it from donors.</li> <li>• Improvements are likely to be seen in significantly improved primary school attendance and retention; then, as progress improves, reduced grade repetition; and ultimately greater success in delivering learning outcomes. Initial changes will be felt in children's more positive experience of school, and greater confidence in education.</li> </ul>



**Table 1: Who should communicate changes to school language?**

Role	Who should do the communicating	Who they should communicate to
Ministry of Education and indigenous minorities' ministry advisers and press teams	Minister or deputy Minister	National media; national parliament; provincial or regional education teams
Academic staff with linguistic or education expertise	Heads of university departments or research teams	Advisers to ministries and ministers; national media; conference audiences including the private sector
Parliamentary or legislative staff	Supportive members of national or regional political bodies such as parliaments	Colleagues in national or regional political bodies; education and indigenous ministers
Experts within agencies in national or regional education working groups	Education Working Group chairs or leaders	Ministers and ministerial advisers; senior donor representatives; senior NGO representatives
Advisers or managers in provincial or regional education authorities	Heads of provincial or regional education authorities	Issue short and clear guidance documents to headteachers and teachers; talk to teacher unions and groups
Experts or managers in internationally funded education programmes	Heads of internationally funded education programmes	Donor representatives and head offices; ministerial representatives; provincial education authorities; provincial or regional indigenous authorities; partner organisations
Managers in teacher training institutions	Heads of teacher training institutions	Trainers; school supervisors; private school heads; public sector school heads; teacher unions
School supervisors	Heads of teacher resource centres, local authorities or inspectorates	School heads in area; heads of parent organisations in area; groups of teachers and teacher organisations
Headteachers	Heads of parent teacher organisations or school management committees	Parents; district education authorities; teachers
Headteachers or teacher mentors/resource persons	Class teachers	Parents and children, both those who speak the current language of school and those who do not.

Encourage publication of national or regional studies and research around multilingual education projects or change processes in the national and local press, to establish a sense of transparency and promote constructive debate.

Ensure that key opinion formers, such as academics, Ministry experts, journalists, royal figures and local leaders, are invited to visit schools using multilingual teaching. Make sure that visitors also see classes in the same

“If schools are to help children learn languages well, teachers need to be supported to encourage language development in the classroom.”

area which use traditional teaching in an unfamiliar language. It can be very powerful when people see for themselves the difference between lively, productive students who clearly understand their classes, and students sitting tensely in a classroom straining to make sense of what they are hearing.

School management and parent-teacher committees should be asked to arrange consultative discussions in advance of changes to their school language, and adjustments to the process should be made in response to parents' concerns. Where some children are seen to be disadvantaged by a change in language of instruction, extra classes for them could be agreed, for example.

Where there is conflict or difficulty in choosing a local language for teaching, arrange a consultation process with parents, teachers and older children. Rule out the use of any language that is not frequently present in children's lives, and ask the group to suggest other solutions to be tried out. These could include grouping children by language and using multigrade mother tongue teaching; choosing a local lingua franca to teach in; or choosing the local language used by most children as their mother tongue to teach in. In all cases efforts should be made throughout school life to provide extra support to children whose mother tongue is not used for teaching, and to celebrate the mother tongue and ethnic identity of all children.

## 2.4. Making teaching multilingual

If schools are to help children learn languages well, teachers need to be supported to encourage language development in the classroom. This has always been the case, as language is a major vehicle of learning. But in settings where there are language barriers, teachers will need extra focus on language.

What should this extra focus on language look like, and how can it be brought into teaching? See Box 8 below.

For all of these areas, education ministries or managers should find out whether teachers can currently do these things and what will need to happen for them to get better.

In particular, those managing teachers should:

### 1. Find out what languages teachers speak

Set up a language skills inventory of teachers. Teaching colleges should be asked to find out and record from new trainees which languages they speak, which languages they write, and to what levels. Headteachers should record which languages teachers speak and write. This information should be shared with departments who allocate newly trained teachers to schools.

### 2. Place teachers who speak a local language in areas where children speak that language

Many countries offer various incentives to encourage teachers to work in rural or remote areas, such as land in the community. These can be developed or strengthened to encourage teachers to work in areas where children do not have easy access to the dominant language.

#### BOX 8

#### What teachers should eventually be able to do:

- Speak to children in the children's first language.
- Teach most of the curriculum in the children's first language.
- Teach children to read and write their first language.
- Be confident in using child-centred, responsive and communicative teaching methods.
- Introduce second language structures and vocabulary in relation to learning topics being covered in the curriculum.
- At higher levels, introduce a third or fourth language in a similar way.

“Classroom partnership models can work well, where a trained teacher who does not speak the children's language plans learning activities with a bilingual teaching assistant.”

Where there is a teacher incentive scheme that allows teachers to work in rural areas for a short period so that they can then go back to urban areas, this sets up potential problems if there are few teachers available who speak the children's language. Teachers should be given incentives to stay as long as possible in the same areas, so that they learn and/or use the local language well.

### 3. Make access to teacher training easier for speakers of local language

Where few speakers of local languages have succeeded in education, it will be necessary to change requirements for their entry to teacher training. This can be done both by lowering educational requirements for teacher training college and by creating teaching assistant roles, where teachers receive basic training to work as teaching assistants and are mentored by qualified teachers.

*Classroom partnership models can work well, where a trained teacher who does not speak the children's language plans learning activities with a bilingual teaching assistant. The teaching assistant leads learning activities in the mother tongue and both assistant and teacher help the children learn related second language. This can be a valuable bridge where the teacher does not yet speak the local language, and can encourage formerly excluded local language speakers into teaching.*

*This teaching assistant is not an interpreter: they deliver a full range of teaching activities with the guidance of the teacher. Otherwise, lessons would take twice as long and would not be effective. This means teachers need support to step back from classroom interactions but spend substantial time planning and discussing with the assistant. However, in the immediate absence of teachers who speak children's languages, this model has proved successful in contexts like Vietnam (Save the Children, 2009).*

Rural education authorities should be encouraged to recruit local people who speak both local and national languages as preschool

and early primary teachers or teaching assistants. Selection criteria should prioritise basic education, language skills, and enthusiasm for working with children. Initial short-term training in multilingual, child-centred teaching should be provided, with frequent on-the-job training and mentoring.

Key elements of training for community teachers and teaching assistants have involved:

- Learner-centred teaching
- Child development and child protection
- Mother tongue based multilingual education principles and methods
- Multilingual lesson planning approaches and formats
- Adapting central curricula and materials to local language and culture
- Creating learning and literacy materials from locally available resources and with parents and children
- Building teachers' literacy in their own local language where required
- Teaching literacy in local language
- Teaching literacy and maths using local language and calculation approaches.

This mix of training and experience should gradually be scaled up over time, so that locally recruited teachers can work towards full accredited teacher status and pay. Without being fairly paid or given support to develop their career, locally recruited teachers or teaching assistants are unlikely to stay in their roles.

Where teaching assistants or local teachers are already being used in non-formal education schemes, their training and support should explicitly encourage them to use multilingual teaching approaches.

### 4. Boost teachers' and trainee teachers' language skills

Language records should identify which languages teachers and trainee teachers are strongest and weakest in. These should be used by local education authorities and training colleges to plan pre- and in-service language support training.

“Where teachers are given career progression or salary points for skills or experience, high points should be awarded for having in-depth knowledge of local languages, especially those in highest demand.”

Teachers already in areas where they do not speak the local language should be given accredited training to enable them to strengthen their communication with children in that language.

Where possible, teachers in this situation should be supported to learn to read and write children's language, enough to teach basic literacy. NGOs can be involved in local language literacy training for teachers, as has been done successfully in Bangladesh (CfBT, 2010).

Teachers should also be given support to learn second languages as subjects for active communication while in teacher training. Encouraging second language conversation classes or book discussion groups is a helpful approach.

#### **5. Work with teacher training institutions to bring in a multilingual curriculum**

Planning improvements to pre- and in-service teacher training at a relatively early stage in a multilingual education programme is important, so that supporting materials like textbooks, teachers' guides and literacy materials can be incorporated into new training at different points.

Teacher training institutions that are supportive of learner-centred methods should be supported to build in multilingual methods to their training curricula. Language should be given a central role in teachers' thinking about communication with children; about socialisation; cognitive development; literacy; and self esteem. Training should be based on the principle of building on the concepts and language that children are most familiar with, particularly for pre-primary and primary education.

The detailed work on this needs to be done after curriculum adaptation tools have been developed, but training bodies should be brought into the process early on for planning.

Contracting for an international expert to help with this process would be recommended, so that experience from other countries can be brought in.

Schools will need guidance and support, particularly via teacher training and curriculum

materials. Weaker schools will need clear, simple instructions at first. This should be combined with helping schools and teachers to learn how to make good choices about language in response to children's needs locally. This is important because there is so much diversity in the way communities use and access different languages, and because the best teaching is done by teachers who are confident to apply good practice principles to respond to children's needs.

#### **6. Update teacher accountability so that teachers are rewarded for using language effectively**

Both incentives and accountability mechanisms are important to secure changes in teachers' behaviour (Dufo, Hannah and Ryan, 2010; VSO, 2002). Communicating that teachers who try hard to support new language approaches will be recognised and rewarded will be an important part of securing success.

Where school supervisors and principals are capable of reliable monitoring, they should be asked to monitor how much local language use goes on in classrooms. Similarly, classroom monitoring should look out for how much of children's second language is used, especially in monolingual rural classrooms.

Where teachers are given career progression or salary points for skills or experience, high points should be awarded for having in-depth knowledge of local languages, especially those in highest demand. Those teachers should be rated as having good capacity to teach the curriculum in local language, and should be prioritised for rapid access to training on multilingual education methods as part of multilingual education roll-out schemes.

Teachers who encourage children to use their first language – even if they themselves do not speak it – should be recognised and rewarded where possible.

Teachers seen standing at the front of the class reading from a second-language textbook for long periods should be discouraged from doing so by supervisors and other teachers.

Teachers should be asked to vary their use of language based on their assessment

*“When speaking in a child's second language, speak slowly, repeat several times and use actions and facial expressions.”*

of children's language situation and other learning needs. For example, a child who already speaks Swahili as well as being very developed in his or her mother tongue can be supported to communicate and do basic academic tasks in those two languages. A child of similar age who has grown up only with his or her mother tongue, and is not well developed in it, will need support to develop the mother tongue through increased communication and academic tasks, and to gradually learn Swahili.

### Advice for teachers on teaching a second language:<sup>2</sup>

- The second language should be present in most lessons, but ideally in structured second language learning activities rather than as a vehicle to introduce new information.
- Small children enjoy learning a second language through games and informal activities. It is difficult for them to learn a second language formally as they have not yet developed abstract ways of thinking about language.
- It is better to expose children to a small amount of the second language and reinforce this regularly, rather than to introduce too much too quickly.
- Young children need lots of opportunities to listen to new words and phrases in a second language before they are ready to begin speaking. Students should be allowed an initial 'silent period' during which they

are building up acquired competence in a second language before they begin to produce it. The length of this silent period will vary from child to child, depending on factors such as individual levels of motivation and anxiety.

- Mistakes are a natural part of learning language. Focus should be on communication, not on accuracy, and student language errors should not be corrected, except where they impede communication (unless the focus of the lesson is grammar itself).
- Children will learn to communicate when there is a need to communicate. All classroom activities should aim to create a real need to communicate in the target language.
- Where a second language has to be used to teach, this will require slower delivery, repeating and paraphrasing, more careful articulation, making use of common vocabulary and shorter sentences, and pre-teaching of key vocabulary. Teachers should simplify the task to make it more manageable and achievable; reduce frustration and risk; and model and clearly define the expectations of the activity to be performed.
- While second language learners may develop a functional level of an unfamiliar language in the first few years of schooling, they will need continued support to develop the academic language proficiency necessary for academic success.

See Box 9 below and Box 10 on page 30.

#### BOX 9

#### When teaching new words and phrases of a second language, remember:

- Six to eight new words or phrases a week is enough in the early stages.
- When speaking in a child's second language, speak slowly, repeat several times and use actions and facial expressions.
- Use a mixture of whole-class work, group work and pair work to build the children's confidence.
- Before asking children to work on a task in pairs or groups, model the activity with the whole class.
- Play games and use action, songs and rhymes to help children remember the words.
- Use pictures or real objects to introduce words.
- Give children lots of positive feedback when they start trying to say new words. Encourage them to say as much as they can, even if it is not always accurate.

<sup>2</sup>Based on advice developed by Jill Knight for Save the Children

**BOX 10**

**Key messages for teachers, headteachers and school supervisors**

1. Tell teachers that encouraging children to use and develop their mother tongue at school is always a good idea and will help them learn, even if the language the teacher uses is different.
2. Ask teachers to always help children understand the meaning of the language they are reading or writing, whether this is their mother tongue or a second language.
3. Teachers and school leaders should find out and record which languages are most familiar to children, and use these in communicating with children and in teaching and learning activities to the greatest extent they are able to.
4. For children who use a different language at home from that used in school, it is better practice if teachers introduce new ideas or information in the children's first language where possible. Doing this in blocks is better than doing it in small amounts. This means that teachers should be encouraged to plan their lessons carefully.
5. If materials in local languages and scripts are available, teachers should be encouraged to use them in school.
6. Teachers who encourage children how to learn based on what is familiar to them already should be praised and recognised.
7. Community members who speak local languages should be encouraged by teachers and headteachers to come into school and (a) help communication between children and adults; (b) deliver informal learning activities such as games, songs and stories in the local language; and (c) tell teachers what knowledge and beliefs children are likely to be familiar with.
8. School inspection and supervision, when it takes place, should look for and positively recognise use of children's first language. This means that supervisors should ask teachers whether they know what languages children use at home; and supervisors should look for instances of teachers (a) encouraging children to use these languages between themselves; and (b) using those languages in communication and teaching and learning.
9. Teachers should be encouraged and recognised for using local-language knowledge and concepts as building blocks for learning (for example, using games which display local approaches to counting).
10. Tests and assessments should, if at all possible, take place in a child's first language. Every test should always record which language each child speaks at home.
11. Teachers of children who do not speak the main national or international language should keep records of each child's progress in key areas of language and literacy. If assessment reveals, for example, that a child in Pre-Primary 2 is struggling to form letters correctly, the teacher needs to use this information to plan activities that provide more practice in letter formation.
12. Teachers in a programme using a new language approach, such as mother tongue based multilingual education, should keep examples of the child's work throughout the year to demonstrate progress, build the child's confidence and share achievements with parents. This will be important for showing parents and other teachers whether the new approach is working.

“Where possible, the Ministry of Education should start adapting learning standards and curriculum content to a multilingual education approach.”

## 2.5. Curriculum and assessment

Adapting the basic education curriculum will give teachers tools for delivering multilingual lessons. Where possible, the Ministry of Education should start adapting learning standards and curriculum content to a multilingual education approach. This will involve national or local curriculum development specialists, linguists, teacher training experts and textbook and materials development experts. Donor agencies or multilateral organisations can be asked to provide expertise or resources.

Particularly if capacity is limited, the process can be done by grade. In other words, the curriculum for the earliest grade can be redeveloped and rolled out in one year, with the next grade being done the following year, and so on. This enables a new group of children to progress through school benefiting from multilingual approaches.

The knowledge a child comes to school with should be seen as the foundation for their future learning. Therefore, the curriculum for preschool and primary education should be based in the culture and environment of the local community to the greatest extent possible, using local knowledge and customs to develop children's skills in all areas of learning. Curriculum guidance which offers at least 20% freedom to teachers to adapt content to children's contexts is extremely important.

Examination and testing arrangements are likely to determine how teachers work. Therefore any approach to improve the language of teaching must include a change to the way testing is conducted for children who do not speak the current language of teaching at home. At the very minimum, these changes should include changing examination papers in the second language so they use the simplest vocabulary possible.

### Beginning to redevelop the basic education for multilingual teaching

Curriculum development experts should investigate the following:

1. Which ideas, skills and language are likely to be most familiar to children in different parts of the country by the time they enter education?

2. What resources are available in different areas for basing education on children's lives, including the language they use?

These resources can include: other children and their knowledge and skills; adults in children's lives, including their knowledge, skills and time available; teachers, including their current knowledge and skills and their capacity to gain new knowledge and skills; adults in the school community and their knowledge and skills, as well as their capacity to gain new knowledge and skills; artefacts or 3D materials that can help learning and be produced in the community; materials already provided to schools; the capacity to develop and provide new materials for schools; local capacity to produce written or printed materials and picture materials; and opportunities to help children learn from the physical environment surrounding them.

3. What language needs has government identified for children in future life?

- Which languages is it assumed that children will need to be able to use well by the time they leave school?
- What types of language might the majority need to use? (formal; informal; social; buying and selling; government business; scientific; technical; entertainment; religious; and so on.)
- Find out the relative levels of difficulty of different uses of different languages at different stages. Seek the advice of linguists at national universities to help with this. Ask them what levels of language might be needed for the different language needs which have been identified.
- How can upper secondary and tertiary education strengthen students' second language needs, rather than expecting students already to have achieved the necessary levels of a second language?

Once these real-life language needs have been more clearly identified, it will be easier to adjust the curriculum to reflect the real language needs of the population. If this involves apparently making learning targets less ambitious, it will be important to discuss with senior education leaders.

“How many second language words can teachers realistically expect children to learn each year in primary school?”

Children who never hear a national or international language at home, and who live a long way from communities who speak it, will take longer to learn that language than those who live in towns where the second language is spoken around them. Second language learning targets should be reduced for children who do not use those languages at home.

*How many second language words can teachers realistically expect children to learn each year in primary school?*

*In a bilingual preschool in Vietnam, a list of Vietnamese words to be introduced to minority ethnic children has been developed: 300, practical everyday terms, linked to themes in the national curriculum. By the end of primary Grade 1, after two previous years of preschool, children are expected to be able to use 500 Vietnamese words. These vocabulary sets are produced to be shared with teachers as part of guidance packages.*

*International evidence indicates that after three years of education, children learning a second language for the first time can learn between 300 and 500 words effectively, depending on the child's capacity and situation (Heugh, 2005).*

### Setting competencies for young children

In the early years, learning outcome targets should be flexible enough to fit the starting point that young children are at. It is widely accepted that young children start the learning and development process at differing points, and take very different routes through it. Education should support these processes rather than trying to impose rigid 'one size fits all' targets which will be irrelevant and damaging for many.

First and second language-related targets as part of early years education should take this flexible approach. This means encouraging teachers and school managers to find out about the characteristics of the children they work with, and give them advice on which approaches to try out for children with different characteristics.

Using a thematic approach to organise the curriculum for preschool and lower primary education allows development of the first

language and learning of a second language to be spread across a range of teaching topics and activities.

### Progression planning

To plan curriculum content and identify the appropriate language of instruction at different stages of education, a transition plan can be developed.

The example plan suggested in Table 2 on page 33 begins with pre-primary education delivered completely in the mother tongue and introduces the second language (L2) and a third language (L3) gradually. There is flexibility within this outline. For example, literacy in L2 could be introduced earlier in Grade 1 if necessary. During the transition period, where L1 and L2 are both being used, they are sometimes used together in the same lesson, not necessarily in separate subject areas. The subjects which might be easier for the children to understand in L2 are transferred first, but always with L1 support to ensure understanding. Research suggests that children will do best if they continue developing their mother tongue for five to seven years at school, alongside any second and third languages (Heugh, 2005; Thomas and Collier, 1997). The crucial element, therefore, in a good approach to school language is the development of the language with which children are most familiar, for as long as possible – while also building in second language learning. See Box 11 on page 33.

### Progressing to greater abstraction in the primary curriculum

Grade 4 is often an important and challenging year for learning, as the primary curriculum becomes more demanding and abstract. Where instruction is in an unfamiliar language, children often struggle hugely with the dramatic increase in complex second language required. National exams often loom up in Grade 5 or 6.

Ideally children should be able to learn in a familiar language throughout this time, and children should definitely not have to cope with the transition to a new language of instruction at this crucial transition period. This should be a priority for policy and practice change.



**Table 2: Suggested framework for planning multilingual teaching content across early grades**

	Pre-school 1 (4–5)	Pre-school 2 (5–6)	1st Grade (6–7)	2nd Grade (7–8)	3rd Grade (8–9)	4th Grade (9–10)	5th Grade (10–11)
<b>Language (Mother tongue – MT)</b>	Oral MT	Beginning reading and writing in MT	MT	MT	MT	MT as subject	MT as subject
<b>Maths</b>	Number MT	Number MT	Maths in MT	Maths in MT	Maths in MT	Maths in L2 with L1 support	Maths in L2
<b>Other Subjects</b>	MT	MT	MT	MT	MT	MT/L2	L2
<b>Language L2*</b>		L2 Oral	L2 Oral Intro of literacy (Term 3)	L2	L2	L2 language development	L2 language development
<b>Language L3*</b>						Oral L3	Reading and writing in L3

\*This example indicates a context where children are unlikely to have any exposure to L3 (third language) as they grow up outside school, and where the practical second-language priority is for L2 (second language) to be developed to an advanced level.

**BOX 11**

**Essential points for curriculum development**

Children should never be expected to learn ‘enough second language to cope in primary school’. This is not possible for the vast majority of children, where children do not have that language in their home lives. It is not possible just to change the first two or three grades of education to multilingual teaching, in the hope that other grades of education can remain unchanged. While such changes may make early years education easier for children, they will not achieve improved inclusion or learning outcomes for children overall.

It is not realistic to expect every child in the country to achieve the same levels of international language as children who are exposed every day to international language. However, the evidence is clear that when children become used to learning second languages, they can much more easily pick up new languages (Thomas and Collier, 1997; 2000). So it is not essential for the school to deliver the full range of language knowledge that children will need in later life. If schools can help children to be *good at learning languages*, children will be able to continue to learn new languages well on their own.

Guidance should emphasise that building strong skills in language learning involves (1) building children’s understanding of concepts through their first language and (2) strengthening children’s ability to interpret new or confusing information. This should start with what the children do recognise (about an object, a text, a speech), and using that to draw conclusions and make deductions.

“*Assessment of children's literacy skills should be developed around finding out whether children can genuinely decode and understand texts, and generate new text for themselves.*”

If children are expected to learn in a second language in these mid to upper primary years, they should receive significant support, and recognition that they face major barriers to making progress.

In the immediate term, teachers should be made aware of the challenges that children in mid to upper primary school face. Teachers and parents should receive guidance that increasing the use of second language instruction in upper primary is likely to be counterproductive, overwhelming children with too many words that they are unable to make sense of.

Curriculum review should focus on how transitions into the more demanding upper primary curriculum can be made less challenging.

#### **Involving teachers**

Once a process of updating teaching guidance and materials is under way, groups of teachers working with local language speaking children, or who have been involved with mother tongue based multilingual education projects, should be asked to help develop and adapting curriculum materials and learning activities. Those teachers can then be involved in preparation of local materials and can work with teacher training colleges to train and support their colleagues. This approach has worked very successfully in many settings.

#### **Changing the way learning achievement is assessed**

Changes to formal assessment systems must be made. This is needed to reduce disadvantage for children who do not know the current language of examinations well, and is essential to motivate teachers to use multilingual teaching approaches.

As curriculum redevelopment takes place, assessment methods and targets should be adapted accordingly. This will require collaboration and coordination between education departments.

Children – especially preschool and primary school children – should be tested in their most familiar language wherever possible.

This may mean updating or translating exam papers, and bringing in speakers of the local language to help with marking. Formal examinations in upper primary school should be reviewed and changed as a first priority.

Tests of second language competency can be delivered mainly in the second language for older children, but tests of other curriculum knowledge should be administered in the language with which children are most familiar in daily life. Learning how to use language effectively depends primarily on practice in communication, rather than on accurately reproducing spelling or grammar. National and local assessment processes will drive teachers' approach to teaching language. If teachers are to be motivated to build children's skills in genuinely using languages, testing and assessment must be developed which focus on communication skills. Several countries have moved towards more effective language assessment which measures communicative competencies: there is much experience to be shared in this area.

Assessment of children's literacy skills should be developed around finding out whether children can genuinely decode and understand texts, and generate new text for themselves.

Working towards these changes can be done progressively year by year, alongside curriculum adaptation. Changes should be rolled out in areas where language is a particularly big barrier for children's learning.

If it is currently not possible to change the language of tests, the specific wording of examination questions must be reviewed to make sure that tests only use a basic second language which children should already have been supported to understand and practise as part of the school curriculum. This means that, whether in first or second language, the very simplest possible vocabulary and structures should be used to communicate test tasks. Examiners must be requested to set papers using the simplest possible vocabulary. See Box 12 on page 35.

Where some children in the national school system speak the school language but others do not, exam officials should be asked to

**BOX 12**

**Complex examination questions spoiling children's chances**

*Children in English-medium secondary schools in Tanzania took formal tests in English. One of the questions was: 'In what ways does a blue whale resemble a human being?' Many students did poorly in the test. When researchers asked students if they understood questions like this, many did not. When the question was simplified to 'In what ways is a blue whale like a human being?', a dramatically higher proportion of students were able to provide detailed and correct answers – in English. The research team found that words like 'resemble' were not covered in the secondary curriculum and supporting materials.*

Findings from SPINE study, University of Bristol, reported by Oksana Afitska in November 2009 (see Afitska and Clegg, 2009)

consider compensating non-school-language speakers for the extra barriers they will face in assessment by boosting their marks by a certain proportion.

As an interim measure, teachers should be advised to introduce and practise specific instructions and vocabulary which children are likely to encounter in important exams. These approaches will not deliver the transformations in children's learning outcomes which can be achieved through testing children in their first language, but they can help to give some children a better chance of success.

## 2.6. Supporting children's literacy

### Guiding principles for local language literacy

Literacy has to be meaningful to be successful. To be useful in life, literacy should be understood as a process of decoding and creating meaning using text – not learning to repeat, copy and recite texts or vocabulary in order to pass tests.

To enable children to continue to develop their linguistic and cognitive capacities in the language to which they have most access, continuing literacy in the first language, after second language text has been introduced, will be important.

Local language literacy should be embedded in communities' culture, wishes and practical literacy needs. Several rights commitments uphold the right of minority or indigenous communities to determine, develop and use

their own languages, which often include writing systems different from the dominant language (Minority Rights Group, 2009). This means that minority language communities have the right for their scripts to be used in schools. If these are not used in school, it is less likely for that writing system to be developed and used for the future of the community.

### What languages should children learn to read and write?

From an educational point of view, the best language for a child to learn to read and write in first is the language he or she is already most familiar with. This means that the child does not have to learn a new language at the same time as learning the demanding new skills of decoding and creating text. From a practical point of view, it is not always immediately possible to do this. Scripts or writing systems may not exist or may not be supported with materials. There may be sensitive political issues around the use of some languages in written form.

The principle of first language literacy should ideally be recognised as good practice, and the constraints towards delivering literacy teaching in children's first language should also be noted. The extra challenges facing children who are not able to learn to read and write in their first language should be recognised, and extra support provided. There should be a clear commitment to developing school literacy strategies that take children as close as possible to best practice, and to regularly reviewing and updating those strategies in consultation with a range of stakeholders.

“Community literacy and communication needs must sometimes be balanced against teaching needs – do not assume these are complementary.”

### Challenges around literacy and local languages

There can be challenges where different scripts or writing systems are used from language to language. For example, if a teacher has to be trained in a local text in order to teach early literacy in it, would it be cheaper and easier to use the script of the majority? This may be particularly relevant when a teacher is not likely to use the minority script outside school. Children could still learn to read their language, but using a script or writing system familiar to the teacher. This could also mean that children are able to smoothly build reading and writing a second language on top of their initial literacy in their first language.

Another issue from an education system perspective is that some writing systems are not in active use, and other languages have not yet developed writing systems. Bringing such languages into education to support children's literacy may be considered too much effort when there are many local languages without writing systems, or outside the remit of education ministries.

Where there are significant differences between scripts, and children are learning to read a local language with major differences in script to the dominant language, there is some evidence that learning to read other scripts can initially be challenging (Vijayakumar, 2010). However, with some extra time to become familiar with a new script, children can learn to take it on well (Buckwalter and Lo, 2002). People in Asia and the Middle East commonly deal with multiple and differing scripts. It is always the case that being literate in a first language supports the learning of a second language (Benson, 2005; Malone, 2004).

Community literacy and communication needs must sometimes be balanced against teaching needs – do not assume these are complementary. For example, it may be easier to use the script of the national language when using a local language for teaching literacy, but the community which owns that language may wish to use a different script. Where local literacy capacity is not strong, the

prospect of developing script processes for many local languages and bringing them into education may seem challenging.

A key issue is that local language communities are unlikely to support the form of their language used in multilingual education unless they have had the chance to see whether it is a reasonable reflection of the language they recognise as theirs. SIL International have produced useful practice guides on how to approach processes of participatory orthography and literacy materials development as part of a multilingual education programme (UNESCO 2007; Malone 2004).

Where minority ethnic groups are moving from not having had their own written language to having a written language developed for education and literacy, there may be concerns that this can be used to fuel anti-government activity. In some contexts it is important to reassure high level and local decision makers in government that these concerns can be dealt with by communicating to minority ethnic groups that government is committed to increasing their access to education, to developing their own language and to accessing national and international language. There are no recorded instances of mother tongue based education in itself worsening political or inter-ethnic conflicts; and the overwhelming experience is that introducing mother tongue based multilingual education reduces ethnic tensions (Durnnian, 2007; Pinnock, 2009).

### Balancing different considerations for a more sustainable outcome

These issues mean that there should be careful consideration and balancing of the different factors affecting literacy for young children who do not speak national or international languages. Wherever possible, three considerations – convenience for educators, identity and preference of linguistic communities, ease of learning for children – should be weighed together and a way forward decided on collaboratively between government and community representatives. This will be much more likely to lead to a form of text used in schools which parents and

“To support the literacy they learn in school, children and communities need literate environments with as much text as possible.”

children can use together, and which is a living literacy for children to situate in their regular context. When children are confident with their own local literacy, it will be much easier for them to learn to interpret texts of less familiar languages.

Anyone promoting multilingual education should make it clear to all stakeholders when attempts are being made to balance between education system needs and community needs.

In many countries there is a department or ministry supporting minority or indigenous communities, with responsibility for preserving and developing cultural heritage. Ministries of tribal or indigenous affairs can manage local literacy and orthography processes. Where such ministries or departments are conducting language revitalisation or development programmes, coordination with education departments can bring those languages into the education system, via teacher training and materials development for early literacy. See Box 13 on page 38.

#### **'Next best' approaches to literacy**

Where it is not considered feasible to use local languages for literacy at the moment, children should be taught to read and write in the closest language possible to them in daily life that has a written form – such as the local lingua franca; the local language most widely in use in writing; or the national language, if there is no local alternative.

Children learning to read and write in languages that they do not use at home should be given more time and structured support to achieve early literacy – perhaps 18 months or two years, rather than one year. Curriculum developers and teacher trainers should encourage teachers to give more support to children whose languages have big differences to the language currently used to introduce literacy.

Target texts and vocabulary for early literacy should be selected carefully to ensure that children will already be familiar with the concepts in their first language. If teachers and teacher training are not yet at the stage where carefully structured literacy teaching is

a possibility, trainers and supervisors will still need to give clear messages to teachers that children must understand the words they are learning to read and write.

Where writing systems for a group exist in a nearby country, it can be beneficial to share and reproduce these writing systems for use in schools and communities. Literacy materials and dictionaries are probably available, and specific education materials can be used for teaching in early grades as an interim measure before they are developed in country. These materials can be used as a starting point to provide learning for developing materials more relevant to the national context.

#### **Print and production of literacy materials**

To support the literacy they learn in school, children and communities need literate environments with as much text as possible. Much research, particularly from the US, has shown that the most effective way to improve the reading of children from low-income families is to increase their access to print (Newman, 2000; Chall, Jacobs and Baldwin, 1990). Ensuring that printed materials are accessible and understandable to children in all key languages of basic education should be a vital part of national education improvement plans.

Production and distribution of local language materials will depend on the state of national and local publishing industries in local languages. In some settings it may be that Ministries of Education can build partnerships with national or local adult book publishers. Donors and multilateral agencies, particularly the World Bank, should be asked for advice and assistance in promoting local publishing for local literacy.

In some countries, such as Southern Sudan, there are learning and literacy materials from previous years in local languages which have fallen out of use. Rather than spending scarce money on developing new materials, older materials should be revived or adapted urgently (Marshall, 2010).

**BOX 13**

**Language committees**

Where language communities have not recently used written literacy, processes should be put in place as part of multilingual education programmes, to establish groups of language community representatives who can validate the production of literacy materials for education and wider community literacy.

Ideally this should take place at two levels – one, nationally or regionally, should be a group of community representatives with expert cultural, historical and linguistic knowledge. This group should be empowered through democratic means to work with education technical staff to identify the key cultural knowledge, literacy and language components that should be used to deliver national curriculum competencies in children's first language.

A language committee such as this for each language group should take overall responsibility for coordinating the writing system development process. It is not necessary to form a separate language committee if any language group has their own community organisation with relevant mandate, skills and experience to produce or develop education materials using their language.

At local level, communities should be invited to visit schools and review new learning and literacy materials, to check that they are also happy with the visual and textual representation of their knowledge and language. Where community relations with government have been poor, this can be an important stage in restoring trust between communities and schools, and will help parents to start getting involved in supporting their children's learning.

Communities are likely to want evidence that the form of language used for school literacy has the following characteristics:

- Representative of the sounds of the language, if the language has more than one dialect or variation
- Designed to enable mother tongue speakers to transfer between reading in both the majority and minority languages
- Easy to reproduce and print
- Stimulates and motivates people to read and write in their language
- Accurately represents the language that people speak in their everyday life
- The language community should be able to reproduce the orthography using the publishing and printing technology available to them at local or national level.

Once scripts have been decided and materials developed, a teacher training programme should include an element of literacy training also, so that minority or other teachers learn to use the writing system of the language they are teaching literacy in.

These processes are vital where relations are strained or there is a history of conflict. There are many lessons from attempts to include minority groups in education showing that it is better to make early processes flexible and collaborative, to ensure take-up and effectiveness of education in the long term.

This type of collaborative decision making may be easier in the context of a specific project, or in a genuinely decentralised education system where links between local education offices and community institutions are good. However, central government programmes should seek to build partnerships which support these processes, to create sustainable literacy.

Because of the need for these processes of review, validation and correction of local language literacy systems and materials, it makes sense to keep new local language reading and learning materials in photocopy form for at least a year or two years, so that money is not spent on expensive printing that cannot be changed in response to community feedback.

*“Setting up travelling libraries or community-based libraries in both local and dominant languages will be very helpful.”*

Curriculum or teacher training experts should review what teaching materials and reading books are available in the languages of children, and should create a list of acceptable quality materials. Publishers and printers should be asked to reproduce these in areas where children speak these languages. Materials should be distributed to the schools where children have least access to dominant languages.

NGOs should be asked to share materials they have developed, and to coordinate with each other and with government in distributing local language materials to where they are needed. Languages often cross national borders so it may be helpful to review and use materials in local languages that are available from other countries that use those languages.

The supply of printed materials may be severely constrained. Ministries and training organisations should give teachers, headteachers, school support officials and parent-teacher associations clear guidance to encourage as much writing as possible in local language by children and adults. Schools and community groups, as well as families, can get children to write and illustrate stories, which

can then be used in language development and discussion activities. Older children can write stories and information which teachers can keep for use with younger classes.

Where paper is scarce, printing on fabric and writing on walls can be encouraged in the short term. Setting up travelling libraries or community-based libraries in both local and dominant languages will be very helpful. Asking teachers to encourage parents and children to learn to read their own language together should be encouraged.

Many education materials in international languages are too advanced for readers who do not speak those languages at home. International publishing companies who produce international-language materials should be asked by clients in multilingual countries to show that they can produce reading and learning materials adapted for learners who have little exposure to the language in everyday life, and that are relevant to diverse local cultures. Government textbook contracts should be approached with this in mind. See Box 14 below and Annex 2.6.1. on page 40.

BOX 14	<b>Camel libraries in Ethiopia: one approach to local language literacy</b>
	<p>In Ethiopia’s Somali Region, most schools and non-formal learning centres have no books for children to learn to read with. Despite government policy supporting mother tongue learning, the only books to arrive in the area are rare deliveries of textbooks in English from foreign publishers. Children do not use English and have no reason to learn it. In any case, there are no roads that trucks could deliver books to schools on.</p> <p>Save the Children in Ethiopia is pioneering ‘camel libraries’. A local camel and driver travels to remote schools and communities carrying books in Somali language to lend to children and families. Some of these books have been sourced in the UK, written in Somali and English for Somali children in London. More are being developed by children and teachers in the local area, using photography to generate stories and life skills advice. The camel libraries are making local language literacy an exciting reality.</p>

### Annex 2.6.1. Tools for teaching early literacy<sup>3</sup>

#### 'Big book' stories

A 'big book' is an illustrated story that is large enough to be shared with the whole class. The purpose of a first grade big book story is to develop pre-reading skills such as prediction, observation and sequencing and to familiarise children with the direction of print and the concept that print carries meaning. Big book stories can also help to introduce new information and ideas and develop children's vocabulary. Discussion related to the stories builds the learners' confidence in speaking and promotes an interest in reading.

Big books can be developed to support children with early reading skills in subsequent grades. The vocabulary is easy and the stories use repeated sentence structures. The teacher can read the stories together with the children and encourage them to begin reading independently.

#### Small books

Each classroom should ideally have a library of small books that children can read alone or with a partner. Some of these could be small versions of the 'big books'. Use of this library will encourage children to become independent readers.

#### Listening stories

Listening stories should be read aloud to children in their first language to develop their listening ability and their memory. Some are traditional cultural stories while others have been written specifically to develop children's language and understanding of core teaching content. Teachers read the stories, using clear verbal and physical expression and appropriate actions, pausing to give children opportunities to guess what will happen next. The teacher then asks questions about the story in the children's home language, to check the children's comprehension and to develop their thinking skills and imagination.

#### Alphabet books

Alphabet books are designed to be used for letter learning in Pre-Primary 2. Each letter of the alphabet is accompanied by four illustrated key words. There are also sentences featuring the key words, so that children can practise reading the letters in context. Teachers should introduce one letter a week in Pre-Primary 2 and use games and activities suggested in the teacher's guide to reinforce the learning.

#### Alphabet charts

Each letter on an alphabet chart should be accompanied by a key word that is familiar to the children from their daily lives, and an illustration. The teacher uses the chart to show children where letters come in the alphabet (not to teach literacy of whole words).

#### Number books

Children need to begin developing the concept of number using real objects. They can then progress to using pictures and finally abstract symbols. Number books should be developed for Pre-Primary 2 to support children with reading and writing the numbers 1–20 and with simple addition and subtraction. Additional games and activities should be included in a teacher's guide to help children to apply their maths skills in the real world.

#### Number charts

Number charts should show the numbers from 1 to 100 in the mother tongue. These will help pre-school children to place the numbers 1–20 in context and will be useful later in primary education.

<sup>3</sup>Adapted from Marshall, J. (2010)



“Producing short, accessible briefings to summarise data for decision makers, journalists and educators is also very valuable.”

## 2.7. Generating evidence to gain support for multilingual education

To build strong support for moves towards multilingual education, communication, monitoring and evaluation should be prioritised. It is critical to have evidence of the effectiveness of multilingual education that can convince people to demand more multilingual education. Also, multilingual education is a relatively new area of work, so it is important that each new initiative contributes to the larger evidence and learning about how best to support children's learning in multilingual contexts.

Communicating information about the effectiveness of multilingual education is very valuable. This can be done in the media, with local authorities, with indigenous groups, with parents' groups, and with key leaders and opinion formers in education at national level. Where it is not possible to get strong evaluation or impact data, it is particularly useful to share and analyse peer-reviewed, validated research and evidence from other countries with similar features and challenges in education. Producing short, accessible briefings to summarise data for decision makers, journalists and educators is also very valuable.

### Suggestions on what to focus on when monitoring a multilingual education initiative

1. What are teachers who are trying multilingual education noticing about which aspects of language and learning children are finding easier and more difficult? What can be done to help teachers strengthen difficult areas?
2. Are teachers experiencing positive or negative feelings in the process, and what about? What can be done to improve their positive experiences and confidence?
3. Do parents see any changes in their children's behaviour, skills or feelings?
4. What do children from different groups (boys, girls, disabled, different ethnic groups) think about the changes? What do children think is different for them about education – good and bad? What do children think can be done to improve things?

5. What information can be collected about learning outcomes? Can any of this be done by outsiders to ensure independence? Which experts are available to help with this?
6. What improvements can realistically be expected? The conditions may not all be in place yet for good quality multilingual education, which would reduce expectations of dramatically improved learning outcomes. However, benefits such as increased happiness, confidence and attendance of children should be apparent from even very basic changes to make school language better.
7. How is coordination and linkage between the different elements or levels of the programme going? Can these be strengthened? Does the order of activities need to be changed?
8. Which challenges have arisen? Which particular challenges are linked to the education system, and which are linked more to issues around language?
9. What is the cost of both separate activities and broader processes? What savings or increased efficiencies are being generated? Which costs are one-off? Which will continue if the approach is replicated elsewhere?
10. How could learning from this initiative be used to improve the way the wider school system works?

### Generating evidence from multilingual education programmes

**Focus on learning outcomes:** The main focus of studies on the impact of multilingual education should be on children's learning experiences and outcomes. This is a primary area of concern for most education stakeholders: how does learning in their mother tongue affect children's learning and progression through primary school? To examine this question, it is useful to conduct assessments of children's learning in relation to the key grade-level competencies in the national curriculum. You may also adapt international tools to assess children's development and learning, and track their progression through primary school by looking at indicators such as promotion and drop-out rates. Having a clear baseline will be important.

**Find a comparison group:** In evaluating multilingual education programmes, every effort should be made to compare children's outcomes in multilingual classes with what we would expect them to have achieved in a non-multilingual education setting. The easiest way to do this is to compare their learning with the learning of similar children who are not in multilingual classes. When possible, establish a group of comparison classes/schools when you are initiating the programme, to allow the comparison of outcomes over time. It is important that children in the comparison group be similar to the children in the multilingual classes, in terms of their ethnicity and the characteristics of their family and community, if possible.

When comparing outcomes of multilingual and non-multilingual schools in a project with non-formal or NGO-managed schools, take into account that multilingual schools may contain more children who would have dropped out of traditional monolingual schooling. These children may be those who experience problems with language learning, and/or who face other barriers to educational success in their lives. Be sure that this is adjusted for in the analysis.

**Clearly identify programme phases:** Since developing multilingual education initiatives takes time, it is important that the evaluation design identifies what should be expected at each stage of policy or programme implementation, and assesses progress in terms of these phased expectations.

**Document programme processes:** It is also useful if any evaluation can document the way the programme is implemented in practice, to see whether implementation is happening as expected and to learn from any unexpected changes. This will also help interpret the reasons why changes in children's outcomes are achieved in the programme, or not. As part of this, it is important to examine teaching/learning processes in practice through class observations.

**Document costs:** In order to decide whether to implement multilingual education more widely, policy makers and practitioners will need to know how much it will cost, and which of these costs are in addition to the cost of education in a traditional setting. Make sure that all costs

are documented, including both up-front investments and recurring costs. If possible, work with a researcher to do a cost-benefit analysis, which compares the increased costs of doing multilingual education with the changes in outcomes identified through an evaluation.

**Identify opportunities for learning:** If a large-scale evaluation is not possible, focus resources on small-scale studies that examine particular research and evaluation questions which are of relevance to the broader initiative and to other stakeholders' interests. See Box 15 on page 43.

**Identify areas for further learning:** Clearly identify programme challenges and unresolved questions. Educators and officials working out how to make real and sustainable improvements to children's learning should be encouraged to share their questions and concerns, so that researchers, donors and decision makers can focus future programming and research on areas where further work is needed.

None of these challenges should be used as a reason to stop working on what is already known and evidenced: that bringing children's home language into school, and using it as a foundation for learning across the curriculum and other languages, is one of the best ways to reverse educational disadvantage and allow multilingual countries to reach their full potential.

**BOX 15**

**Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) and language**

The Early Grade Reading Assessment method of testing children's reading skills is receiving attention from donors and education agencies, and is being rolled out in several countries with support from the World Bank (USAID, 2008). It is seen as a useful diagnostic tool to see what problems children are having with reading, and what corrective action to take.

An Early Grade Reading Assessment exercise can be useful to capture whether children are having difficulty with reading because they do not understand the school language. However, this can only be done if the assessment is designed and analysed properly.

Any EGRA exercise in a multilingual country must record which language each child being assessed speaks most often at home, and whether or not the reading assessment is taking place in that language. Analysis of the results should highlight this issue. When this is done, it is possible to see whether there are significant differences in children's reading depending on whether or not they speak the school language at home, or whether they use a home language which is not currently used for literacy.

Having this information can evidence the need to change school language, or the need for teachers to give children extra help with reading. Adapted EGRA assessments run by Save the Children in Nepal took this approach and discovered that speakers of minority languages not used in school were performing dramatically worse than other children. A mother tongue based multilingual education programme was developed as a result (Ochoa and Srestha, 2010). If EGRA assessments do not record whether children are reading in a first or second language, ineffective strategies are likely to be used to boost reading achievement.

EGRA assessments should not only sample the reading achievement of children in urban settings, or in majority language settings: EGRA should assess the reading skills of children in a range of settings and should capture disparities between children in different contexts. Subsequent policy and practice should focus on reducing these disparities.

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