

Language and Education Policies in Pakistan and Far East Asia: A Comparative Analysis

Dr Farida Yasmin Panhwar*
Dr Mukesh Kumar Khatwani[†]

Abstract

This paper critically evaluates the language and education policies of Southeast Asian (SEA) States including China, the Philippines, Cambodia, and Myanmar to assess the role assigned to official and indigenous languages in the main stream of aforementioned states. Keeping in view the language and education policies of SEA states, the past and present language and education policies of Pakistan have been compared in the paper too. The researchers have designed a model and labelled it as the 'Democratic Model of Language and Education Policy' (DMLEP) that can help the language policymakers to protect the rights of indigenous and minor languages. The model highlights the promotion of early education of children in their mother tongue. Additionally; it evaluates the status of indigenous languages in order to promote the language rights of the indigenous languages of the region. This is an important and sensitive area for a state to design such language policy that can satisfy every speech community.

Keywords: *language policy, language planning, ethnicity, indigenous languages, minor languages.*

Introduction

Language is perhaps the strongest and most lasting bond that glues a speech community from the inside as well as promotes the identity of the group from the outside to show who they are (Cummins, 2000). Generally, it is observed that for a nation, linguistic identity is

*Assistant Professor, Institute of English Language & Literature, University of Sindh. Email: fareeda.panhwar@usindh.edu.pk (Corresponding Author)

[†] Associate Professor, Area Study Centre, Far East & Southeast Asia, University of Sindh. Email: mukesh.khatwani@usindh.edu.pk

a sentimental issue. Furthermore, it is a more problematic especially in the multilingual state to rank one or two languages as the official languages in the language and education policies and ensure the linguistic rights of other languages. The linguistic rights are 'concerning the individual and collective rights to choose the language or languages for communication in a private or public atmosphere. Linguistic rights in international law are usually dealt in the rights of a child to speak his/her mother tongue and protect and support the minor and endangered languages' (Farida, Khatwani & Abbasi, 2018). The constitution of a democratic country protects linguistic rights through a balanced and widely accepted language and education policies (Singh, Zhang & Besmel, 2012). According to De Swaan (2004), more than 98% of the world's languages are *Peripheral Languages*. The term *Peripheral Language* refers to the world's many small languages and some of them are oral in nature, without any written script (Singh et al., 2012). More than 100 languages are central languages in the various parts of world and learned as a second language, including English, Arabic, Chinese, French, Spanish and Hindi. In some states, these central languages belong to minor speech communities but they are widely used as first or official and academic languages in the presence of indigenous languages spoken by majority of the population (De Swaan, 2004).

This paper critically evaluates the role assigned to the official, indigenous and minor languages in the language and education policies in some of the Southeast Asian (SEA) states like China, Myanmar, Cambodia and the Philippines. Next to this, paper also analyses the past and present language and education policies of Pakistan, comparing it with the language and education policies of SEA states. This paper also presents a language model designed in the light of the study of some language and education models implemented in various states, which are successfully protecting and projecting the indigenous and minor languages. The need to

design such a model is essential, especially in Pakistan, which is linguistically known as a sensitive region. The focus of the model is to ensure the fundamental language right of a child to be educated in mother tongue (MT). This model may be helpful in resolving the language and ethnic tensions.

Literature Review

In the end of 20th century and the beginning of 21st the language planners, practitioners and scholars diverted their attention from learning a second language to adopt their mother tongue as medium of instruction. The scholars believe that the Mother Tongue Education (MTE) improves children's abilities during early education, which they can carry to their end of educational career and achievement (De Swaan, 2004). The need to implement the MTE programme especially in multilingual contexts where one or two languages are declared as the official languages, has complicated the situation to decide the language of education in the presence of their MT. To resolve this issue, UNESCO suggested "education is the best carried on through the mother tongue of a pupil" (1953, p. 6). On the contrary, the ground reality is that, generally, official languages are declared as the academic languages, neglecting the native languages and depriving the child to be taught in MT, which is the fundamental right of the child. Focusing on the importance of MT, UNESCO charter elaborates:

Mother-tongue instruction should be the best way for children to learn as it bridges the gap between home language and language of instruction. Every language is sufficient to give high cognitive skills to its users and there are no major or minor languages. Therefore, mother-tongue instruction should be extended as long as possible. A Lingua Franca or a language of wider communication cannot be a substitute for the mother-tongue, and it should be

avoided until the child fully acquired their mother-tongue (UNESCO, 1953, p. 11).

The latest report of UNESCO (2017) depicts a mixed picture of Southeast Asian countries. It states that 'Southeast Asian languages of instruction policies have traditionally emphasized the official and national languages. However, over the past two decades, a movement towards multilingual education (MLE) has arisen in the region' (p, 2). The report illustrates the examples of some of the SEA countries like Cambodia, the Philippines, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam, which are focusing on the education in native languages (UNESCO, 2017). The same policies are implemented in some states of Europe and Africa. However, MTE is confined to the very primary stage of education and medium of instruction (MOI) switched into national and official languages after the primary education. Similar education policies are followed by the countries like Pakistan, Botswana and Malaysia etc.

Following the same steps, the Soviet Union introduced language policy to protect the minority languages under Lenin notion of 'self-determination of all nations'. Stalin revised this policy in the 1930s in order to support 'Russification' bringing a great blow to the minor languages because a large population was forced to abandon their mother tongue by learning Russian (Schiffman 2012, p.150). The enlightened aspect of the UNESCO declaration is that some states are accepting the linguistic diversity and paying the due attention to educate a child in MT. In this regard, some SEA countries like Cambodia; the Philippines, and Myanmar have initiated MTE programme to recognize the native and minor languages of the states. The glaring example is the Philippines; linguistically rich region where more than 183 languages are spoken as indicated in the following figure (Lewis, Simons & Fennig, 2016).

To implement the suggestions of UNESCO Government of the Philippines initiated the mother-tongue-based education

programme in 2012. In this regard, the Education Department of the Philippines has proposed two programmes: first, is the *Multiple Monolingual Model*, comprising the students with the same MT in the monolingual classes and second is *Lingua Franca Model* in which more than 25 indigenous languages are the MOI (Gonzalez, 1998). The crux of this programme is that first four years schooling of the children should be in their MT. This move was initiated to enable a child to read, write and speak in MT as well as protect the minor languages of the state. This programme faces a number of challenges, especially the choice of language of a speech community as MT among many alternatives, which many times mismatch with students' mother languages. However, this programme is followed in 46,000 schools and it is successfully expanding further (Trudell, 2016). By introducing MTE programmes, the Philippines is not only protecting the fundamental rights of the children but she is officially protecting the indigenous languages.

Similar language and education policies are implemented in Cambodia, where 90% of the population speaks *Khmer*, the official language of the state, along with some minor languages (Kosonen, 2013). In 2007, Cambodia introduced the MTE programme through 'The Education Law', which grants the rights to the people to select the minority language(s) as their MOI. The law was modified and strengthened in 2014-15 by introducing the "Multilingual Education National Action Plan" (MENAP). This law makes the government responsible to implement the bilingual education programmes (education in MT and national language) for the children speaking indigenous languages in the highland provinces (Kosonen, 2013, 2017).

Following the Cambodian education policies, Myanmar initiated Mother Tongue Education (MTE) programme. Myanmar is the state where more than 117 languages are spoken including *Burmese*, spoken by the majority of the population and it is the official language of the state (Kosonen, 2013, 2017). Till 2008, the *Burmese*

was the sole language of MOI but in 2014 state introduced 'The National Education Law' acknowledging the linguistic diversity and protecting the indigenous languages (Aye & Sercombe, 2014) Myanmar introduced MTE programme, which is known as Myanmar Indigenous Network for Education (MINE) in 2014, making indigenous languages of the state as the medium of instruction (Ref).

Contrary to the other SEA countries the situation in China is different. The Chinese constitution protects the *Hanyu*, also known as *Han* language, which is the language spoken by more than 92% of the population but *Putonghua* (form of Mandarin Chinese) is considered as the official language (Ref). In practice, Mandarin is the only MOI and language of textbooks (Ref). However, students learn Mandarin along with some minor languages like *Xinjiang*, *Uyghur* as basic MOI in the early stages of the education (Ref). Hence, like Pakistan, the language of minority is imposed as official and academic languages on the *Han* language speakers. Following figure illustrate the linguistic map of China:

Before discussing the language and education policy of Pakistan and comparing it with the other states of the Southeast Asia, it is important to discuss the socio-linguistic scenario of Pakistan. Pakistan is a multilingual society where more than 72 languages are spoken (Rahman, 1995). The official language of the state is Urdu, the language of migrated-Indian-Muslims, and English, the language of colonizers, mostly used for official correspondence. Sindhi, Punjabi, Pashto, and Balochi are the largely spoken languages but they are not used at any level of official correspondence. Figure 3 indicates the various languages of Pakistan and their geographical context.

Unlike the UNESCO declaration (1953) the language and education policies of Pakistan are highly politically motivated as compared to the SEA states (Farida, 2018). In 1970, the Government of Pakistan

declared Urdu, the language of small portion of the population, neglecting the major indigenous languages under the slogan of 'symbol of national unity' (Rahman, 1995). They neglected native languages including Bengali, the largest spoken language of the East and West Pakistan. It is the general truth of time that "ethnic groups react violently against any policy or act that underestimate their language" (Farida, Khatwani & Abbasi 2018, p. 14). In such situations, the grieved speech communities consider such policies as a potential threat to the existence of their languages and they fight for the legal status of and legalize their language rights). The declaration of Urdu as an official language of Pakistan in 1970 triggered the violence, which took the shape of Movement known as *Bhasha Andolan* (the Language Movement). This perhaps is the only example in history that a state was born because of differences among the various ethnic communities on the national language policy. The reaction of the Bengali speech communities can be rationalised because after all, a language is a nation's symbol of identity and existence (Shah, 1978). Ultimately, Pakistan was disintegrated into two parts as a result of language controversy. However, the 1973 constitution of Pakistan reflects the same languages and education policies, which had creating unrest among the native language speakers before the separation of East Pakistan. . Three clauses in Pakistan's constitution of 1973, Chapter 4, Article 251, describe the country's language policy:

1. The National language of Pakistan is Urdu and arrangements shall be made for its being used for official and other purposes within fifteen years from the commencing day.
2. Subject to clause (1) the English language may be used for official purposes until arrangements are made for its replacement by Urdu.

3. Without prejudice to the status of the National language, a Provincial Assembly may by law prescribe measures for the teaching, promotion and use of a provincial language in addition to the national languages.

Although the constitution of the Pakistan shifts its burden on the provincial government to decide the fate of indigenous languages. However, the provincial governments have never taken any serious effort to restore the status of most spoken languages in the provinces (Farida, 2018). Hence, the provincial languages 'play no role in the official life of the provinces and their educational role is restricted to primary or secondary level in the government educational institutions' (Mansoor, 1993, p. 6).

The general survey of the various SEA states and Pakistan highlights one important issue i.e., the MT is made essential for early education of the child while in the advanced academic stage, the state's official languages are MOI. Generally, the official languages belong to the language of minor population (e.g. Urdu in Pakistan and Putonghua in Mandarin) and they are imposed on the majority population. Another fact is that the minor and foreign languages are officially declared MOI at the all levels restricting MT to the level of 1st to 5th grade. Thus, children of the region are deprived of their fundamental right to be taught in their MTs. This is the violation of the charter of UNESCO (1953). So far, the academic and language scenario in the SEA states and Pakistan illustrates that the whole attention is focused on the protection and development of the official language(s) in the social, cultural, political and academic domains while less or no role is given to the native major and minor languages. Such situation has created an unrest and violence in the region on the ethnic basis. Above all, neglecting the minor languages at official level is minimizing their functionality at any level (Farida, 2018). Such situation is pushing some languages, especially, minor and *Peripheral Languages* into the endangered status. UNO declared many languages of the world as endangered languages and in this

list, a high ratio of language belongs to Asia (UNESCO, 2017).

In current circumstances, a large portion of the population is thinking on the track that “should we take steps to protect the minor languages or be a silent spectator to let these languages, culture and civilisation die inaudibly? We think it is the high time that the policy makers must realise the value and need of language and education policies, which should be more democratic in nature. The paper aims to present a new model to protect our language and develop consensus on language and education policies. To resolve the language and education policy issue, we suggest ‘*Democratic Model of Language and Education Policy*’ (DMLEP). This model focuses on the notion of “self-determination of all the indigenous and minor languages of the state” (Castellino & Gilbert, 2003). DMLEP has the following salient characteristics:

- The allocation of official status to the main native languages of the state, region or province through the amendments in the states’ constitutions.
- The criterion of selection of main language/s should be according to the strength of the population of language of the region.
- The indigenous languages can be given equal importance in the official, social, political and educational domains.
- The native language of the state or province/area should be the sole academic language in the primary school level.
- The lingua franca of the state and the global languages must be taught from grade three, initially as a language subject and after grade 10th as the medium of instruction.
- However, the teaching of MT should not be ceased but it should be continued in the higher education system.

- The 'village schools' may establish which provide education in the regional languages.
- The language of instruction in the village schools can be determined by the strength of the speech community in a particular region and by the language environment.

The main purpose of the model is to ensure that the due rights must be given to all major and minor languages and enhance the sense to all speech communities that their languages are officially accepted and protected. The nucleus of the DMLEP is to follow the multilingual education rights, by providing the education to the children in mother tongue. DMLEP has the similar notion as explained in 'Soviet Union Model of Language Policy' (SUMLP) that all the ethnic languages of states are officially protected. However, SUMLP failed to support the linguistic diversity in Russia due to the over emphasis on "Russification" (Leprêtre, 2002). On the contrary, fundamental purpose of DMLEP is to provide less space to any one language to act as main or dominant language and ensure linguistic diversity, provide equal right to all languages and child's education in MT. The similar models are successfully running in the multilingual scenario of the Philippines and Australia, as discussed in the early sections of this paper. DMLEP has the following main goals to achieve:

- 1) Accept and protect linguistic diversity;
- 2) Accept the linguistic rights of every speech communities;
- 3) Ensure the future of official language/s;
- 4) Protect the endangered languages;
- 5) Intact child's right of MTE;
- 6) Improving a child's linguistic, cultural; cognitive and Academic development; and
- 7) Avoiding the ethnic unrest.

With all such alluring statements one important question rises 'where to frame lingua franca of a state and global language'. We realize that lingua franca of a country is the wielding tool to connect the various speech communities at one language podium. We also know that discarding global languages is a day-dreaming and longing in vain to have a new generation who will achieve success in business or technology or any other field at the global level. Therefore, to address such challenges, we suggest that the teaching of lingua franca and global languages must be taught from 3rd grade of schooling as a language subject. This is not a novel or innovative design, in fact, it was followed during the colonized period in Indian Sub-continent. English as a language subject was introduced in grade 6th in the government schools. After the grade 10th, the English was the sole MOI in all government and private schools.

We understand that to implement such delicate truce - a consensual stage is complex, intriguing and difficult but not impossible. It may need a long hard work to get consensus of the stakeholders but to respect the linguistic rights of an individual, to protect the languages from extinction, to teach a child in MT and above all to resolve the ethnic and linguistic concerns. It is highly important to change the language and academic policies that are not democratic in nature.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to provide a detailed survey of the language and education policies of the various SEA states and has compared it with the prevailing language and education policies of Pakistan. Realizing the increasing threat and alarming tag associated with many major and minor languages and sole focus on the official languages, we have suggested the '*Democratic Model of Language and Education Policy*' (DMLEP). This model needs to address the deficiencies of the present language and education policy framework. This is highly important that the government must realise the ethnic unrest and must take initiatives to provide

the official protection to the endangered and minor languages of the region and education right of a child in MT.

References

- Aye, K. & Sercombe, P. (2014). Language, education and nation-building in Myanmar. In P. Sercombe & R. Tupas (Eds.). *Language, education and nation-building: Assimilation and shift in Southeast Asia* (pp. 148–164). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Castellino, J. & Gilbert, J. (2003). Self-determination, indigenous peoples and minorities, *Macquarie Law Journal*, 3, 155- 178.
- Cummins, J. (2000). *Language, power and pedagogy*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- De Swann, A. (2004). *Word of world: The global language system*. Cambridge: Blackwe.
- Farida, P., Khatwani, M.K. & Abbasi, I. (2018). Language Policies in Pakistan and its impacts on Sindh: A critique. *Grassroots*, 52 (2), 13-23.
- Farida, P. (2018). Multilingualism in Sindh, Pakistan: the functions of code-switching used by educated, multilingual, Sindhi women and the factors driving its use. Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Sussex, UK.
- Gonzalez, A. (1998). The language planning situation in the Philippines, *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Studies*, 19, 487–525.
- Kosonen, K. (2013). The use of non-dominant languages in education in Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam: Two steps forward, one step back. In C. Benson & K. Kosonen (Eds.). *Language issues in comparative education*. (pp. 39-58) Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

- Leprêtre, M. (2002). Language policies in the soviet successor states: A brief assessment on language, linguistic rights and national identity. *Papeles del Este*, No. 3. Retrieved from <http://webs.ucm.es/BUCM/cee/papeles/03/03.PDF>
- Lewis, P., Simons, F. & Fennig, C.D. (eds.) (2016). *Ethnologue: languages of the world*. (9th edn.) Texas: SIL International.
- Mansoor, S. (1993). *Punjabi, Urdu, English in Pakistan: A sociolinguistic study*. Lahore: Vanguard.
- The Philippines Department of Education (2012). Guidelines on the implementation of the mother tongue-based multilingual education. Retrieved from <http://www.deped.gov.ph/orders/do-16-s-2012> (accessed: 12 December 2017).
- Rahman, T. (1995). Language and politics in a Pakistan province: Sindhi language movements, *Asian Survey*, 35(11), 1005-1016.
- Shah, G.M. (1978). Wasted years: Pangs of Pakistani nationalism, facts, fantasies, fallacies. *Sindh quarterly*, 1-16.
- Schiffman, H. (2012). *Linguistic, culture and language policy*. London: Routledge.
- Singh, N., Zhang, S. & Besmel, P. (2012). Globalization and language policies of multilingual societies: Some case studies of South East Asia, *Revista Brasileira de Linguística Aplicada*, 12 (2), 349-380.
- Trudell, B. (2016). The impact of language policy and practice on children's learning: Evidence from Eastern and Southern Africa. Retrieved from <http://www.unicef.org/esaro/UNICEF> (accessed: 2 March 2018).
- UNESCO (1953). The use of the vernacular languages in education. Monogram on fundamental education-VIII. Paris: UNESCO Retrieved from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002481/248136e.pdf> (accessed: 12 December 2017).