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Language policy as text and language policy as practice

In examining the language policies of the various schools visited, certain gaps between policy and practice were identified. These include: (i) the gap between government LiEP[1] and School LiEP, (ii) the gap between School LiEP and claims about school practices or what they should be, and (iii) the gap between policies and claims on the one hand and actual practices on the other (manifested in observed classroom practices, direct observations of school environment, materials used in pedagogic contexts).

Some discrepancies between language as text and language as practice are the result of an unwillingness of the schools to implement a multilingual policy. In other cases, the schools showed a willingness and commitment to the cause, but they lacked support and resources.

These three themes (gaps) can be described as follows:

(i) Gap between govt LiEP and School LiEP.

In examining the first of these three gaps, the focus is on socially responsible and creative interpretations of policy.

The question when considering this theme is how far is a school willing to go in a multilingual direction? If the school adopted a democratic process of consultation it is very likely that it encountered diverse needs in terms of language in education. It would then have to arrive at a reasonable 'mix' of these diverse views. This mix would probably be based on a majority view, and availability of material and human resources. To the extent that this mix is broadly in tune with Government LiEP, the school policy could be classified as *conforming* with Government policy. In particular if the mix reflects sensitivity to local contexts it could be described as *socially responsible*. And to the extent that the school LiEP makes provisions for alternative possibilities in anticipation of changing demographics it could be describe as being *proactive and creative*.

The basic principles underlying the Government LiEP are:

- Cultural and linguistic diversity should be valued and protected
- Multilingualism should be promoted and learning in more than one language should be a general principle
- The home language should be maintained while providing access to additional languages through an additive approach to bilingualism
- Disadvantages resulting from different kinds of mismatches between home languages and languages of learning and teaching should be addressed.
- Guidelines regarding languages as subjects and language of learning and teaching are provided
- Description of the rights and responsibilities of the learner, school and Provincial Education Departments

For alignment to occur between Government and School LiEP, there should be an overlap between the content And intent of the two documents. The principles of the Government LiEP should be reflected in the School LiEP. On the surface, this was the case in almost all of the schools visited. However, very few of the schools followed the Government

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[1] LiEP = Language in education Policy

LiEP to the letter, as they did not follow an additive approach to multilingualism. The Government LiEp stipulates that the schools should either follow a single medium approach where content subjects are taught in the mother tongue and additional languages as subjects, or a dual medium approach where subjects are taught in English and home language in equal measure (none of the school were able to incorporate this approach).

Some schools also have different policies for different grades. These individual policies should be compatible with the Government LiEP. In general the policies follows these principles:

> "That we respect other languages. That no one language is more important than the others and that the medium of instruction is English. And that cognizance should be taken of other languages. And we try to encourage as much as possible multilingualism in our school and that is why we offer three languages." (Interview with principal)

(ii) Gap between School LiEP and claims about school practices

This gap reflects the difference between what the school claims it is doing concerning promoting multilingualism in the school and actual practices. These claims therefore do not necessarily reflect actual practices. In some schools the policy document painted a positive picture of the current state of language practices in the class. During lesson observations these practices were not noted as part of the actual class-room activities. It can then be said that the gap between the claims the school make and actual language policy is big.

(iii) Gap between school LiEP and claims on the one hand and actual school practices.

Three kinds of gap are anticipated:

1. A large gap, where policy makes larger claims that the existing practices. The gap between the declared policy of the school and its actual practice is large, suggests a predominance of rhetoric over practice, and is a negative example of policy and practice. We expect that in this case disabling factors would out-weigh enabling factors. Challenges for implementing multilingualism in such cases would mean searching for enabling factors. An example is a particular school that has a very progressive policy that completely mirrors the requirements of the Government LiEP. However, none of the practices mentioned in the policy is actually being implemented. An educators criticised the practicality of Government LiEP.

> "If they (learners and parents) choose to come to _____ they must understand that we are teaching in English. We don't have the time to teach the lesson twice; once to the entire class and again to the individual that struggles with English. If the boy's English is not up to scratch, maybe he must first do a bridging course somewhere else. This is not in line with where the government wants to go. The government wants us to include everyone of all languages, and I must teach in the language of my choice, but the learners who don't understand, I have to re-teach. Which is ludicrous."

2. A small gap, which would therefore show successful implementation of policy. The integration between language as text and language as practice can be described on three levels:

> A. The school merely conforms to Government LiEP.
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> B. The school uses the Government LiEP in a creative manner and interprets it according to its local environment.
>
> C. The school uses the Government LiEP in an innovative and proactive manner.

3. A third kind of gap worth looking at is also a large gap but this time where the paper policy is too modest in relation to actual practices. This gap would suggest that schools need to update their paper policy to reflect the richness of their actual practices. The approach here would be from practice to policy. In a particular school multilingualism practices extended far beyond the initial scope of the policy. The school addresses the appreciation and encouragement of multiculturalism in its fullest sense:

> "... we had to provide jugs in the toilets for washing facilities for the Muslim children we know that some children shaving their heads was a sign of mourning... the little things learned were very useful and I think we all learn so much from each other... and parent also taught us you know, Muslim parents come in...the staff is all right with this and we are now going to organize similar talks for parents. Parents are becoming aware that they need to learn about these things (other cultures). For instance there was a child whose father passed away he was a Muslim child. None of us knew what to do, what do we do? What are their mourning customs? How do we cope with this, take flowers to the house? Parent ask, "I'm having a Muslim child come over to play. What is *halal* food, what can I serve them?" So, we're starting this talk with our parents with groups of parents talking with each other. The same thing happened with one of our Jewish teachers ... and we found out that we're not supposed to take flowers that we must in fact take food so that the family wouldn't have to worry about food. So, we're learning from each other all the time and all this is very, very interesting and part of culture is language so it's an important aspect."

And:

> "You see I'm fascinated by it; I'm fascinated by cultural differences so you always encourage your learners and show respect ...and by talking and sharing. The teachers do it too. The children now share and say thing like "ah that's like our Christmas, we have Christmas what celebrations do you have? And we talk about it. We (the school) then do a big theme on celebrations and we celebrate our differences and our similarities... We have Zulu reading and Hindi reading....and the children dressed up and told us exactly what happened. The teachers coordinate all that... the parents are producing a recipe book and we're having a food festival in the last term. We've always done Christmas carols at the end of the year, this year we're changing that, but we thought we would take the theme of light this year that's common to all the religions we have and we'll have a festival of light we the Jewish carnival, *Id*, *Dibali* and then we'll have Christmas... It not preaching, just getting to know about others... it not the doctrine. We have assembly for the festivals... dancing, music and other cultural activities. That's how we incorporate our multicultural, multilingual environment. It's lovely."

The extent of the gap on all three levels (the gap between government LiEP and School LiEP, (ii) the gap between School LiEP and claims about school practices or what they should be, and (iii) the gap between policies and claims on the one hand and actual practices on the other) can be determined by evaluating the different case studies against the following criteria:

a) Medium of Instruction / Language of Learning and Teaching

Most of the schools stipulate English as the medium of instruction. In some instances a Straight for English approach is followed where learners are only allowed to speak English and they are actively discouraged to speak their home languages.

> "It's our goal, but unfortunately learners aren't sticking to that. We'd like them to speak English all over, inside the classroom, outside the classroom wherever they are."

Many educators, parents and learners prefer to follow the route of English as LOLT (with code-switching and peer-assistance allowed), although some individuals expressed a concern of the loss of indigenous cultures if a language is not actively promoted. In most cases all communication with parents and the SGB members are conducted in English. A participant explains the tension between home language and English as medium of instruction:

> "Yes, I do agree (with the school's language policy). There is a school of thought; some people say that children learn language best when they are younger. They are more receptive to language. The other side says children become more confused if the language of learning and teaching is different from their home language. But I think that this culture of multilingualism works well because it teaches children that other people's languages are important and that fits in with our junior policy of tolerance and acceptance of everybody's language. I am happy with the policy as it is."

An educator explained the learners' negative attitude towards their home language as such:

> "I will talk a lot about black community, we are becoming elites, we are becoming sophisticated, meaning in most homes sophistication means forgetting your culture. Forgetting your roots. That is where the language is. If you find people at home forcing themselves to speak a borrowed language like English - being black. What do you expect from the kids? The kids are going to have a negative attitude to the language [home language/mother tongue]. Those are the challenges we face whereby parents are not proud of their language. They deprive their kids - that is language deprivation. Those are our challenges. You say to a child, take this book and go and read at home. That poor child does not have anyone to help him read a book in mother tongue and he comes back saying, "My mother cannot help me". .... It does not matter where you live or work, it is being proud of your roots. Teaching your children your mother tongue and motivating them to respect their mother tongue."

An exception to the Straight for English approach will be where the learners are taught in a home language and English is provided as a subject. This approach meets the aim of the Government LiEP, where an additive approach is encouraged: ...

> "...basically because the medium of instruction in our school is Northern Sotho we actually teach the learners in Northern Sotho ... let me say from Grade 3 some words are introduced (in English), then from Grade 4 English is taught as a subject. There are periods allocated for Northern Sotho and English. English. ... In most cases the books are written in English and if the terms, the mathematical terms, are either difficult or cannot permit the learners to understand, the teacher then switches to Northern Sotho to let them understand ... and uses objects to illustrate and demonstrate the content or the concepts to help the learners to understand."

Many participants emphasized the importance of home language education:

> "Kids, especially in the early years, should learn in their own language or at least in a situation where a teacher understands enough of their [learners] language... and has good enough grasp of what a multilingual lesson really is, and what a disadvantage it is for those children who are not allowed that privilege or that situation ...that they will be able to handle those kind of lesson. I think we require very specialised teaching of teachers themselves which our teachers have not been given".

b) Language as subject

The schools offer other languages such as Afrikaans and other African languages as additional languages. Although the Government LiEP state that equal time should be given to all languages, in most cases English receives more time on the time table, which shows that other languages are not viewed as priority. An educator explained the link between English and other languages:

> "We (learners/staff at the school) also learn other languages and the reason for learning other languages is to facilitate communication between the different language groups, to promote respect for your languages ... and to prepare them, I think it's a very important point, to prepare them to be able to earn a living locally, nationally and internationally. And if you know, for example, because we teach Zulu here, if you know Zulu and you can communicate with the people it would help you to earn a living... you can speak to the people in Zulu who don't understand English "...

c) Aim of multilingualism

The reason why multilingualism is promoted should also be considered. In some cases encouraging African languages are equated to fostering cultural identity, and the home language is promoted to increase cultural awareness. The ideal would be home language teaching for its functionality (utilitarian purpose). At present, many learners, parents and educators feel that mastering English holds more practical value, as the labour market and further study is predominantly English. But, many learners feel that it is important for them to retain their home language:

> "Some of us who are not SePedi speakers feel that we will loose our tradition, culture. Not all languages are SeTswana. Some of the words I am loosing, I am loosing the language. I also like to know my language" (Learner)

And,

> "I personally chose to come to .   so that I could learn Sepedi. I started schooling at English school but when my parents asked me if I wanted to continue from that school, I told them that I wanted to learn Sepedi and I then came to _____."
>
> (Learners)

d) Environment

Although the rural/urban setting of the school influences the implementation of the policy, certain factors in the environment can promote the implementation of the LiEP. This includes embracing learning practices such as code-switching, peer teaching (or a buddy system), effective LSMs and the existence of bridging programmes. Evidence of the implementation of a policy that promotes multilingualism can also be found in the posters, charts and class-room decorations. An educator explain how language barriers can be overcome:

> "We're not teaching in isolation as language and that's all that it is. We interact in other learning areas and we're also helping them in what they're doing in other subjects as well. We teach it in their home language so that they can understand it better when they go to other classes as well ... and when they encounter problem the learners come and say, "Oh we've got a problem in this learning area" and we can clarify it in our mother tongue. ...The role of the mother tongue in education should be to simplifying the education system to the kids...we do essays, debates, grammar, letter writing so cognitively...we follow the guidelines of the national curriculum and follow OBE. We're not doing our own thing, we're guided by policy here."

Educators face many challenges in implementing code-switching in the class:

> "I think the only challenges that I experience is that you must switch languages. Like in my class I have to switch from Sepedi to English just to try and cater for just this one, one boy. And then the other challenge is that my class is too large, I have got nearly 52 and is very difficult to maintain them especially regarding the curriculum, the RNCS let me say OBE, is very strenuous."
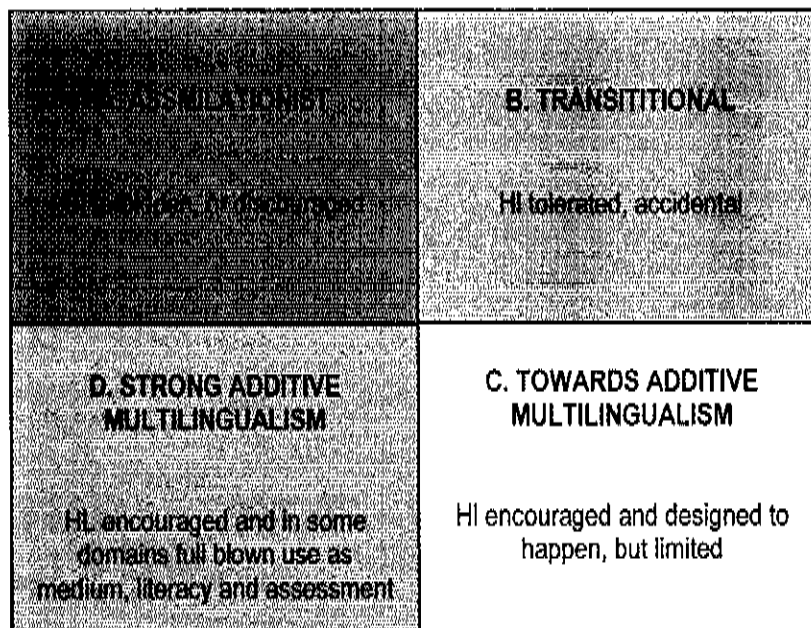
e)   Language as admission criteria

In some cases proficiency in specific languages, e.g. English, is used a criteria for admission to the school. On the other hand, some schools hold clearly that a learner should not be denied the opportunity to attend a school because she is unable to speak the language. In some cases the parents stipulate that the medium of instruction should remain English.

> "The reason they are bringing their children here is to be taught in English, and if we change anything they will take their children out."

An example of where language is applied as criteria to determine whether a child should be allowed in the school:

> "With regard to the admission policy within the school, eh we do make all the children who apply to the school, to the come to the school, we do make them write eh, an entrance exam which is based on language. We have a very, very good working understanding with a little school at the church just around the corner, which is school called Vuleka, which is a bridging school. What happens is that we let the child write the test we also interview the parents, If we find that the child can not speak English properly, what we do is we then send this child to Vuleka, which is the bridging school for a year or two and then what we do is that we do accept the child as a Rosebank primary child and when the child is ready when she, you know, when Vuleka believes that she is ready to come to the main school then she comes back to us. So it's a working understanding we have with that bridging school, us and the department do know about it and OFSTED knows about it as well and is a very good relationship and works very well. So language efficiency is quite high."

After considering the cases against the above mentioned criteria and determining the extent of the gaps, it would be possible to plot the various schools on the following quadrants, which emerged based on varying degrees of strength on a cline from weak to strong additive multilingualism.

A. ASSIMILATIONIST	B. TRANSITITIONAL
HL not discouraged	HL tolerated, accidental
D. STRONG ADDITIVE MULTILINGUALISM	**C. TOWARDS ADDITIVE MULTILINGUALISM**
HL encouraged and in some domains full blown use as medium, literacy and assessment	HL encouraged and designed to happen, but limited

In general it can be said that most of the schools fall within quadrant B and C, with a small number striving towards quadrant D.

Enabling and disenabling factors

The following enabling and disenabling factors were identified that either promotes or hampers an alignment between policy as text and policy as practice:

- o   Number of (qualified) educators

Schools are confronted with the difficult dilemma of finding enough qualified educators to present multilingual classes. At present, educators are not adequately prepared to teach a class with diverse linguistic groupings. The following statement from one of the educators mirrors this:

> "Yeah, (pause) I think for some children teaching in mother tongue could be perfect, but my concern is the teachers. Would there be qualified staff available? There'd be so many languages spoken, how do you justify that and who pays for it because I think part of it is dependent on choice most parents choose the school they want to send their children to for that particular reason. "

- o   Time

The schools find it difficult to fit additional language classes into the time-table. This practical constraint disenables effective policy implementation.

> "...main difficulty is having sufficient time allocated to the languages to do justice to them. There is not enough time that the department has allocated for languages, if they want to encourage multilingualism. I will give you a grade 7 scenario. We are allocated 20 periods over a two-week cycle. 20% of the time is allocated to languages and of that 20% we are now teaching three languages. So what we have done, we are suppose to give equal amount of time to all languages but we have to spend more time on the language of teaching, which is English. So we have taken 50% of the time for English and 25% of time to the other two languages. And that we have done right throughout the school and that is not sufficient for the other languages. Not for the main language and also not for the other two languages" (Interview, Principal, June, 2004).

- o   Financial resources

The schools do not have sufficient resources (financially and otherwise) to draw on to ensure that the classroom is multilingual and culturally sensitive. The school cannot afford to employ more educators, and is only able to provide additional languages as subjects if a minimum number of learners express a need for these languages. Minority groups are therefore not automatically catered for and it becomes difficult to redress the mismatch between home languages and LoLT.

- o   Material and learning aids

Very few learning support material is available in African languages. The language policy can encourage learners to read and speak their home language, but without access to relevant LSMs, this becomes problematic.

> "The main difficulties for the implementation of the language in education policy has been... the lack of resources. It's better now, they are beginning to publish reading materials".

Educators also complain that it is difficult to teach in a language other than English, as there is a lack of terminology for technical, specialised subjects such as Mathematics, Science and Biology. A participant noted:

o   Awareness

In many cases, the participant, which includes learners educators and parents, were not aware of the existence of a language policy at the school. This disenables effective policy implementation, as the role-players are not aware what the policy stipulates, which leads to limited buy-in and commitment.

In some instances the involvement of the parents and SGB was not adequately harnessed.

> "We teach in English and that is all the SGB has to know."

o   Proficiency of educators in languages

All educators are not able to speak and teach in all official languages. Educators can dissuade learners to use their home language in the class-room if they are unable to understand the language. It can be too big a demand to expect the educators to be proficient in all languages. The proficiency of the learners and parents vary across different schools.

> "I am comfortable because ... my first language [IsiXhosa] is one of their languages. I am not relying on English only.
> So those that understand English is fine for them, and those that don't understand English I am fine with them too...
> in explaining and in everything and carrying out instructions. Though the lesson is not like the Zulu one, where carry
> the lesson in English for everybody to understand. It's English but at the end of the day I ... get a chance to explain
> to them in the language they understand".

o   Diversity

Most of the classrooms are linguistically heterogeneous. It becomes problematic for the educator to teach the same lesson to learners speaking a range of languages. It is sometimes difficult to distinguish whether the learner is performing badly because she does not grasp the LoLT or whether she is experiencing conceptual, reasoning obstacles.

> "...the use of English is International for careers and interacting with the outside world, for progress in life. Diversity
> causes problems. Imagine, Seswana, Zulu, Sepedi in the same class and there are no terminologies in these
> languages. Even with borrowed terminology the learners' responses to questions have to be in English. So English
> should be used .The problem is that there are too many African languages. I understand only two. Although other
> educators and learners can help explain things to learners who don't understand."

The influence of globalism can also be seen in many of the more affluent schools. The learners view multilingualism as the ability to speak international languages and don't see the immediate value of mastering an African language. The school has to contend with other cultural influences such as the "Americanisation of black youth" and the "computer generation". English, in modernised version, is the language most often used on the internet and with computers, and home languages are not recognised as computer-friendly languages.

o   Leadership (championship)

The most important enabling factor is the presence of a driving force (in the form of the principle, educator, etc) in the school that prioritises multilingualism and ensures that the school strive actively to improve its language practices. This champion should be in a position of authority to ensure that the principles of the LiEP is enforced and taken seriously.

- o Involvement by community and parents

In many cases the community and parents are not supportive of multilingualism. Some parents feel that learning in English is more advantageous for their children and they do not encourage multilingualism in the classroom.