



BILINGUAL AND MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION: LANGUAGE INTERACTION

KEYWORDS

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ABSTRACT

This article presents some aspects of bilingual and multilingual education. The aim is to briefly present and discuss some similar and differing trends within the field of bilingual and multilingual education into both outside and inside perspectives. On the basis of the experiences a cross-professional framework for understanding bilingual and multilingual education policies and individual language learning paths is suggested and discussed.

1. INTRODUCTION

Language is a bridge between cultures as much as it is a tool for communication. The complex role of language has led to controversy whether it is better to provide education in a minority language (a language spoken by the minority of a population) or simply educating students in the dominant language of a given region. There is no one-size-fits-all solution to the problem: 20 percent of the population of the United States speak a language at home other than English, 56 percent of Europeans are bilingual, and it is believed that over half of the entire world's population is bilingual.

Given the growing size of the bilingual population, students should receive bilingual education starting in elementary school, in which humanities and social studies are taught in one of the country's minority languages, and math and the sciences are taught in the dominant language. After establishing fluency in both languages, from middle school onwards, students would be taught their classes in the dominant language — in preparation for college admissions or job searches, depending on their intended career — in addition to one literature class continued to be taught in a minority language. This ensures that students are more skilled and maintain a competitive edge when applying to colleges or for jobs, and that students retain their newly acquired command of their minority language.

Even if one has not grown up in a bilingual environment, it is not too late to reap the potential benefits of a multilingual education while at college. Although MIT teaches subjects primarily in English and has no foreign language requirement, students still have opportunities to immerse themselves into a foreign culture through Foreign Languages and Literatures. The FL&L department offers a selection of foreign language classes at a range of levels, as well as culture classes that have quite a popular reputation. In fact, I have handfuls of friends who began studying a second, or third language at the Institute. They were able to study these at a level advanced enough to spend a summer in the country of that language, and returned with a newfound appreciation of a culture that was once foreign to them.

Multilingual Education typically refers to "first-language-first" education that is, schooling which begins in the mother tongue and transitions to additional languages. Typically MLE programs are situated in developing countries where speakers of minority languages, i.e. non-dominant languages, tend to be disadvantaged in the mainstream education system. There are increasing calls to provide first-language-first education to immigrant children from immigrant parents who have moved to the developed world.

2. BENEFITS TO LEARNING A LANGUAGE INCLUDE

- being more efficient communicators.
- being consistently better able to deal with distractions, which may help offset age-related declines in mental dexterity.
- having a better ear for listening and sharper memories.

- being able to learn languages more quickly and efficiently particularly if an individual speaks Greek or Latin given that these languages influenced most other western languages.
- being better problem solvers, gaining multiple perspectives on issues at hand.
- Learners likely to be excluded from the educational system, whether due to poverty, faith, ethnicity, etc., or because they belong to minority language groups. Very often, such individuals do not master the national and/or official language.
- Since girls and women often form the majority of out-of-school populations within these groups, a multilingual approach is particularly active to promote gender parity.

3. UNESCO PROMOTES BILINGUAL EDUCATION (BE)/MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION (MLE) FROM THE EARLIEST YEARS OF SCHOOLING

- It lays a solid foundation for learning
- It improves access to education, especially for girls
- When used at home and/or at school, it promotes literacy in the mother tongue (L1) and later in the second language (L2)
- It facilitates learning both of academic subjects as well as the second language (L2). At school, children can concentrate on the subject matter instead of struggling to understand the language of instruction as well.
- It improves learning outcomes as it promotes dialogue and interaction between learners and teachers by means of better communication and understanding
- It raises the quality of education by emphasising understanding and creativity rather than repetitive memorization.
- Despite the known benefits of bilingual/multilingual education, the principle of education in the mother tongue is not always respected. More often than not, children are taught in a language that they do not master.

4. HOW TO IMPLEMENT MLE?

- Creating a favourable environment prior to the actual implementation of a multilingual education project, upstream work is needed. This includes inter alia the following:
- Conducting an analysis of the sociolinguistic situation in consultation with concerned stakeholders such as learners, parents and school officials in order to ascertain which languages are used by whom and for what purposes.
- Defining the educational objectives of MLE
- Ensuring that the concerned populations adhere to the project from the start
- Launching information and communication campaigns which are helpful notably when implemented through traditional and electronic media
- Formulating a language policy addressing all levels of education and integrating it in a national plan of education
- Ensuring sustainable technical and - financial support, with government involvement regarding challenges related to human

and –financial resources.

5. MATERIALS

- Teaching/learning materials should be developed in local languages so as to entirely reflect local cultures.
- The use of available computer programmes and local publishing facilities should be envisaged for the production of appropriate teaching/learning materials at reasonable costs
- Universities, academic centres and Institutions should invest in language development (standardization of the writing system, lexical development and grammatical description) to support the development of materials in local languages.

6. TEACHER/EDUCATOR TRAINING

- Educators and teachers must be trained to teach in a multilingual/multicultural environment
- Educators and teachers should receive relevant training to enable them to teach in the learners' mother tongue (L1) as well as in the second language (L2) should this not be their own language
- Educators and teachers should be provided with methodology and pedagogy adapted to teaching in the mother tongue
- Educators and teachers must fully master the learners' languages and know their sociocultural backgrounds.

7. LEARNERS

- School curricula should be based on local cultures and themes should deal with the daily life and activities familiar to the learners
- Learners' knowledge base should be taken into account when implementing MLE
- BE/MLE can be set up provided that children have a good command of their mother tongue(s) and know their values and cultures well
- Learners should be encouraged to use L1 at home as the mother tongue is generally transmitted in the domestic environment
- L2 should be the language of instruction and L1 a subject only when the children have achieved literacy in L1

8. REFERENCE

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