UNU/UNESCO Conference: Globalisation & Languages

Workshop 2 – Education & Learning

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The following report attempts to briefly summarise a number of key points raised during the intense and fruitful discussions during this workshop session. These points are dependent upon the necessary commitment at all political levels, acknowledging the fundamental human right to education, and as a key part of efforts towards achieving the EFA and MDGs.

Language-in-education policy and principles

- Education, language and learning are inextricably linked. As language plays a central role in cognition and learning, the promotion of mother tongue education is necessary for personal development and access to quality education. Quality mother tongue education, in particular in basic education, is crucial for social inclusion and effective bilingual and multilingual education. Mother tongue language education provides an essential foundation for further language education and facilitates the life-long development of the learner’s linguistic repertoire.

- Effective mother-tongue based multilingual education needs to be promoted within a strategy of ‘multilinguality’ based on a coherent integrated approach to national and regional policies with a view to accommodating local, national and international languages in the curriculum. Access to education in the mother tongue which is a basic right of all learners, should form part of an additive rather than subtractive approach
(mother tongue AND other languages) by ensuring children’s entitlement to the other languages readily available, including the right to acquire the necessary competences in an official language of the country.

- The languages and cultures of all students should be valued regardless of their status in the curriculum, thus promoting a positive self-identity, deepening cultural awareness and understanding, raising the individual’s awareness of his/her own plurilingual repertoire and developing respect for the repertoires of others.
- Language education policy needs to be properly targeted in order to create a real and inclusive learning society that is responsive both to the immediate realities of learners and the demands of globalisation and rapid change.
- Language education policy is a key part of social policy and needs to be developed within an intersectoral approach to policy making.
- Policy development requires strategic planning with advocacy programmes, including awareness raising and consultation with key stakeholders; the particular concerns of parents regarding multilingual education should be addressed in this process.
- Ongoing research is necessary to a) clarify and develop the concept of multilingual education in specific contexts and produce empirical evidence, and b) develop multilingual pedagogy.

Some pedagogic considerations

- The languages represented in the classroom are a resource to be exploited. Classroom (linguistic) diversity should be used to promote awareness of languages, their diversity and convergences, as a mode of thinking – developing cognitive skills and abilities, and critical thinking. This will support the development of intercultural awareness and sensitivity, at the individual and societal levels, also contributing to empathic understanding and, ultimately, towards peace.
- Teachers are facilitators and learners. Beginning in primary school, an active pedagogy – rather than “teacher knows everything” approach to education is necessary so that children are empowered; learners can thus be supported in gradually assuming an appropriate degree of responsibility for their learning as a basis for further life-long learning.
- A successful teacher does not need to know all the languages in the classroom – it is much more important that he/she understands how to use them.
• The teacher should have the necessary competence in the language(s) of instruction and should develop awareness of the specific language competences required by the school curriculum. The elaboration of benchmarks - descriptions of the specific language competences required for successful learning in all subjects across the curriculum at different levels - is desirable for curriculum planning at different levels; teacher education should aim to make all subject teachers aware of their role as language teachers. A holistic approach to the overall language curriculum would support the implementation of a coherent approach to the development of the learner’s plurilingual repertoire.

• ICTs and software localisation present educators with new ways of thinking about multilingual education and language teaching pedagogy. Investment is required in multidisciplinary research and developing teaching methods with a view to examining how ICTs can be most effectively used. Both hardware and software should be carefully designed, through dynamic interaction between educators, administrators, and computer engineers.

• ICTs based on interactive pedagogical principles can offer learners new and effective ways of developing autonomous learning strategies and help to promote an inclusive knowledge society.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. UNESCO should promote an approach based on ‘multilinguality’ – quality mother tongue based multilingual education for all, accompanied by the necessary educational research, as part of its efforts towards the EFA and the relevant MDGs through the organization in different regions of awareness-raising events;

2. In cooperation with other international and intergovernmental organizations, UNESCO should:
   a. help all member states to elaborate appropriate language in education policies that ensure successful education and social inclusion
   b. encourage research in support of the implementation of these policies
   c. identify sources of funding for the effective implementation of these policies.