![UNICEF for every child]

EARLY LITERACY AND MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION IN SOUTH ASIA

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Code-switching	Use of two languages simultaneously in a communication. Generally bilingual and multilingual people use words from different languages while communicating.
Dominant language	Language used for official purposes, often the language of the dominant social group. It could be a regional/national language or a language used for national and international communication.
Early Childhood Education (ECE)	The education that a child receives in the early years of childhood, i.e., up to 5 or 6 years of age prior to joining primary education.
Home language	Language spoken at home of the child.
L1	First language of the child is the language that she/he speaks fluently or is most comfortable in oral communication. It is usually the language learned first at home.
L2	Second language for the child is the language that she/he is still learning to understand and speak. It is usually a language of wider communication. This term is used to refer to the official school language.
Lingua franca	Language used for wider communication; also used synonymously with LWC (language for wider communication) among groups who have different native languages.
Local language	Language/a variety of a language spoken in the local community. This is a colloquial variety, not used for academic purposes.
Mother tongue (MT)	Mother tongue is the first language of the child, which she/he has learnt from birth and is a part of her/his identity.
Multilingual education (MLE)	Two or more languages used as mediums of instruction.
Non-dominant languages (NDL)	Languages that are not used in any formal domain, which may or may not be written. Not considered appropriate for use in education.
Translanguaging	Translanguaging involves flexible use of language resources available with children to communicate fluently without thinking about which language they have used or having used words of more than one language in a sentence.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The study on 'Early Literacy and Multilingual Education in Asia: Challenges and Prospects' was undertaken with the objective of developing guidance around appropriate policies and strategies for teaching and learning of early language and literacy and multilingual education in the varied language contexts in South Asian countries.

An important backdrop for the study is the ubiquitous concern about low student learning outcomes, especially the 'low and varied' levels of reading and writing skills of children in primary grades. Findings of the study are based on review of secondary literature relating to research in early literacy and multilingual education, surveys of students' literacy achievements in primary grades, analysis of sociolinguistic situations, and policy and programme documents from each of these countries.

The study analyses the varied language situations in these countries and the existing policies and practices of using languages as mediums of instruction (MoI) and as subjects in primary education. It outlines a set of research-based principles of language learning and appropriate approaches for different sociolinguistic contexts. Case studies of multilingual education (MLE) programmes in two countries provide specific learning for planning and implementation of mother-tongue-based programmes.

Based on these analyses, the study makes recommendations for policy and practice for the two related dimensions of (a) improving the teaching and learning of language and literacy in early primary grades, and (b) use of languages for education. Strong language and literacy skills are the basis for academic learning as they support all cognitive processes required for leaning. Therefore, meaning-making, thinking and reasoning need to be a part of language and literacy development in early grades.

Teaching and learning in early literacy must build on children's oral language and provide those who come from low literacy home environments with initial experiences that help them understand the forms and functions of print. Promoting children's talk and using their languages as a resource in the classroom as well as their contexts and experiences in literacy related activities are some crucial elements of an early literacy instruction strategy.

When children study through their first language (home language or mother tongue) for several years, they are likely to do much better at learning additional languages and other school subjects than children who study through a second or unfamiliar language as the medium of instruction. A strong foundation of the first language (L1) holds the key to learning other languages better as languages develop in an interrelated manner.

Children need to spend five to seven years learning an unfamiliar language as a subject before they are ready to learn through the medium of that language. This is the time required to develop adequate academic skills in that language, especially if the children have limited exposure to the second language outside school. Apart from the perspective of better learning, use of children's languages is imperative from the perspective of creating positive self-efficacy, self-esteem and affirming identity among young children, aspects that are crucial for their all-round development.

South Asian countries are multi-ethnic and multilingual with the use of many languages, dialects and local/regional languages for inter-community interaction. Adults in most parts of South Asia are bilingual or plurilingual. Much less is known about children's language proficiencies when they join school at age 5 or 6.

While languages seem to co-exist in a multilingual setting in these countries, there are clear hierarchies between languages and most non-dominant languages are not considered adequate for use in the domain of school education in any formal manner. While some countries have policies that promote use of local languages in primary education, there is a wide gap between policy and practice.

A very large number of children in most of these countries study through a language medium that is not their first language. The high aspiration for English learning and use of English as a medium of instruction further restrict pedagogically appropriate options for languages in education at the primary level.

Different approaches to use of languages as mediums of instruction and as subjects and their use together for teaching-learning will have to be used flexibly depending on the different sociolinguistic contexts at school level. The study presents a typology of school sociolinguistic situations and makes suggestions of appropriate approaches and strategies. The following four approaches are identified:

- Introducing children's L1 as an MoI for an extended period, say for six to eight years.

- Mother-tongue-based multilingual education (MTB MLE) programmes help children learn new languages based on a strong foundation of their L1. Initially, only L1 is used for teaching and a second language, L2, is taught as a subject. Later, both languages are used for teaching. When the MoI shifts to L2 only by Grades 5 or 6, L1 continues to be used to support understanding of academic concepts in later primary years. Programmes that implement an early transition (also called early-exit MTB MLE) to L2 as MoI are less effective in improving children's learning.

- In situations where L2 would need to be used as MoI from the beginning of primary education, it is important to plan for extensive and strategic use of children's L1 throughout primary grades. The teacher would need to balance use of L1 and L2, depending on children's understanding of L2 at different points. Also, effective second language teaching strategies would be needed to develop an understanding of L2 in the initial school years.

- For situations where multiple first languages are present in the same classroom, the teacher has to use children's languages as a resource and use appropriate strategies to help children learn the official school languages. Much more work is needed to create living examples of this model.

Prescriptive formulations of policy and programmes will not be effective where language situations are fluid and diverse. The bottom line for any flexible language-in-education policy or programme should be that children's linguistic and cultural resources must be valued and used.

Children need to develop strong early literacy skills as well as communicative and academic competence in two or more languages in primary school. Policy, programme development and classroom practice for language and literacy development in primary grades should be guided by a set of principles and non-negotiable components that relate to the use of children's languages for teaching and learning, appropriate strategies for learning additional languages and a comprehensive approach to developing early literacy, including thinking and reasoning skills.

A three-pronged approach needs to be developed and implemented to support early literacy and multilingual education. This approach should cover advocacy or mobilization, policy formulation and programme design and implementation. Successful MLE programmes need active involvement and support from a variety of stakeholders, such as government agencies, civil society organizations, teachers and teacher educators, communities and development partners.

A supportive language-in-education policy helps guide and promote appropriate MLE programmes. However, often, implementation of pilot MLE programmes in different sociolinguistic situations and policy formulation could happen alongside. Even before a full-fledged policy is made, certain policy initiatives could be taken, e.g., emphasis on strong early literacy development for all children, recognizing the need for them to develop multilingual competencies, promoting oral use of their first languages with official backing, promoting development of children's literature in the non-dominant languages (NDLs) and ensuring that only mother tongues are used for teaching in preschools.

Teaching of English as a subject in primary grades needs urgent attention. Teacher development to improve English language proficiency and understanding of strategies for teaching English should be taken up as a priority. However, introducing English as MoI in primary grades should be discouraged.

Some priority areas for action by government agencies include teacher deployment and recruitment for specific languages, introduction of a strong focus on early literacy and multilingual education in pre-service teacher education, development of curriculum and material in NDLs and sociolinguistic mapping.

Improving early literacy teaching and learning as the foundation for all future learning and including children's non-dominant languages in the teaching and learning at primary level are two of the most important initiatives for ensuring inclusive and equitable student learning.

Bringing about a paradigm shift in policy and practice in early literacy teaching and learning and multilingual education is not easy. While the pivotal role has to be played by the government and its agencies, organizations like UNICEF and local and international non-governmental organizations need to be involved as partners to develop and implement a roadmap for this agenda.

INTRODUCTION

Language is the primary medium for communication, thinking and understanding. Strong language and literacy skills developed in primary grades lay the best foundation for all future learning in school. Unfortunately, a very high proportion of children in South Asian countries do not develop good literacy skills in the early grades.

Even fewer develop higher-order academic language proficiency that is the basis of learning from textbook content. Many of these children, who must study through the medium of a language that is unfamiliar to them, face a burden of non-comprehension and alienation. The language they know best at the time of entry to school, which is their strongest resource for learning, does not find place in the school curriculum. Sometimes, their languages and cultures are considered 'sub-standard' and not worthy of use in education. The teaching and learning practices of language and literacy also contribute to the low reading and learning outcomes.

This study attempts to provide a framework and guidance for appropriate policies, approaches and strategies for teaching and learning in early literacy and multilingual education in the varied contexts of South Asian countries.

Findings of this study are based mainly on review of secondary literature relating to research in literacy and multilingual education, surveys of literacy achievements, analysis of linguistic situations, and policy and programme documents from each of the countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

Chapter 1 presents a set of research-based principles of teaching and learning of early language and literacy. It also brings out the rationale for using children's first language as the medium of instruction. It lays out the principles of language learning, including learning of an unfamiliar language. These sets of principles and good practices provide a framework for the review of policies and practices in later chapters.

Chapter 2 provides a review of learning outcomes of language and literacy in each of the eight countriesAn analysis of evidence-based factors, such as the teaching-learning process, language-in-education policy, curricular expectations, teachers' beliefs and knowledge, school-level language situations, preschool experience of children and parental involvement, which contribute to low and varied literacy achievements is presented.

Chapter 3 reviews the language speech patterns and linguistic diversity and complex sociolinguistic situations in each country, including the hierarchy between languages. The linguistic patterns, including the widely prevalent multilingualism, is compared with the nature and number of languages used as mediums of instruction. The issue of the high value attached to learning English and also instruction through the medium of English is discussed.

Chapter 4 presents a typology of school-level sociolinguistic situations commonly found in the region. An attempt is made to identify approaches for use and sequencing of different languages as mediums of instruction and subjects at preschool and primary school. The approaches of bilingual and multilingual education are introduced. Introduction of non-dominant languages as mediums of instruction requires intense preparation. More importantly, this requires a shift in mindset and attitudes towards these languages and cultures.

Chapter 5 outlines two case studies of mother-tongue-based multilingual education from India and Nepal. The learning from these two case studies has important implications for designing and implementing multilingual education programmes.

Chapter 6 gives recommendations for policies and programmes for supporting children's language and literacy learning. It consolidates and builds on principles and approaches discussed in previous chapters.

The recommendations focus on the dimensions of policy, advocacy and programme interventions. Successful design and implementation of multilingual education requires collaboration between various stakeholders.

The study concludes that improving early literacy teaching and learning and including non-dominant children's languages in the teaching and learning at primary level are two of the most important initiatives for ensuring inclusive and equitable student learning.

1 UNDERSTANDING EARLY LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

> "
> Language is not everything in education, but without language, everything is nothing in education.
>
> – Wolff, 2011
> "

Centrality of language in a child's overall cognitive and socio-emotional development is well researched. The aims of language and literacy teaching go beyond the language classrooms and encompass the overall curricular learning in the early years of schooling. This chapter elaborates the principles for effective early language and literacy (ELL) instruction in general and in the context of diverse language situations. The rationale for use of a familiar language as medium of instruction in the early years is highlighted.

1.1 The role of language in learning

Language is more than just listening, speaking, reading and writing. Language serves the purpose of communication and making sense of the world through the processes of thinking, inferring and reasoning. In fact, strong early language and literacy skills are the basis of all learning in a formal school setting. "Language is not merely a 'tool'. It is an integral and inalienable part of understanding. This conclusion is of critical importance to primary education." (Dhankar, 2009).
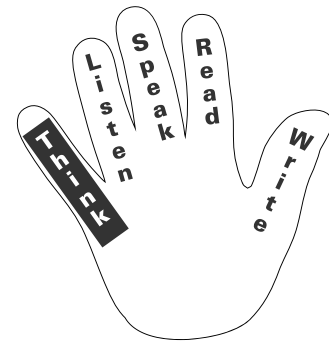
Source: Organisation for Early Literacy Promotion

1.2 Conversational and academic language

> ### LANGUAGE SUPPORTS COGNITIVE PROCESS REQUIRED FOR LEARNING
>
> - Extended and exploratory talk.
> - Reading and writing.
> - Thinking, inferring and reasoning.
> - Collaborating with others.
> - Expressing oneself.
> - Relating new experiences with earlier ones.

Conversational language: It is the day-to-day language needed to interact with others, e.g., parents and friends on the playground, in informal, social situations – the language of 'here and now'. Such language is always used in a meaningful and concrete context and is not cognitively demanding. Contextual and non-verbal clues help to interpret meanings. Dr. Jim Cummins, a renowned authority in bilingual education, has called these conversational language skills 'Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills' (BICS) (Cummins, 2008).

Academic language: Unlike BICS, a different set of language skills is required to be learnt in an academic setting of school. Proficiency in such skills, called 'Cognitive and Academic Language Proficiency' (CALP), is needed to understand the subject area content in textbooks or as presented by the teacher (Cummins, 2008). Students need to understand new concepts that are presented in an abstract or context-reduced (decontextualized) form, be it orally or in print. Academic language usually has some unfamiliar vocabulary and complex language structures. CALP is that aspect of language proficiency that is used for cognitive tasks of inferring, analysing and problem-solving.

The demands of academic literacy from Grade 4 onwards make it challenging even for those students who have a good understanding of the language to cope with complex texts. For students who are still struggling to acquire BICS, the demand of academic language and advanced cognitive tasks become almost impossible. Therefore, it is the development of BICS first, and then CALP, that determines students' level of success in schools.

Initial CALP development comes through higher-order comprehension work in oral conversations in children's language (L1) (through listening and responding to formal texts and extended talk), before children begin to read and write academic language. In early grades, therefore, the teacher could engage children in a discourse on a range of topics, where she/he models such language and thinking processes and encourages them to speak in an elaborate manner in L1.

1.3 Understanding literacy

Literacy includes the capability to read with understanding, write to express one's thoughts and feelings, and apply this capability to do day-to-day work; it also includes appreciating, examining and questioning a given text – be it oral or written (adapted from Luke & Freebody, 1999). Becoming literate means being able to think independently, being able to make sense of what one sees, hears or reads, and being able to share one's ideas, thoughts or feelings through spoken, pictorial, written or other forms of language (Jayaram, 2016).

Thus, reading is a complex and active process of constructing meaning from a text. The process of reading is not confined to passive comprehension of a text but involves an active engagement or connection with the text, where the child is constantly responding to what is being read. Learning to read is a developmental process and, so, a desire and positive attitude to reading should be an important component of an early language classroom. Similarly, writing requires a set of cognitive skills to process one's thoughts and represent them through symbols.

1.4 Aim of early language and literacy teaching

The basic purpose of early language and literacy teaching is to enable all children to read fluently with deep comprehension, an ability to respond to what is read, and to be able to express themselves with clarity, both orally and in independent writing. In addition, children should develop an interest in and the habit of reading. Children should also develop bilingual or multilingual capabilities, both oral and written. "Language and literacy teaching, therefore, goes beyond development of reading and writing skills and should aim to enable students to use language and literacy skills and practices for a wide variety of purposes to participate meaningfully and in an empowered manner in society" (CECED & CARE, 2016).

1.5 Comprehensive and balanced approach to teaching of early language and literacy

Development of early language and literacy in the formative years requires developing a wide range of skills, knowledge and attitudes (see Box 1). Skilled reading requires a child to distinguish different sounds in spoken words, recognize letter-sound relationships, make words by combining sounds, develop vocabulary, comprehend what is written and develop reading fluency. This requires teaching of literacy to include several processes that build comprehension, vocabulary, fluency, word recognition, letter knowledge and phonological awareness.

Box 1. Components of early language and literacy

Emergent literacy includes emergent reading and writing skills
Developing awareness about print and pretend reading, i.e., reading words as pictures; drawing and scribbling to represent something and expressing.

Oral language
Improved listening comprehension; oral vocabulary and extended conversation skills.

Phonological awareness
Building an understanding of the sound structure of language.

Decoding
Deciphering written word by sounding them out, based on understanding the relationship between symbols and their corresponding sounds.

Vocabulary development
Developing knowledge of words and word meanings.

Reading with comprehension
Constructing meaning from a written text and critically thinking about it.

Fluent reading
Accurate, automatic recognition of words and reading with expression.

Writing
Ability to write words correctly, along with presentation of thoughts or information in a logical and organized manner.

Developing the habit of reading
Engaging with a wide variety of books and other reading materials and developing appreciation for literature.

Figure 1. Four-block model for literacy teaching-learning

Teaching of language and literacy should be a balance of both

1. *Lower-order, skills-focused work* (phonological awareness, decoding, writing letters and words correctly); and

2. *Higher-order, meaning-based work* (oral language development, including listening comprehension, conversation, reading, engaging with books, drawing and creative writing).

It is now widely accepted that the balanced and comprehensive approach is the best model for early literacy instruction (Pressley, 2006; CECED & CARE, 2016). Another dimension of balanced literacy teaching is inclusion of oral language development, decoding related work, and reading and writing activities on a daily basis. An example of a four-block model for literacy teaching is represented in Figure 1.

While children are learning to decode, they should continue to engage with books, listen and respond to interactive reading-aloud of storybooks, and then write/draw in response to the text being read to them. Also, teaching of symbols (letters and vowel diacritics) can be organized in a clustered manner so that children can begin to read and write simple words and meaningful sentences soon after learning a few symbols (which by themselves do not carry meaning) first.

1.6 Some basic principles of language teaching-learning in early grade classrooms

1. Language and literacy development should include development of thinking and reasoning skills

Development of higher-order skills, such as making inference from the text, abstracting the main idea, summarizing and retelling a story, applying ideas learned in one context to a new different context, expressing an opinion about what is read, organizing and presenting thoughts logically in writing, and thinking and writing creatively, should be important components of teaching oral language, reading and writing. The initial development of these higher-order comprehension skills happens through oral language work in preschool and early primary grades much before children learn to read.

2. Supporting children whose home language is different

Many children join pre-primary and primary school with a very limited understanding of the school language used as the medium of instruction (MoI). At the preschool and primary level, the MoI should be the children's home language. This ensures meaningful participation of children and creates a focus on communication and expression in using language. Additionally, this requires a change in the attitudes of teachers along with others in the education system.

Children could be exposed to the school language in oral forms. Appropriate strategies should be used to help children acquire an understanding of the school language over time beginning with oral comprehension. The school system (curriculum, teacher education, teaching-learning process) needs to adapt to the backgrounds and contexts of children. It is inappropriate to brand their families or contexts as 'deficient' and these children as incapable of learning.

3. Supporting children with low-literacy and print-poor home environment

A significant number of children join preschool or Grade 1 with little or no exposure to print owing to a lack of reading and writing culture at home. They need to be initiated into understanding print through a print-rich environment at school and engagement with illustrated storybooks that help them develop an understanding that print carries meaning and it can be used to express as well as communicate with others.

Children need to understand how literacy is useful for them before they are taught to read and write letters. Early language education should help the transition from children's dominantly oral culture to a print culture. It is also important to note that children coming to school from non-print contexts have a lot of skills, knowledge, stories, songs and music from their heritage culture that children from middle-class families may not have. This abundance of knowledge and skills needs to be celebrated and used in early language classrooms (CARE, 2016).

4. Using children's languages as a resource in the classroom

Language is an integral part of a child's social and cultural identity. Children's languages and dialects, often different from the formal language used in school, and their prior knowledge and experience should be valued as an affirmation of their identities. Including children's languages in the classroom helps in promoting an equitable learning environment and provides a strong scaffold for learning the school language.

5. Meaningful use of language in contexts familiar to children

Children face several challenges while learning to read and write, including familiarizing themselves with the form of print and use of written language, breaking the 'code' of the script to be able to recognize words, understanding an unfamiliar language, using unfamiliar and abstract contexts in school texts, and the presentational nature of school discourse, which is focused on formal teaching of lessons.

Children's burden of language and literacy learning would be greatly reduced by using contexts and themes that are very familiar to them and promoting a communicative and conversation-oriented use of language where meaning and relevance for children and their participation is a priority.

6. Focus on meaning-making from the beginning

A very common belief among teachers is that children should first learn to decode; once they can read words, they can easily understand what they read. This belief in the sequential teaching of decoding and meaning-making is very harmful. Meaning-making should be the focus of language teaching from the preschool stage.

The focus on meaning-making can be achieved initially by developing strong listening comprehension skills and vocabulary through oral language activities of storytelling, interactive read-aloud from simple storybooks and through conversation.

Oral comprehension skills transfer easily to reading comprehension with the development of strong word recognition skills. Therefore comprehension, including higher-order skills of inference, analysis, application and expressing opinion, should be emphasized and practised along with teaching of decoding.

7. Availability of children's literature in the classroom

Children need to engage with a wide variety of reading material in the classroom beyond the textbook for developing their reading skills to make 'reading' a habit. Simple, interesting and illustrated storybooks in the language the children know best may be used for reading aloud by the teacher, shared reading and independent reading by children. These activities could be a part of the instructional design of a language class and for independent free reading by children.

Opportunities to engage with a wide variety of children's literature in different languages will help develop a desire and positive attitude to reading. Literature also helps develop imagination, prediction, critical thinking along with print awareness and understanding text structure. Some of the storybooks in local languages should be developed locally reflecting local contexts.

8. Children's talk important for learning

Oral language is seen as being an integral and important part of children's literacy development (Heath, 1983). Children's talk is an important tool for learning especially during their early years. Generally, talking in the classroom is dominated by the teacher, with children being passive listeners or engaged in choral repetition. It is important to reiterate that most of the learning in the initial years happens through talking about something or talking through a topic, which acts as a scaffold to learning.

Children need opportunities to talk – with each other, with adults, one-on-one and in a group. Such opportunities can be built into a specific time dedicated for children's talk with a variety of activities related to language and mathematics.

Children's talk can be encouraged by listening to them attentively and patiently, asking open-ended questions (e.g., why do you think this happened?), planning for structured discussions and providing a fear-free environment in the classroom.

> "
> ## Reading and writing float
> ## on a sea of talk.
> – Britton, 1970
> "

1.7 Strong language and literacy skills crucial for equitable learning

Developing a strong foundation of language and literacy skills in the early years (3+ to 8+) is critical to all future learning. If language and literacy competence is not developed strongly and equitably in the early years (preschool to Grade 3), children will never be able to catch up in later grades. This learning gap continues to widen as texts and concepts in textbooks becomes more complex and abstract in later primary grades.

Research has shown conclusively that children who are unable to develop basic foundations of language and literacy by the end of Grade 3 are at a serious disadvantage; their academic performance in other subjects continues to remain poor in later years. These children suffer from low self-esteem and are at the greatest risk of dropping out of school without completing their education.

Ensuring that children learn to read early and well is the most important way of ensuring that every child has an equal opportunity to learn at the primary stage of schooling. "Any child who doesn't learn to read early and well will not easily master other skills and knowledge" (Moats, 1999). Once a child starts falling behind and becomes a struggling reader, it is very difficult for him/her to catch up in later years, unless there is intensive and individualized remedial support, which is rarely feasible.

Poor readers are also poor writers. In fact, reading skills are self-reinforcing. "Poor readers read about half as many words as good readers, thus getting half the amount of vocabulary practice and improving their reading skills at a slower rate" (Gove & Cvelich, 2010).

1.8 Importance of preschool education

Figure 2. Brain growth chart
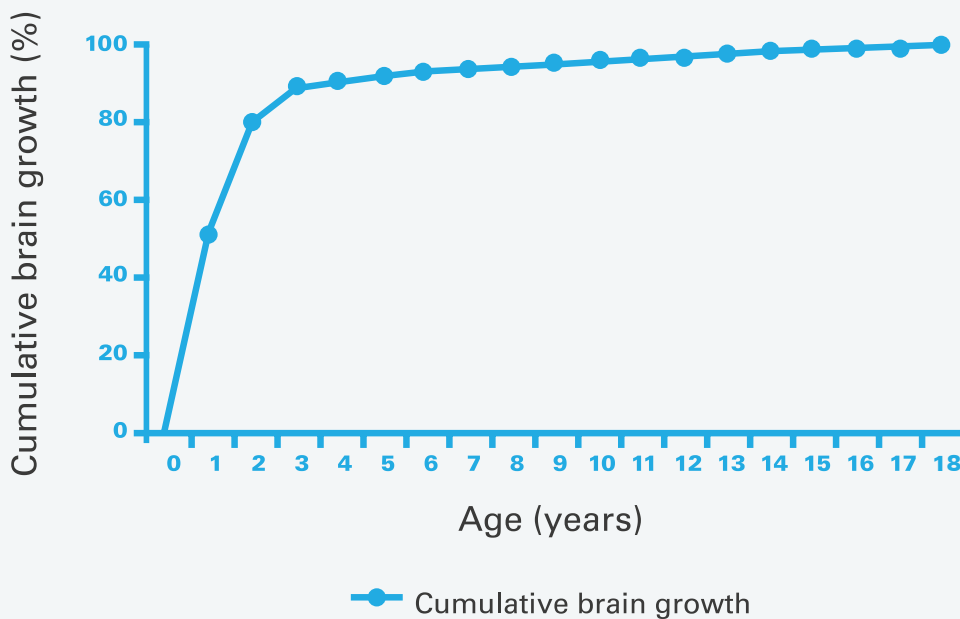
Source: Karoly et. al.,1998

Ninety per cent of a child's brain development is complete by age 5. The early years are also the time when connections between neurons (brain cells) are made most rapidly (1 million per second). These are the connections that build brain architecture – the foundation upon which all later learning, behaviour and health depend. (Center on the Developing Child, 2009).

In a recently concluded longitudinal research in India (Kaul et al, 2017), it was found that participation in preschool education led to higher levels of school readiness in children, which in turn led to better learning levels in language and mathematics in primary grades.

Oral language development in home language, appropriate exposure to the school languages, including good listening comprehension skills, development of print and phonological awareness and development of emergent reading and writing skills in the preschool years are crucial for language and literacy development in pre-primary school years.

Analysis of Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) results clearly shows that children who had three years of pre-primary education performed much better in the literacy test than those with only one year or less of pre-primary education. Children who did not attend pre-primary education at all had the lowest reading scores (PIRLS, 2011)

However, preschool education is not given enough importance in most South Asian countries. Access to preschool (early childhood education in the age group 3 to 6 years) is low and inequitable, and the quality is far from satisfactory. Children do not learn the foundational skills, abilities and attitudes for literacy and numeracy by the time of entry into school.

1.9 Linguistic potential of children

Children acquire one or more languages with ease by playing an active role in social interactions happening around them or with them (Bruner, 1985). Children comprehend not only the verbal language but also situations and intentions, even before they themselves can utter a word.

By the age of four,[1] children master the use of specific words, styles, gestures and social conventions. They use appropriate pronouns for addressing people based on the context of talk, they use questions to enquire, exclamations to express surprise, they vary the stress on words depending upon their intentions, and they narrate events using narrative style, engage in dialogues, make arguments, read intentions of other people, negotiate and respond depending on their motives and so on.

Young children are also able to acquire conversational skills in additional languages quite easily if they receive adequate exposure in a meaningful context in their immediate environment.

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[1] This is not to say that by the age of four children have mastered their first language completely. As children grow and learn, the home language competence continues to grow (Wolff, 2011).

They also demonstrate attributes of emergent literacy if the appropriate environment is available (Clay,1987; Teale & Sulzby, 1989). They represent their thoughts and ideas using scribbles and drawings, develop awareness about print, and begin to realize that what is said can be written and what is written can be read. They also pretend to be reading and can identify environmental print, like names of products on wrappers, and predict plots of stories and understand story structure.

All these skills represent the beginning of literacy learning. However, in low-literacy and print-deprived home environments, with a predominantly oral cultural tradition like in some parts of South Asian countries, these emergent literacy skills do not develop naturally since children do not see or interact with print at home.

1.10 General principles of good teaching-learning practice

It is not enough to only discuss principles of literacy teaching and learning. Good literacy instruction practices must be part of overall effective teaching. Principles commonly identified as part of good teaching-learning practice include:

1. Children should be actively engaged in the teaching-learning process.

2. Play and fun is intrinsic to learning in early education.

3. Learning for young children is a social activity: Providing adequate opportunities for teacher-child interaction and children's pair and group work.

4. Young children learn from concrete experience. Therefore, use of their contexts, experience and prior knowledge should be the starting point.

5. Teaching at the 'right level' (developmentally appropriate): Targeting learning activities in the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978).

6. Scaffolding children's learning and tasks and following a 'Gradual Release of Responsibility'[2] process for teaching new skills.

7. Recognizing that errors are part of the learning process.

8. Assessment is an integral part of the teaching-learning process and follow-up action following assessment is crucial.

9. Young children develop in an environment of positive relationships. Emotional well-being, acceptance and a positive self-image apart from a stimulating learning environment are crucial for early learning (NSCDC, 2004).

10. Revision or spiralling of concepts deepens learning. Also, children need time to practise new skills.

11. A focus on equity by identifying children who are struggling with basic skills and providing them with extra time, support and learning experiences. Some differentiated instruction according to levels is also needed.

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[2] www.ascd.org/publications/books/113006/chapters/Learning,-or-Not-Learning,-in-School.aspx

1.11 Teaching-learning of early language and literacy in multilingual contexts

1. Why is teaching-learning through an unfamiliar language (L2) inappropriate?

Children studying through an unfamiliar language face a 'double learning disadvantage' since they must try and learn a new language and at the same time learn through that unfamiliar language (Jhingran, 2005).

This could be understood through the concepts of BICS and CALP discussed in section 1.2. Children develop BICS in the home language (L1); in schools, BICS needs to be further enriched by providing a broader platform for communication. At the same time, children are to be taught to carry out higher cognitive activities of thinking, reasoning and making inferences that require CALP. They need to cope with the new language at both the levels: BICS and CALP.

Studies show that it takes only 2–3 years to gain conversational fluency in a second language (L2), but to be able to use this language for academic purposes requires five to seven years of formal instruction (Cummins, 1980; Skutnabb-Kangas, 1981).

Figure 3 shows the gap that remains in development of CALP if an L2 medium of instruction is used instead of L1. Thus, if the MoI is L2, development of CALP, so essential for school learning in later primary and upper primary grades, lags behind the grade level expectations of the curriculum and textbook content.

This deficit is difficult to bridge as the content (vocabulary, language difficulty, abstract nature of texts and nature of cognitive tasks) becomes more difficult in Grades 4–5 and at upper primary stage. Once the children show command over BICS, they are expected to carry out academic tasks in that language, which is inappropriate. To expect that proficiency at conversational level (BICS) would soon lead to academic language competence (CALP) is a mistake.

Also, not using children's first language in teaching in primary grades conveys the message that they should leave their language and culture outside school as well as the central part of their identities. Faced with this rejection, they are much less likely to participate actively and confidently in the classroom process (Cummins, 2001).

Undermining children's languages in school and imposing a new language shakes learners' self-identity and hurts their self-esteem. Denial of their language denies not just a way of communicating, but also ways of thinking, acting and exploring. In such situations, children feel almost helpless because they see their cultural and linguistic resources are of no use in schools and so choose to remain silent.

Linguistically privileged children have continuity of experience from home to school and can start learning from the first day of school, while the others must first learn the unfamiliar language code.

Figure 3. Development of CALP in L1 and L2
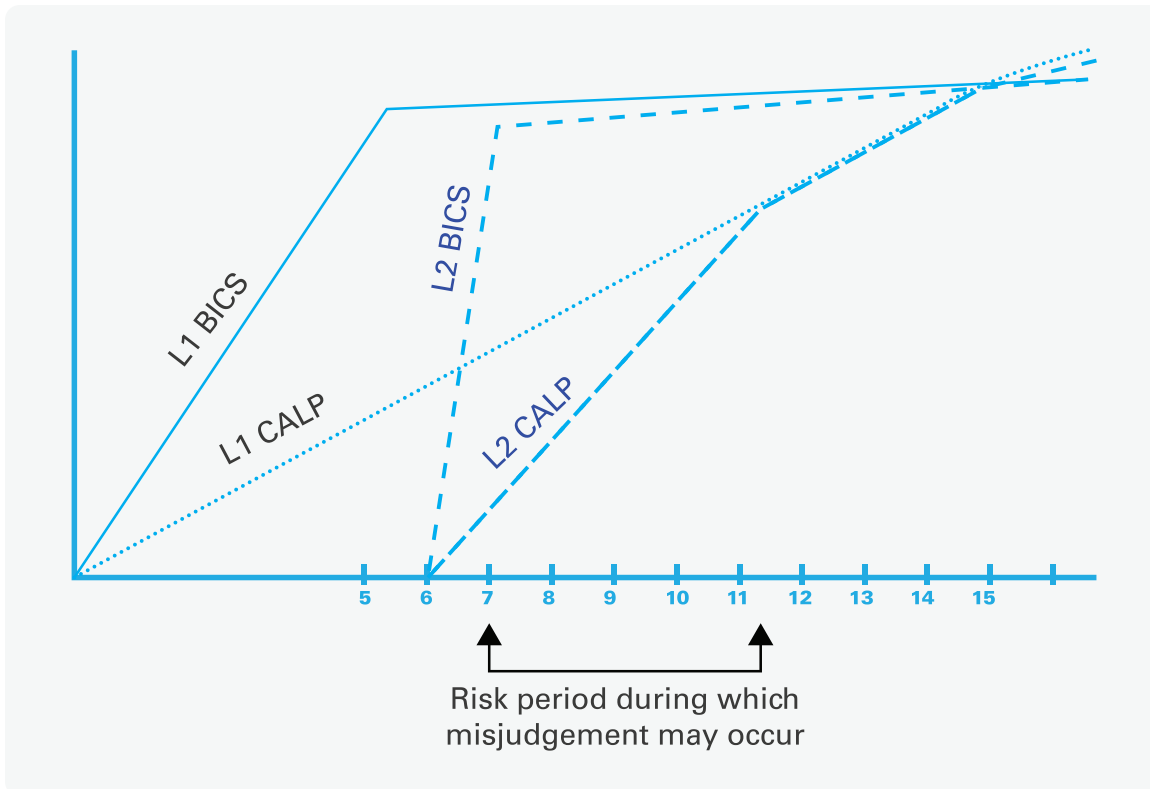
Source: Skutnabb-Kangas, 1981, p. 113.

2. Why is it imperative to teach through the children's first language?

Children's linguistic potential in their home languages (see section 1.9) and the role of these languages in learning are ignored in many contexts. It was estimated that 221 million primary-aged children from minority language and ethnic communities in developing countries did not have access to education in a language they know (Dutcher, 2004).

  a. In the Indian state of Jharkhand, only 4 per cent of the rural population speak Hindi while 96 per cent speak a tribal language or another regional language. The MoI in primary schools in Jharkhand is Hindi. The learning levels for Hindi were the lowest for a major state in the entire country for Grades 3 and 5 (ASER 2016).

  b. Research from India (Jhingran, 2005) estimates that around 25 per cent of children attending primary school in the country face a moderate to severe learning disadvantage on account of the MoI being an unfamiliar language.

Several research studies have shown that children who have studied through their first language as the MoI for several years (at least through primary stage) perform much better in the second language and other subjects than those who have studied through a second language or shifted very soon to the second language.

a. Students in Ethiopia who studied through a mother tongue (MT) medium of instruction had higher mean achievement scores in mathematics, biology, chemistry and physics in Grade 8 compared with students who had not studied through their mother tongue (Heugh et al., 2007). The mean scores were highest for students who had studied through the MT medium for eight years, followed by those who had MT as the medium for six years. Those who had the MT medium for only four years scored lower, but still higher than those who studied only through a non-MT medium.

b. Similar results were seen in a large longitudinal study in 15 states of USA (Thomas and Collier, 1997). The main finding was that the biggest predictor of long-term school success is the number of years of academic instruction (MoI) in the children's first language.

c. Tribal children as well as other groups of children in India perform significantly better in MT-medium classrooms compared to their matched counterparts in classrooms where the MoI is another dominant language (Research studies from India cited in Mohanty et al., 2009, pp. 289–290)

d. Results from several large-scale studies have also shown the positive impact of mother tongue instruction on enrolment and reduction in drop-out rates (Pinnock & Vijayakumar, 2009, p. 16)

3. Why does L1 medium result in better learning and all-round development of children at the primary stage?

Research has shown that:

a. Based on a strong foundation of BICS when a child first joins school, development of CALP over 5–6 years in L1 is the most appropriate trajectory. While children struggle to develop BICS in L2 within the first 2–3 years, the academic demands of the curriculum and textbooks far outpace the development of CALP and students can never 'catch-up' (see Figure 3).

b. Cognitive skills and concepts are best learnt first in a familiar language. Later they can be easily transferred to additional languages that the student has learned.

c. A familiar language is required for comprehending what is being taught in early grades. Learning in a familiar language (L1) helps in taking a child from the known to the unknown and is essential for making early grade classrooms learner centred.

d. Language, identity and culture are closely related. Teaching young children in their language affirms their identity and culture and provides a positive environment for learning. Use of local language and context also provides the scope for linking the school with the community and local knowledge and culture.

e. Use of children's first language in primary school promotes a smooth transition between home and school, fostering an emotional stability that translates to cognitive stability. Such children learn better and faster, retaining knowledge longer (Kioko et al., 2008, as cited in Ball, 2011).

Primary education is more than just memorizing, choral repetition and copy writing. It involves development of higher-order comprehension, thinking and reasoning skills though appropriate learning experiences. For such a focus, children have to be able to use their strongest linguistic resource, which is their L1.

Large-scale research has clearly demonstrated that it takes children about 12 years from birth to fully learn their mother tongue or first language. This means teaching-learning of L1 should continue for at least 6–7 years in school (Save the Children, 2009).

Preschool education should necessarily be in the mother tongue (L1) of the children. Children learning in preschool settings using mother tongue tend to outperform their non-mother tongue peers in almost every competency area. They develop literacy and other skills in an environment that involves more child engagement and participation, and more integration of local culture in a more child-friendly environment (Vijaykumar, Pearce & Meherun, 2011, cited in Mackenzie & Walker, 2013, p. 9).

Gradual exposure to simple L2 in informal and meaningful contexts would help children acquire some L2 naturally. Formal instruction of an unfamiliar language is not useful at all at this stage.

However, it needs to be clarified that merely teaching through L1 will not result in better learning or more child-centred education. In addition, the curriculum should be rooted in the children's culture and environment with appropriate reading materials and teaching methods for active engagement of all children and early literacy instruction.

4. How many years should L1 remain the MoI?

Research and evaluation reports clearly show that children who learn in their L1 for the first six to eight years of formal schooling have better academic performance and self-esteem than those who study through L2 or transition too early from the home language to the school language (Ball, 2011; Thomas & Collier, 1997; Heugh et al., 2007). Continued development of L1 beyond the first 6–8 years as a subject and as a scaffold for higher-order thinking and learning (e.g., difficult and new concepts) is very beneficial to learning of content through L2.

The development of CALP in L1 requires at least 5–6 years of formal instruction. If L1 is stopped earlier (before developing academic language skills) and children have not developed CALP in L2 (which is most likely as they would have taken the first 2–3 years to acquire BICS ability in L2 before beginning to develop CALP in L2), they would not be able to work on cognitive tasks, such as reasoning, inferring and understanding abstract language and concepts, through either of the languages.

Children normally require about five to seven years of second language learning as a subject before they can learn academic subjects purely through L2. We have already discussed that L1 should remain the MoI for at least 6–8 years for children to develop strong language and thinking skills and understanding of concepts. During this time, they can learn additional languages, viz., L2 and L3 (English), without the pressure or burden of having to learn through them.

Figure 4. The 'Dual Iceberg' representation of bilingual proficiency
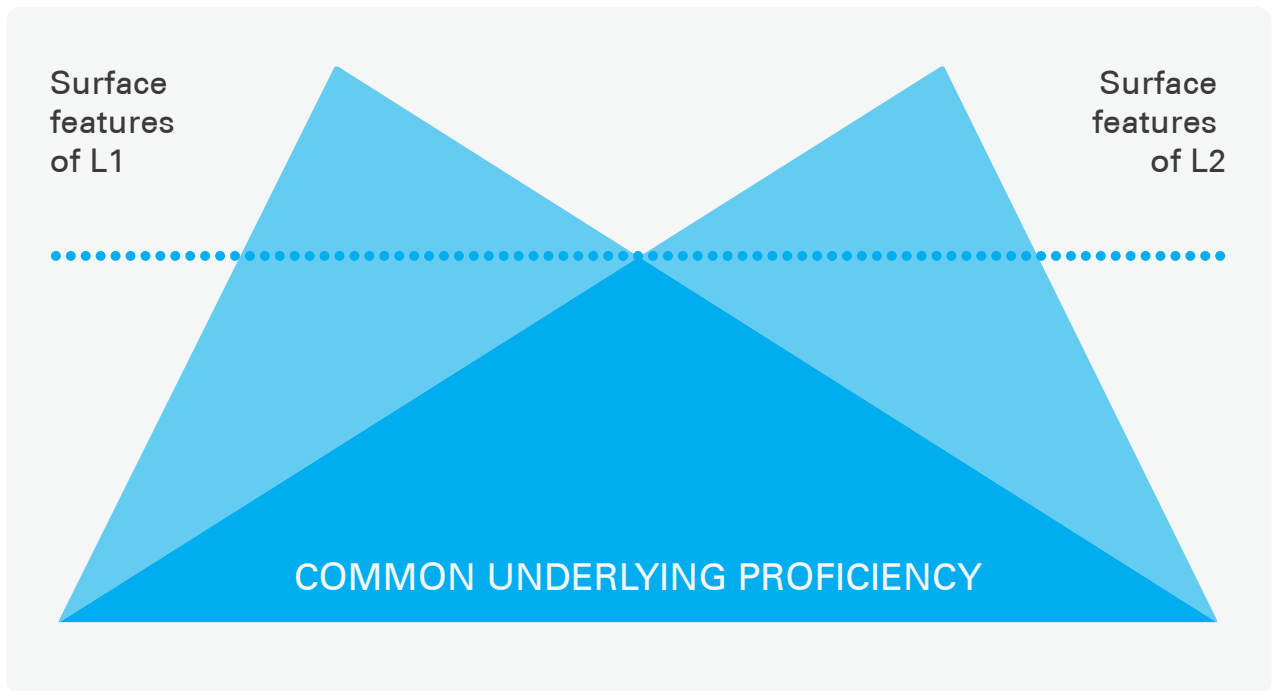
Source: Cummins, 2005.

During these first five to seven years of primary school, children can focus on learning L2 only as a subject and understanding increasingly difficult texts that can prepare them for learning other subjects through L2 later. L1 can help support the learning of L2 during these years. A strong foundation in L1 helps learning of literacy and academic learning in L2. A commonly held misconception is that languages occupy separate spaces in the brain and increase in learning/development of one will inhibit the development of another language(s).

However, it is now known that languages are not 'stored' in separate compartments but develop in an interrelated and interdependent manner. At one level, for a child or an adult, there is a common underlying proficiency for different languages. It is the surface features (BICS) that differ. The 'interdependence hypothesis' is represented in the 'dual iceberg' model shown in Figure 4.

Since language development in different languages is interrelated and interdependent, it is possible for literacy skills and CALP developed in one language to be 'transferred' to another language. Thus, if a child acquires literacy skills like decoding, reading and writing strategies and knowledge of text structures, these will transfer to a second language that the child has learned orally even when a different script is used. We only learn to read once!

Similarly, concepts and higher-order skills, like problem solving and text analysis, once learned in one language will be transferred to another language. Such transfer is best when children (or adults) have acquired a reasonable degree of competence in their literacy skills or concepts. Of course, such transfer requires guidance and support from teachers about similarities and differences between the two languages.

It also requires children to develop strong competence in one language before the transfer to another language can be effective. An implication of this 'transfer' is that it is easier for older children (with 3–5 years of formal language instruction) to learn an unfamiliar language through instruction than younger children. However, gradual exposure to L2 can begin early in an oral form, even at the pre-primary stage.

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For this reason, for better learning of L2, it is more efficient and effective to invest pre-primary and primary school years in literacy and language development (CALP) in L1 than to focus on providing maximum exposure to L2 from the beginning of school. Also, continued development of L1 by teaching it as a subject at the upper primary stage helps support development of cognitive competence in L2.

5. Is an early start for teaching English useful?

Children can acquire more than one language in early years through a natural acquisition process when these languages are present in their immediate social environment. Since English is not available in the immediate environment of most children, there is little chance of natural acquisition of English.

If teachers are proficient in English and can provide scope for natural and meaningful exposure to oral English in early grades through storytelling, conversation and simple instructions, it could help children acquire some English. But most teachers in government primary schools in South Asia do not possess good communicative English skills and begin with the teaching of the English alphabet.

Early formal instruction in an unfamiliar language (L2) is not as effective as later, more intensive instruction after they have already developed L1 proficiency. An early start is particularly not useful when a language is not taught intensively or well (Ball, 2011), as is the case for English in many South Asian countries. Therefore, formal teaching of English should be delayed as much as possible, say until Grade 3.

1.12 Some principles for learning an unfamiliar language

We have discussed that an unfamiliar language should be taught as a subject for several years before it is used as MoI. Outlined here are some principles for teaching-learning of an unfamiliar language in early grades (adapted from Krashen, 2009, and Cummins, 2009):

1. Provide ample comprehensible exposure to L2

Learning an unfamiliar language requires many opportunities of listening to the language (and reading it) in a form that is within the children's sphere of comprehension, also called 'comprehensible input'. The implication for an early classroom is that the L2 used by the teacher should be simple and supported by gestures, pictures, actions and use of words from the children's home languages. Using a familiar context that children can easily relate to is important for better comprehension.

2. Build a meaningful and purposeful context

Language learning happens best when there is a real purpose of communication. Children engaged in interesting group tasks or having a discussion around their favourite topic can generate such an environment. Children find it easier to acquire an unfamiliar language or improve oral expression when the main purpose of language use is for effective communication instead of purity and correctness of language used. When children are learning a language, they would naturally use a 'mixed language' and make errors in the use of the unfamiliar language. This should not be discouraged, but rather considered as a natural part of the learning process.

3. Activate prior knowledge/build background knowledge

Whether it is teaching of vocabulary of L2 or storytelling in L2, both activate relevant previous knowledge that children may have regarding a particular topic/theme. Allow them to respond in L1 and build sufficient background before introducing anything in L2. Use children's contexts and experiences, familiar stories and conversation themes that are close to their hearts, leading them in turn to active learning. Using contexts familiar to children can also be a big help in bridging the gap between the home and school language.

4. Scaffold meaning

To help children understand the language, realia (objects from real life, e.g., product wrappers) or flash cards can be used. Use of drama, action songs and other activities for 'Total Physical Response' (Asher, 1977) and nature walks followed by discussion also provides important scaffolds for learners to understand the use of language in context. L1 itself is a strong scaffold for learning L2.

5. Affirm children's identity

Children's languages, their words, thoughts and culture need to find respectful space in the classroom. Any effort to bring about learning would fail in absence of positive self-identity. Encourage sharing of folk stories, songs and personal experiences in the class, e.g., make these a basis of drawing and writing, use children's words for word wall, create new stories.

6. Extend language

Extensive oral language work in the classroom, including reading aloud to children, is very important to help them develop an understanding of the school language. Initially, the focus should be on developing oral fluency and not literacy. Slowly, children's language can be enriched by helping them compare L1 and L2 vocabulary, asking them to translate and write using language/s they are comfortable with. Talking about one's own language use also helps learners develop meta-cognitive awareness. A print-rich environment especially helps learners grasp sight words. Words with pictures can be displayed on walls.

7. Focus on building vocabulary

For learning an unfamiliar language, it is important to develop a minimum vocabulary of commonly used words of that language at an early stage. This helps in building comprehension of oral and written language.

8. Provide stress-free and safe environment

Language learning requires a stress-free environment, the way children learn their first language at home. The implication is that there should not be any pressure on early production or speaking and formal assessment of learning for L2. A positive and supportive classroom environment where children are motivated and have high self-esteem and low level of anxiety helps reduce the barrier (affective filter) for second language acquisition.

In the following chapters, these principles will be used as a framework to review existing early literacy teaching and learning practices and policies relating to languages in education.

2 LEARNING OUTCOMES AND FACTORS FOR LOW ACHIEVEMENT

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> " When children learn language, they are not
> simply engaging in one type of learning
> among many; rather, they are learning
> the foundations of learning itself.
>
> – Halliday, 1993 "

It is common knowledge that children in early grades in many South Asian schools are not able to read and write at the levels expected in these grades. In addition, there are large disparities across regions, social and ethnic groups and schools within each country or province.

Even within the same class, a multilevel learning situation is very common, with some children at an advanced level of reading and writing, while some others struggling to acquire basic literacy skills. The low learning outcomes in early grades result in continued low learning levels in later primary and middle school grades, as pointed out by various research studies mentioned in Chapter 1.

This chapter reviews the results of achievement surveys of reading and writing outcomes in the South Asian countries and presents a research-based analysis of factors contributing to the 'low and varied' literacy outcomes.

2.1 Country-wise learning outcomes

Two international reading and literacy assessments that have been widely used for developing countries are Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) and pre-PIRLS, a less challenging version of PIRLS. None of the countries in South Asia have participated in international reading and literacy assessments like PIRLs or pre-PIRLS. Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nepal have participated in EGRA; India, Bhutan and Pakistan have participated in the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER).

2.1.1. Afghanistan

Table 1. Learning outcomes in Afghanistan

Afghanistan	
i. Early Grade Reading Assessment, 2016	
Scale	658 General Education (GE) schools; 11,771 students in Grades 2 and 4; in all eight regions, in urban and rural environments, in warm and cold climates, and in mixed gender and in single gender schools.
Grade	Grades 2 and 4
What was tested?	Dari and Pashto: Phonemic awareness, letter-sound identification, decoding, oral reading fluency, reading comprehension and listening comprehension.
Results	i. Children in both Dari- and Pashto-medium schools struggled with reading comprehension. ii. Dari-medium schools: only 14% of Grade 2 students and 35% of Grade 4 students could comprehend what they read. iii. Pashto-medium schools: only 1 in 10 Grade 2 students could comprehend what he/she was reading; in Grade 4, only about one in four did.

Table 1 (cont.)

Variation	i. Students attending schools in urban locations outperformed their rural counterparts on all sub-tasks in both grades in GE schools in both Dari- and Pashto-medium schools. ii. Students in Dari-medium GE schools performed best in the Central, Southeast and West regions in both grades. The poorest performance was found in the Northeast, Southwest and West Central regions, the latter being a region where students scored poorly across the board on all sub-tasks. iii. Grade 2 students (Pashto medium) scored lowest in the East region where they had uniformly low scores across four sub-tasks: letter sounds, decoding, fluency, and reading comprehension. iv. Grade 4 students (Pashto medium) in the Southwest region showed the strongest reading skills across both foundational (phonemic awareness, decoding) and reading application skills (fluency, reading comprehension).

ii. Monitoring trends in educational growth

Scale	In total, 110 schools and 5,979 students in Grade 6 participated in the assessment across 13 provinces. The number of participating students was fairly even in students tested in Dari (54%) and students tested in Pashto (46%).
Grade	Grade 6
What was tested?	Dari and Pashto: Graded tasks related to reading and writing literacy: matching words with pictures; recognize meaning of a simple sentence; identify message in a narrative (supported by repetition in the text); identify explicitly stated information and explain emotions of characters; write one or two sentences following a common pattern; provide minor elaboration in their texts; form simple sentences correctly and use vocabulary adequately to convey important elements of a short and simple message; produce texts where ideas are elaborated to some extent.
Results	Reading literacy i. 90% of students in Grade 6 were likely to be able to recognize the meaning of single sentences on familiar topics. ii. About 10% of students were able to identify the main message in short texts on familiar topics. iii. A small percentage of Grade 6 students could explain the behaviour and emotions of characters in a narrative text. iv. 55% of Grade 6 students could answer questions that required them to retrieve directly stated information located at the beginning of a text. Writing literacy i. 8% of students were able to produce texts where ideas were elaborated to some extent and generally relevant to the task. ii. 45% of Grade 6 students were unable to demonstrate writing ability beyond producing a recognizable word to label an everyday object or correctly spell single words prompted by a picture.

Source: USAID, 2016; Lumley, T., et al., 2015.

2.1.2. Bangladesh

Table 2. Learning outcomes in Bangladesh

Bangladesh
National Student Assessment, 2013

Scale	A national representative sample of 22,871 Grade 3 and 17,828 Grade 5 students from seven types of primary schools from all divisions participated in the 2013 National Student Assessment in Bangla and mathematics. The sample covered 64 *Upazilas* (sub-districts) in 32 districts under seven administrative divisions.
Grade	Grades 3 and 5
What was tested?	Bangla: The tests covered content, various skills related to reading comprehension (including the ability to locate, identify, interpret, infer and synthesize information) as well as aspects of language use, such as vocabulary and grammar.
Results	i. Only a small percentage of Grade 3 pupils (8%) and about a quarter (25%) of Grade 5 pupils demonstrated some capacity to read inferentially. ii. In general, students could retrieve directly stated information, but found it more difficult to recognize nuances or draw inferences.
Variation	Indigenous population (4% in the sample): While one in four students (general population) met Grade 5 level competencies in both Bangla and math, only one in eight indigenous students met Bangla competency and 1 in 11 students met math competencies in Grade 5.
Other assessments	Language use and literacy skills: READ Baseline Assessment and Situation Analysis: The baseline survey included 2,112 students from Grades 1, 2 and 3 from 69 schools in the Khagrachari district. Overall, the results of the baseline assessment are consistent with parents' and teachers' perceptions of students' reading and writing abilities, namely, that most students "can read and recognize the alphabet and punctuation marks, but they read without understanding meaning". Not surprisingly, language along with socio-economic status and the home literacy environment – especially access to reading materials at home – are the main drivers of learning disparities. (READ, Bangladesh)

Source: Monitoring & Evaluation Division, 2014.

2.1.3 Bhutan

Table 3. Learning outcomes in Bhutan

Bhutan	
The Bhutan Learning Quality Survey, May–June 2007	
Scale	The school survey was designed to be nationally representative and covered all districts in the country. It covered 120 out of 472 primary schools. The sample was representative of small and large schools and was approved by the Ministry of Education. Dzongkha is the national language of Bhutan and also the language of instruction for some subjects at lower primary levels in public schools.
Grade	Grades 2 and 4
What was tested?	The items used for Dzongkha tested six competencies: word recognition; word construction; vocabulary; grammar; sentence construction; and reading comprehension.
Results	i. Grade 2: 30% of students were able to read a simple passage and answer questions; 26% of students could see a picture and match it with the correct sentence. ii. Grade 4: Only around 60% of students were able to read a simple passage, and around 58% of students could see a picture and match it with the correct sentence.
Variation	This analysis shows that variation in school and teacher quality is correlated with a maximum of about 50% of variation in test scores, even after controlling for child and family background characteristics.

Source: Siaens & Gopal, 2009.

2.1.4 India

Table 4. Learning outcomes in India

India	
i. Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), 2016	
Scale	ASER 2016 reached 589 rural districts. The survey was carried out in 17,473 villages, covering 350,232 households and 562,305 children in the age group 3–16. The ASER team collected information on enrolment status, type of school, tuition status and fees, preschool status (age 3–6) and home background. Children were asked to do letter and word recognition along with reading and comprehension tasks.
Grade	Grades 1,3 and 5 along with preschool status

Table 4 (cont.)

What was tested?	Basic reading skills and arithmetic (in 19 different languages including English)
Results	i. Just about one in four students in Grade 3 in an average rural school was at 'grade' level (can read short story – story level) in reading. ii. In 2016, the proportion of children in Grade 3 who were able to read at least a Grade 1 level text was 42.5%. The proportion of children in Grade 5 who were able to read at least a Grade 2 level text was 47.8%. iii. Nationally, this picture does not seem to have changed much over the last decade, although there was a slight increase between 2014 and 2016.
Variation	i. Proportion of enrolled children in Grade 3 in government schools who could read at the story level was 45% in Himachal Pradesh and 7.2% in Uttar Pradesh, implying a huge disparity across states. ii. Similarly, percentage of children in Grade 5 who could read at least Grade 2 level text was 55.1% in Andhra Pradesh, 25.5% in Arunachal Pradesh, 69.2% in Kerala and 70.7% in Manipur.

ii. National Achievement Survey (NAS), 2014

Scale	NAS is the largest assessment survey conducted in the country by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). It is among the largest conducted in the world with 104,374 students from 7,046 schools in 298 districts of 34 states/union territories assessed. The results are from the survey of 2014.
Grade	Grade 3
What was tested?	Listening comprehension, word recognition and reading comprehension (in 16 languages of instruction across the country)
Results	i. The overall language score in three areas (i.e., listening comprehension, word recognition and reading comprehension) was 257 on a scale ranging from 0 to 500. ii. Overall, 59% of Grade 3 students were able to read a passage with understanding. iii. Overall, 65% of Grade 3 students were able to listen to a passage with understanding. iv. Overall, 86% of Grade 3 students were able to recognize words.
Variation	Variation across states: i. Significant inter-state variations. ii. In 13 states, more than 10% students were in the 0–35% range. In two states, Bihar and Chhattisgarh, this proportion was much higher at 24% and 24.1%, respectively. iii. No significant difference between performance of boys and girls in language in most states. iv. No significant difference in the performance of rural and urban students in language in most states, except for Maharashtra and Dadra and Nagar Haveli (rural higher), and Jammu and Kashmir, Jharkhand, Mizoram, Tripura and Daman and Diu (urban higher).

Source: ASER India, 2017b; NCERT, 2014.

2.1.5 Maldives

Table 5. Learning outcomes in Maldives

Maldives	
National Assessment of Learning Outcomes, 2008	
Scale	Large scale assessment across 21 atolls, covering 5,503 Grade 4 students and 5,686 Grade 7 students.
Grade	Grades 4 and 7 (English)
Results	The mean score for English among students at Grade 4 was just 32% and at Grade 7 the mean score for English was merely 29%.
Variation	There were wide regional disparities in learning outcomes. Cognitive achievement levels in English language skills, at both Grade 4 and Grade 7, were considerably higher in the Male atoll[3] than elsewhere in the Maldives. The difference in average test scores among students from the best and the weakest atolls, the Male and Raa atolls, respectively, was more than double.

Source: Aturupane & Shojo, 2012.

2.1.6 Nepal

Table 6. Learning outcomes in Nepal

Nepal	
i. Early Grade Reading Assessment Study, 2014	
Scale	In total, 269 schools and over 5,000 students (split roughly equally between Grades 2 and 3) using a four-stage process to ensure representation across regions and ecobelts (Mountain, Hill, Terai, Kathmandu Valley).
Grade	Grades 2 and 3
What was tested?	Nepali: Basic reading skills and reading comprehension.
Results	i. The mean oral reading fluency for Grade 2 was 14.2 correct words per minute (cwpm), and for Grade 3 it was 27.2 cwpm. ii. Proportion of students who could not read a single word correctly in the passage, thus obtaining a zero score: 37% of Grade 2 students and 19% in Grade 3. iii. High percentage of students scoring zero across almost all the tasks and grades, with the exceptions of letter sound knowledge and listening comprehension. iv. Majority of students did not read Nepali fluently with enough comprehension to ensure that they could read and understand content across the curriculum.

[3] Administrative subdivision.

Table 6 (cont.)

Variation	i. The differences in oral reading fluency and reading comprehension across regions were significant, with students in the Terai region performing consistently lower. ii. Students in the lowest socio-economic status (SES) quartile were almost one full year/grade behind the highest SES students (the average oral reading fluency for quartile 1 in Grade 3 was only slightly higher than the average oral reading fluency for quartile 4 in Grade 2). iii. 52% of Grade 2 students and 51% of Grade 3 students reported speaking Nepali at home, while 70% of students in the Terai region reported speaking a language other than Nepali at home.

ii. National Achievement of Students Assessment, 2012

Scale	Assessment results in Nepali were based on the achievement test conducted among 19,501 students of Grade 3 in 849 sample schools and among 13,971 students of Grade 5 in 569 sample schools selected from 28 sample districts. The schools represented all ecological zones and development regions, rural and urban areas as well as community and institutional schools.
Grade	Grades 3 and 5
What was tested?	Nepali: Reading, writing, grammar and vocabulary
Results	i. The students were much better in the recall type of questions than in the tasks requiring higher cognitive skills. ii. The learning outcomes were poorer in writing and vocabulary and higher in grammar and reading in Grade 3, whereas the result was poor in the content areas of reading and better in vocabulary in Grade 5.
Variation	i. The data show that, on average, the students from the Valley outperformed those from the other ecological zones. ii. On average, the students in institutional schools outperformed the students in community schools. The difference is highest in writing (28%) in Grade 3 and reading (25%) in Grade 5. iii. Grade 3: The dataset shows that there was an educational inequality among the students of various language groups in Nepali as a subject. In community schools, the students from Magar background performed very well in Nepali, while the students who had Newari, Tharu and Gurung as mother tongue performed lower than the average. The differences between the lowest and highest performing language groups were remarkable. iv. Grade 5: When combining all the minor language groups as non-Nepali there was a notable difference between the language groups in the community schools (7% favouring the Nepali speakers).

Source: USAID, 2014.

2.1.7 Pakistan

Table 7. Learning outcomes in Pakistan

Pakistan	
Annual Status of Education Report, Rural, 2016	
Scale	The ASER 2016 survey was conducted in 144 rural districts of Pakistan. This covered 83,324 households in 4,205 villages across the country, with a total of 216,365 children aged 5–16 years tested for language and arithmetic competencies.
Grade	Age group 5–16 years
Results	i. 83% of Grade 3 children could not read a story in Urdu/Sindhi/Pashto. ii. 48% of Grade 5 children could not read a Grade 2 story in Urdu/Sindhi/Pashto. iii. Around 7% of Grade 5 students and 8.4% of Grade 3 students could not recognize letters.
Variation	i. Poorest income quartile had the lowest learning levels (19% Urdu/Sindhi/Pashto, 17% English and 16% Math) and richest quartile had the highest learning levels (44% Urdu/Sindhi/Pashto, 43% English and 39% Math). ii. 14% of females from the poorest quartile could read a story in Urdu/Sindhi/Pashto as compared to 22% of males from the same income group. iii. Boys outperformed girls: 43% of boys compared to 36% of girls could read at sentence level in Urdu/Sindhi/Pashto. iv. 72% of Grade 3 students in Punjab could not read a story in Urdu. In Sindh, Islamabad and Balochistan, the number of such students was 90% (in Urdu/Sindhi), 71% (Urdu) and 96 % (Urdu), respectively.

Source: ASER Pakistan, 2017a.

2.1.8 Sri Lanka

Table 8. Learning outcomes in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka	
National Assessment of Achievement (NAA), 2015	
Scale	Conducted by the National Education Research and Evaluation Centre. It has been administered every three years since 2003. The latest was in 2015. The sample consisted of 15,462 students from 448 schools.
Grade	Grade 4
What was tested?	Content domains for first language (Sinhala or Tamil): Comprehension, syntax (grammar), writing and vocabulary
Results	i. The national assessment results revealed that students at Grade 4 were yet to fully obtain the (grade level) essential learning competencies. ii. In both the groups with first language as Sinhala or Tamil: The lowest achievement could be seen in writing. Some students did not attempt to write even the first sentence.
Variation	Students from schools where the medium of instruction is Sinhala language performed better than those from schools where Tamil language is the medium of instruction in all subjects except the first language. Moreover, girls performed better than boys in all subjects, while urban schools performed higher than rural schools.

Source: NEREC, 2016.

2.1.9 Discussion on the low literacy outcomes

The results clearly show that:

1. Most children are not achieving expected grade-specific outcomes for language and literacy in the primary grades. Many children are several grades behind the grade-appropriate competencies in reading comprehension (Dundar et al., 2014).

2. A significant proportion of children have not learnt to read fluently with full comprehension even by the end of Grade 5. Unfortunately, in all countries (other than Sri Lanka), between 10 per cent and 20 per cent children do not achieve mastery of even basic skills like letter recognition as reflected by 'zero' scores in the assessments.

3. Most classrooms have a significant multilevel learning situation in early grades, with a small proportion of children achieving grade-level competencies, while others are at different levels, including some struggling to learn the very basic skills.

   Evidence from the Literacy Research in Indian Languages (LiRIL) study in India (Menon et al., 2017) shows that the top 20 per cent of the performance bracket came into Grade 1 knowing approximately as much about reading and writing as students in the bottom 20 per cent of the performance bracket who were completing Grade 3. Also, 40–60% children made very slow progress in developing literacy skills over the early grades.

Similarly, in Pakistan, Andrabi et al. (2007) found that 50 per cent of the variation in learning levels in a representative sample of government-run schools in Punjab came from students in the same class, taught by the same teacher.

4. There is significant disparity in literacy outcomes between regions and social groups. Lower income levels further exacerbate disparity between regions and groups.

5. There is significant variation in literacy learning outcomes across schools in the same region or district.

6. Some other studies have given more insights into children's literacy learning difficulties.[4] Many children do not gain mastery over recognizing letters and reading words even by the end of Grade 2. Even children who could recognize script symbols are not able to read words or sentences successfully or read very slowly, which in turn hinders comprehension. Ability to communicate in writing, i.e., composition, was very low in most Grade 2 and 3 classrooms.

Based on limited comparison with international assessments, the 'Student Learning in South Asia' report (Dundar et al., 2014, pp. 93–100) suggests that student performance in reading and mathematics in some South Asian countries is very low compared to other countries participating in these assessments. Also, in India, the learning outcomes show a high degree of inequality.

Reading comprehension is a combination of several interrelated skills, including fluent decoding, strong vocabulary, development of world knowledge through oral discussions and reading, regular practice of reading simple texts and learning strategies for comprehension (see section 1.5).

2.2 Factors for low literacy achievements[5]

> "
> Teacher's interaction with learners
> is the axis on which educational
> quality turns.
> – Fry, 2002
> "

There are a multitude of factors that lead to poor achievement in schools. These range from teaching methods, particularly the extent to which learner-centred methods are used, to teacher motivation, availability of learning materials, learners' health and nutritional status and community participation (Hanushek, 2005; Watkins, 2000; VSO, 2002; cited in Pinnock & Vijayakumar, 2009).

[4] Menon et al., 2017; Dundar et al., 2014; Room to Read: https://www.roomtoread.org/the-latest/benchmarking-reading-fluency-in-bangladesh.

[5] In this section, the discussion is with respect to disadvantaged children going to government or community schools and low-fee or affordable private schools.

The 'Student Learning in South Asia' report lists a range of evidence-based factors that influence student learning, including:

1. Household related: Gender; family income; language spoken at home; social status of family; nutrition status of the child.

2. Early childhood: Nutrition and early stimulation (0–3 years); school readiness of disadvantaged children.

3. Teacher related: Knowledge and skills; teacher accountability; teachers' professional development.

4. Pedagogy and classroom process: Low instructional time; inappropriate practices for teaching reading.

5. System related: Monitoring of learning outcomes; regular assessments.

Other complex sets of factors add to the issue and intersect and reduce learning opportunities and outcomes further for the groups of disadvantaged children: responsibilities at home (e.g., taking care of younger siblings/ contributing to household work), lack of academic support at home, low self-esteem and self-confidence, alienation due to difference in home and school language, and teacher attitude and expectations.

In South Asia, as in other parts of the world, student and household characteristics are strong predictors of student achievement. However, student background only explains a portion of the variation in student achievement.

A review of a large body of research indicates several factors that influence children's early literacy achievements specifically. Some of these factors are instructional time in general and specifically for language and reading, strategies for teaching second language and reading, importance given by the curriculum and the school to language and reading, school resources like library and availability of books in the classroom, regular assessment, organization of reading activities or events, varied opportunities for teacher professional learning, dedicated time for reading, school management and the quality of teachers, and continuous professional development of teachers.

In consonance with these studies, about half to two thirds of the variation in student achievement in many South Asian countries can be attributed to school-specific factors (e.g., teachers, school resources) – more than is typical in other regions of the world where there is much fewer variability in school quality. This provides considerable scope for improving learning outcomes with an effective education policy directed at school quality (Dundar et al., 2014).

As regards the quality of teachers, there is inadequate evidence to show that the number of years of experience or qualification influence student learning. Other characteristics that are less easy to measure, e.g., teachers' enthusiasm for teaching, expectation of students and commitment to equitable learning, may be more crucial than mere experience and qualification.

Several studies (Baker, et al. 1997; Teale, 1986; Heath, 1983) highlight the crucial role of early home support, including reading aloud to children, encouragement for reading for enjoyment and print availability at home.

2.3 Conceptual framework of factors influencing early language and literacy outcomes

Drawing from these studies, a conceptual framework indicating factors that influence early language and literacy outcomes has been developed (see Figure 5). Certain factors, such as children's nutrition, children's innate ability, teacher qualifications, and school leadership and management have been removed to keep the focus on factors related to language and literacy.

The factors identified for the framework are: (1) teaching-learning process for language and literacy; (2) preschool experience of children; (3) language teacher; (4) classroom literacy resources; (5) classroom language situation; (6) system-level issues like curriculum textbooks and assessment practices and instructional time; (7) parental involvement; and (8) language-in-education policy.

Figure 5. Factors influencing ELL outcomes

CLASSROOM-LEVEL FACTORS

Teacher
- Knowledge of early language and literacy pedagogy
- Underdstanding of children's language
- Beliefs and attitude

Classroom resources
- Instructional material
- Children's books

Language situation
- Children's language
- Language used as MoI
- Teachers' attitude towards children's languages

SYSTEM-LEVEL FACTORS

Curricular expectations
- Instructional time
- Textbooks
- Assessments

Language-in-education policy
- Language used as MoI
- Language taught as subject

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT
- Support for use of children's language/s in school
- Parental literacy and print at home
- Involvement in school
- Aspirations for languages of wider communication

TEACHER-LEARNING PROCESS
- Focus on comprehension
- Assessment and support to learners

PRESCHOOL EXPERIENCE
- Number of years
- Quality

STUDENTS' LANGUAGE AND LITERACY OUTCOME

Box 2. ELL teaching-learning practices in some South Asian countries[6]

> In most classrooms, there are children of different ages and varied learning levels. Copy writing (from the blackboard or the textbook) and choral repetitions are the only modes of literacy learning these children are exposed to. There is no connection with their real-life experiences and context. Hence, the children soon become disinterested or distracted and their 'time-on-task' is low.
>
> The curriculum and teaching are highly sequenced with letters being taught first, followed by words and sentences, and meaning-making postponed to later grades. There is very limited focus on meaning-making even in later grades, except for direct explanations by the teacher.
>
> The focus on lower-order skill is reflected in assessments as well. There is also scarcity of children's books and other learning material in the classrooms, leaving out any opportunity for these children to engage with meaningful print. The classroom displays are not meaningfully integrated into the teaching-learning process.

2.3.1 Teaching-learning process for language and literacy

As shown in Figure 5, the classroom teaching-learning process for language and literacy plays the most crucial role in determining children's early literacy outcomes. On the other hand, classroom instruction quality is also influenced by several of the identified factors, e.g., teachers' knowledge about language and literacy pedagogy, teachers' fluency and ability to communicate in oral and written L1 and in oral and written L2 (and L3), teachers' beliefs and attitudes about children, their languages and cultures, availability of classroom resources, classroom language situations, textbook and prescribed assessment practices. Literacy practices in the early grades in some of the South Asian countries present a dismal picture.

Clearly, teaching-learning practices of the main language (used as MoI) in early grades are far from appropriate (see sections 1.5, 1.6, 1.10 and 1.12 for concept and principles of an appropriate ELL teaching-learning process).

2.3.2 Preschool experience of children

Quality preschool education helps in developing oral language and emergent literacy skills among children, which is the foundation for literacy learning in early primary grades (see section 1.8). Children who come from literate homes are already aware of print and its importance and have experience of handling (orientation of books/newspapers, left to right movement of eyes while reading) printed material.

Children who attend early childhood education centres also are acquainted with print and their abilities to symbolize gain further momentum, laying a strong foundation for literacy acquisition in school. Mullis et al. (2017) have reported, based on analysis of PIRLS data, that good readers had an early start in literacy learning in two basic ways: (a) having parents who often engaged them in early literacy activities, and (b) attending preschool education.

Access and participation in preschool education is low and varied in most countries in the region (see Table 9).

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[6]The summary is developed from Andrabi et al., 2007, and Chatwin & DeCamp, 2011.

Table 9. Access to preschool education

Country	Availability and participation in Early Childhood Education
Afghanistan	Only 1% of children aged 3–6 years are attending preschool.
Bangladesh	The net enrolment of children aged from 3+ to 6 years is only 22.47% as per population Census 2011.
India	Approximately 30 million children in the 3–6 age group are still to be provided for, which remains a significant challenge.
Pakistan	64% of children aged 3–5 years are currently not enrolled in any early childhood programme/schooling.
Sri Lanka	Only 50% of children have access to preschool. Access is also highly inequitable. Preschool is mostly provided by private and non-governmental organizations due to lack of public investment, which means there are considerable access disparities by both socio-economic status and location. In 2012, only 39% of children aged 3–5 years from the bottom quintile attended early childhood development centres/preschools, as against about 56% from the top quintile.

Source: Afghanistan: AKDN, 2016; Bangladesh: MPME, 2013; India: CECED, 2016a; Pakistan: ASER, 2017b; Sri Lanka: Dundar et al., 2017.

The quality of preschools is also often poor. It is very common for preschools to bring down the curriculum and practices used in Grade 1 into early childhood education (ECE), with children sitting silently for hours, carrying on meaningless drills and rote learning, often without the use of the children's language and cultural context. Preschools in the private sector in several countries provide 'English medium' education.

To improve the quality of preschool education, it should:

1. Be in the child's first language and gradually introduce a second language.

2. Focus on a lot of activities wherein children have opportunities for physical, socio-emotional and cognitive development. All these activities should be done using the child's language.

3. Work on oral language development of children, allow for talk in the class, encourage singing, action songs, oral storytelling and experience sharing.

4. Facilitate development of emergent literacy skills, such as drawing and colouring, talking about the drawings, role play activities (e.g., doll house, puppets).

5. Be sensitive towards children's languages and socio-cultural background.

6. Use children's prior knowledge and experiences to design language learning experiences.

Box 3. **Situation of early childhood care and education centres (government funded): India**

> In India, early childhood care and education centres (that provide children aged 3–6 years with a range of services) operate primarily as nutrition centres. Opportunities for planned play, storytelling, free and guided conversations, outdoor play and free and guided play, which are critical components of successful early childhood education programmes, are almost entirely absent; the majority of time is spent on formal teaching of the 3Rs and routine drill-type activities. The centre worker is provided with minimal on-the-job training (Kaul et al., 2017). ECE workers do not use children's linguistic resources for teaching-learning.

2.3.3 The language teacher

The teacher plays an important role in making classroom processes meaningful for children. Komarek (1996, cited in Stroud, 2002) draws attention to the important role that teachers play in developing contexts, arguing that in these countries, it is not the curriculum that is the basis of the educational system, but the teacher.

These attributes of a teacher influence literacy instructions:

1. **Knowledge of the language of learners**

   When a teacher knows the children's language, she/he relates with the children more naturally and can engage them more actively in the classroom. The teacher is able to connect with their experiences, making classroom learning meaningful for them.

2. **Understanding of how children learn language and literacy**

   Language is learnt when it is used; language learning requires authentic contexts and scaffolding by adults. Teachers need to build on children's oracy, while providing early exposure to literacy at the beginning of school. Children need to be provided opportunities for emergent reading and writing, which they may not have in their homes.

   In addition, teachers have to understand the concept and practice of a balanced approach to teaching of language and literacy where work on higher-order, meaning-based activities and lower-order, skill-oriented instruction happens on a regular basis.

   Reading comprehension strategies can be taught in a planned manner. Use of resources available in the classroom, e.g., children's literature, is very important to create a context for talk and meaning-making. Specific strategies are needed for helping children learn an unfamiliar language.

   These are only some of the elements of early literacy pedagogy that most teachers have not been exposed to during their professional development programmes. Lack of knowledge and exposure to such good practices in classrooms around them is a major reason for the inappropriate literacy instruction practices seen in early grade classrooms.

3. **Beliefs and assumptions about teaching of literacy**

    In the absence of opportunities for understanding appropriate early literacy pedagogy, teachers are often guided by their own beliefs and assumptions, such as children come to school with oral language capabilities, and, therefore, teaching should focus on learning to read and write only; children cannot start reading before they have learnt all the letters and vowel symbols, therefore, there is no point providing storybooks until children have learnt decoding fully; children already know the meaning of words, and once they are able to decode they will automatically understand the meaning of the text.

4. **Attitude and beliefs towards children's language and their background, especially language-minority children**

    Children belonging to disadvantaged communities require time and space to adjust to school environment activities to familiarize with print and transition from their language to the school language.

    A positive attitude of the teacher towards these children's cultural context and background and an understanding of their specific needs can make a huge difference to self-confidence and learning in their early years. However, several studies have found that many teachers have certain beliefs or attitudes about these children:

    a. Their home language (and culture) is inferior and not appropriate for use in schools.

    b. Their families do not value education and the children are not interested or capable of learning. Teachers have low expectations of academic achievements of such children.

Teacher education programmes, both pre-service and in-service, can play a strong role in influencing teacher knowledge and skills as well as attitudes related to early language and literacy teaching.

2.3.4   Classroom literacy resources

Engagement with print is central to literacy learning. The early language and literacy classroom needs to be print rich. Flash cards, storybooks, big books for read-aloud and shared reading, picture books and other authentic local materials play a very important role in acquiring concepts of print, emergent literacy, vocabulary development and text structure.

In fact, reading skills develop through regular reading. The reading material should be simple, interesting and graded to align with children's reading levels and be available in different languages, including English. At least some of the materials should be developed locally to include local languages and contexts. Along with print, resources for children to scribble, draw and role play should be made available. Of course, appropriate use of these classroom resources to support literacy learning is crucial.

2.3.5 Classroom language situations

Language situations of the classroom are defined by languages that children and teachers bring to the classroom along with those valued by the curriculum. These together create complex linguistic dynamics in a classroom. Children who have no exposure to or familiarity with the school and teacher's language face the highest burden of incomprehension and low self-esteem, leading to alienation (see Table 10).

Table 10. Language situations of the classroom

	Language situations of the classroom*
Language of the individual learners	Children may know one or more languages (L1), with the following possibilities: I: One of these may be the school language. II: None of the L1s is similar to the school language. It is in the second case that children face disadvantage. More often these are children from a socio-economically marginalized background, leading to further complexity.
Language of the teachers – languages that teachers know and prefer to use	Language(s) that the teacher knows and prefers to use in the classroom has impact on how children perceive that language. The teacher's language has higher prestige. I: If the teacher knows the children's language and uses it in class, it motivates the children and they participate in the class. II: If the teacher does not know the children's language, then it is extremely difficult for the children to even talk, let alone participate in the class.
Attitude of teachers towards children's language(s)	Attitude of teachers towards language of learners impacts their performance. Negative attitude impacts learners' socio-emotional development and overall learning negatively.
Language of the textbook	Language of most textbooks is generally spoken by a very low percentage of the population. To learn to master the language of the curriculum is a bigger challenge for the children whose language is very different from the textbook language.

*These situations are not binary, i.e., that children either understand or completely do not understand the school language. There are multiple variations in language situations in the classroom that need to be understood at decentralized levels, including the school, to develop appropriate strategies. In Chapter 4, a typology of language situations will be discussed along with suggestive approaches relevant for different language situations.

The impact of learning through an unfamiliar language is clearly visible in the lower literacy outcomes of children in the states and districts with significant tribal population in India. For example, Jammu and Kashmir, a state in India, is among the bottom five states in language achievements of children in Grade 3. Here, the medium of instruction in schools is English, whereas children speak Kashmiri, Dogri, Ladakhi and other languages at home. In Nepal, the reading levels of children in Grade 3 in the Terai region, where children's first languages are not used as MoI, are significantly lower than in other regions.

Children in Pakistan have performed poorly in Urdu reading tasks, which is not surprising given that only 6.8 per cent of the population have Urdu as their first language (Coleman, 2010). The National Education Assessment System data on Pakistani Grade 4 students show that students who spoke Pashto at home had the lowest test scores, not only in Urdu but also in other subjects.

2.3.6 System-level issues

Textbooks: Curricular expectations may or may not be in consonance with the larger objectives and, therefore, processes of early literacy learning. For example, the curriculum may not emphasize the aim of enabling students to use language and literacy skills and practices for a wide variety of purposes. The expectation that all children in the same grade, including those who are learning through an unfamiliar language, should achieve grade-level competencies is not supported by classroom reality.

In most countries, there is only a diffused focus on reading in the language curriculum and a textbook is one of the crucial documents through which curricular expectations are conveyed to teachers. Often it is the only resource that the teachers receive from the state. The teachers feel compelled to teach the books from cover to cover in a sequence. The textbook also conveys a language pedagogy. Limitations of early grade language textbooks include:[7]

1. Textbook lessons written in a sequential format of alphabet to words and then sentences limit the scope for early reading.

2. Not enough focus on meaning-making.

3. Often the vocabulary used is difficult and unfamiliar to children.

4. Inadequate scope for oral language development and use of children's contexts, thus, undermining the wealth of experiences that children already have.

5. Grade 1 textbooks often assume children have already developed foundational skills (like phonological awareness and familiarity with print), which may not be the case.

6. The content and language used in early grade textbooks are often difficult for children.

7. Textbooks should be aligned with the principles of early language and literacy identified in Chapter 1.

Assessment: It should not focus on memorization of content, skills and concepts. Regular assessment and feedback should be an integral part of the teaching-learning process. Teachers need to take corrective measures based on assessments, including providing additional support to children who are struggling, adjusting teaching strategies and pace of instruction.

Instructional time: Language teaching is considered like any other subject, and the crucial and foundational role of language and literacy in all learning in school education is often not understood within the education system. A result of this is the inadequate instructional time for language in early grades curriculum in many countries in South Asia.

In most states of India and Nepal, the language used as MoI is taught for just one period (35 to 40 minutes) a day, which is grossly inadequate to develop the expected proficiency in early literacy, given the inadequate early literacy exposure at home, less than satisfactory preschool, and home language backgrounds of most children.

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[7] Primarily based on Menon et al., 2017, and Jhingran, 2012, and Ministry of Education, Nepal, 2014.

Instructional time is a crucial variable that affects learning outcomes (Abadzi, 2009; Berliner, 1990). It is a prerequisite, a basic enabling condition. If it is really low, then other academic factors will not be able to ensure learning. We also know that the time spent by students on 'learning' tasks is only a small fraction of the officially allocated time for teaching a language. The Ministry of Education (MHRD, 2014) in India has suggested, as a part of the guidelines for early literacy and mathematics programmes that two and a half hours of instructional time should be available for language and literacy in early grades out of a four-hour instructional day.

2.3.7 Home environment and parental involvement

Many research studies have concluded that exposure to print at home and parental support in early literacy activities, like reading aloud from storybooks to children, have a strong positive influence on children's literacy learning in early grades (Mullis, 2017; Geske & Ozola, 2008; Rowe, 1995).

Most parents in South Asia aspire for English-medium schools for their children. It is therefore crucial to explain to parents about the advantages of using the children's familiar languages and good second language teaching practices, including delaying literacy in English. Involvement of parents and the larger community plays an important role in ensuring learning in school.

2.3.8 Language-in-education policy

Language-in-education policy (which is often not available as a single policy document) includes the use of different languages as mediums of instruction in the pre-primary and primary school stage in which additional languages are used, teaching English as a subject and its use as MoI, and use of children's languages in the classroom.

Such policy prescriptions have an impact on children's resources available in class and the language valued in class – its use by the teacher, textbooks and the overall language dynamics in the classroom. Appropriate language-in-education policies should take into account the principles and research evidence about use of first, second and additional languages at the pre-primary and primary stage and the language situations in different contexts in a province/district.

2.4 Conclusion

The teacher and the teaching-learning process are the most important factors for children's learning. While many of the factors operate at the classroom level, e.g., availability of classroom reading resources, teachers' knowledge of appropriate early literacy practices, availability of teachers who understand/speak children's languages, they are influenced by system-level policies and programmes. For example, teachers' understanding of early literacy pedagogy would depend on the focus and quality of professional development programmes that they receive. Other factors, such as development of appropriate textbooks, language-in-education policies, assessment practices, preschool access and quality, and instructional time, are squarely in the domain of the education system at different levels.

3 LANGUAGE AND LANGUAGE-IN-EDUCATION SITUATIONS

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"

When learners can express their full range
of knowledge in a language in which they are
competent, and their backgrounds are valued and
used as a basis for instruction, they develop higher
self-esteem and greater self-confidence, as well as
higher aspirations in schooling and in life."

– Benson, 2005b, p. 8

"

This chapter outlines the language situations in the South Asian countries and provides a detailed review of language-in-education policies and practice for each of them.

3.1 Linguistic diversity in South Asian countries

All South Asian countries are linguistically and ethnically very diverse. In these countries, languages spoken by people are diverse in both the number of languages and the families of languages they belong to (see Table 11). Thus, there is diversity in the linguistic differences among the languages belonging to the different families.

Moreover, it is not feasible to identify linguistic boundaries or attach language labels to the varied speech patterns as there is considerable fluidity in the spoken languages, which could form a continuum from one place to another. The local spoken language could be influenced by two or more languages.

In many regions, a lingua franca or a contact language is used for communication between different ethno-linguistic groups. The contact language itself is usually a hybrid of other languages. In several regions, people have stopped using their indigenous mother tongues and adopted the local regional language (which is usually not the standard variety of the school language). There is a gradual shift taking place in speech patterns with greater exposure to the languages of wider communication (LWCs), which could be state or national languages.

Language and dialect: There are also variants or dialects of many of the languages. Very often these dialects are influenced by other local languages in the region. One of these variants or dialects is recognized over time as the standard language, while the other dialects continue as 'non-standard' varieties or dialects that have lower prestige and little acceptance in formal domains, leading to a hierarchy between different forms of the same language. Thus, it is common to have limited mutual intelligibility of dialects or variants of the same language as spoken in different regions. Which 'becomes' a language and which remains a dialect is a social and political issue.

Table 11. Examples of numbers and families of languages

Country	Number of languages	Families of languages
India	1,652 mother tongues grouped into 122 languages	Indo-Aryan Dravidian Austro-Asiatic Sino-Tibetan Tai-Kadai
Afghanistan	41[8]	Indo-European (comprising three sub-families: Iranian, Indo-Aryan and Nuristani) Turkic Dravidian
Nepal	More than 123 mother tongues[9]	Indo-European Sino-Tibetan Astro-Asiatic Dravidian (Yadava, 2014)

[8] Ethnologue, 2018.
[9] 2011 Census.

Societal multilingualism: It is very common for two or more languages to be spoken in the same area (e.g., a village). Bilingualism or plurilingualism,[10] where people speak and identify with more than one language (with varying degree of proficiency) is the norm rather than exception in most parts of South Asia. One implication of this hierarchy of languages is that the bilingualism is asymmetrical as speakers of the non-dominant languages

3.2 Language profiles

This section outlines language situations of each of the countries[11] and their implication for primary education in the children's first languages.

3.2.1 Afghanistan

Afghanistan is a multi-ethnic and multilingual country. There are 41 living languages in the country (Ethnologue, 2018). Pashto and Dari (also called Afghan Persian) are the two official languages and also the most widely spoken. One estimate[12] is that Dari is spoken by about 50 per cent of the population (as a first and second language) and Pashto by about 35 per cent. Both Dari and Pashto belong to the Iranian sub-group of Indo-European languages.

Dari is used at national level for government and business transactions. Both Pashto and Dari are widely used as LWCs by speakers of other languages. Over decades, there has been tension about the official status and use in administration of these two languages. Dari enjoys a higher status in culture, knowledge, higher education and administration, even though Pashto speakers enjoy political dominance.

The current Constitution (2004) has for the first time recognized and conferred status and rights to non-dominant regional or local languages by prescribing that in areas where the majority of people speak in any one of the Uzbeki, Turkmani, Pachaie, Baluchi or Pamiri languages, that language, in addition to Pashto and Dari, shall be the third official language. There is also a commitment to the development of these languages and their use in education. This is a formal recognition of the multilingual nature of the country and plurilingual status of the population.

There is large-scale social multilingualism, except in very remote areas. Most minority language speakers are bilingual in at least one other local language (e.g., Brahui speakers in Baluchi, a local LWC). A language hierarchy operates between the two dominant languages and other local languages.

Considering the multi-ethnic and multilingual nature of the country, the use of only one language at the national level and just two at the regional level indicates marginalization of speakers of non-dominant languages.

3.2.2 Bangladesh

Bangla is spoken by 98 per cent of the population, hence Bangladesh is often referred to as a homogeneous nation. There are minority languages in Bangladesh and several dialects of Bangla, which are different from the school language.

The number of L2 Bangla speakers is 19.2 million (Ethnologue, 2018), which is 10.7 per cent of all Bangla speakers. Also, some of the languages, like Sylheti, that are called dialects is a different language with 70 per cent lexical similarity with Bangla.

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[10] Multilingualism here refers to the presence of multiple languages in a language ecology and plurilingualism to individuals able to speak two or more languages, consistent with Council of Europe's terminology (see http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/division_EN.asp).

[11] Please refer to the websites, www.languaesgulper.com and www.ethnologue.com, for more details on languages, their speakers and geographical spread.

[12] https://www.afghan-web.com/languages

Moreover, there are more than 45 different ethnic communities in Bangladesh who live in isolated or remote areas of the country. They form just under 2 per cent of the country's population and in absolute number come close to 2.5 million. Most of them live in the three Chittagong Hill Tract (CHT) districts. Clusters of others are found in the greater Sylhet and Mymensingh districts, the North and Southwestern regions and the coastal areas.

Ethnic communities have their own languages and dialects and a rich and colourful cultural heritage. However, most of their languages have no script (Ahmed et al., 2007, pp. 27–28). In addition to ethnic minorities, there are 300,000 Urdu-speaking Pakistanis in Bangladesh (Wasif, 2006, cited in Hamid, 2009), who have not been repatriated to Pakistan since the war in 1971. Furthermore, Bangla is divided into a number of dialects (Maniruzzaman, 2006, cited in Hamid, 2009) and for some of them the level of mutual intelligibility with standard Bangla could be low. Most adult speakers of these dialects are bilingual in Bangla.

3.2.3 Bhutan

There are 23 languages spoken in Bhutan (Ethnologue, 2018). The predominant languages are Dzongkha (210,000 speakers), Lhotshamkha (187,000 speakers), Tshangla (182,000 speakers) and English. Interestingly, according to Namgyel (2003, cited in Dorjee, 2014), Hindi is the fifth dominant language that Bhutanese are comfortable in speaking.

Dzongkha is the national language of Bhutan. The government has invested in the development of Dzongkha language in the written form with appropriate terminology and grammar. The use of other languages in Bhutan is restricted to intra-community communication (Dorjee, 2014, p. 98).

Bhutan is an interesting case of multilingualism. While unschooled people in the rural areas are mostly monolingual, all educated Bhutanese are bilingual or mostly multilingual. Besides Dzongkha and English, most Bhutanese speak Lhotshamkha, Tsangla and other native languages (Dorjee, 2014). Several minority languages in Bhutan are endangered.

3.2.4 India

The 2001 Census identified 1,652 MTs, which were then 'rationalized' into recognized languages. In the 2001 Census, these MTs were grouped into 122 languages. This was an artificial exercise and MTs (or languages) grouped under one language could be very different from each other. For example, the MTs of Sadri, Lambadi and Chattisgarhi are grouped under the language Hindi. Speakers of these languages would have low mutual intelligibility and would not find it easy to understand the standard dialect of Hindi (Jhingran, 2009).

Of these 122 languages, 22 are constitutionally recognized as official (scheduled) languages listed in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India (scheduled languages). Hindi is recognized as the official language of the Government of India, but it is not the national language of India; it is only one of the 22 scheduled languages. In addition, English is recognized as an associate official language and is considered the language of power throughout the country.

Over 95 per cent of the population speak 13 of these scheduled languages. There are no clear criteria for recognition of a language as a scheduled language. Several languages with a large number of speakers are not included in the Eighth Schedule. Only two languages spoken by tribal groups are included in this group. In some cases, languages receive 'scheduled language' status based on political considerations.

States in India are organized on linguistic basis. Each state notifies their own official languages through state legislation, usually called the Official Languages Act. While some states have one official language, several have two or more languages as official or additional/second official languages.

Speakers of other languages in that state thus become minority language speakers. It is the standard variety of a language that is used in the formal domains, like offices and educational institutions. The 'non-standard' variants are considered inferior and not considered appropriate for formal use. Many of the non-dominant languages and dialects are being maintained because of the 'non-conflicting' use of these languages in informal domains.

Almost a quarter of the population was reported as bilingual in the 2001 Census. Multilingual situations where several dialects and languages are spoken in a small area, like a village or group of villages, is common in India, except in remote areas.

3.2.5 Maldives

Isolated from the rest of the world, with its closest neighbour, India, lying over 400 km away, the 1,192 islands of the Maldives are spread over an area of around 90,000 sq. km., making it one of the most geographically dispersed countries in the world. Yet, its 328,536 people (Ministry of Planning, 2012, cited in Mohamed, 2013) remain homogeneous, sharing the same ethnicity, religion, culture and language.

Colonization, foreign trade and a thriving tourism industry have all left their mark on the language of the Maldivians – Dhivehi. This Indo-Aryan language is spoken almost exclusively in the Maldives and is declared as the official language in the constitution. It is the language of general communication and the predominant language of the local media. However, Maldivians have been conscious of the fact that Dhivehi is of limited use outside the Maldives and have attached great importance to foreign language learning (Mohamed, 2013).

3.2.6 Nepal

Nepal has a very high degree of cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity. Turin (2007, cited in Singh, Zhang, & Besmel, 2012) notes that in Nepal, linguistic, social and ethnic, and cultural identities are closely interwoven.

The 2011 Census enumerated more than 123 mother tongues, which belong to four language families (see Table 11). Nepali, the official language of Nepalis, is spoken by 44.6 per cent of the population, while Maithili is spoken by 11.7 per cent of the population.

Indo-Aryan languages numerically overshadow other languages. Sino-Tibetan languages constitute the largest number of languages, i.e., over 57, spoken by about 18.4 per cent of the total population and spoken in different geographic pockets of mountains and hills. Sixteen Austric languages are spoken by some tribal groups in eastern Nepal.

A total of 19 languages have more than 100,000 speakers each, who altogether form 96 per cent of the country's population. By contrast, the residual 104+ languages are spoken by about 4 per cent of Nepal's total population (Yadava, 2014).

Nepali is the language of administration, education, media, business and employment. English is also highly valued. All three situations of monolingualism, bilingualism and multilingualism exist in Nepal. The majority of Nepali first language speakers are monolingual, whereas most minority language speakers also speak Nepali since it is the lingua franca.

Nepal is a mosaic of linguistic diversity. However, until 1990, Nepal followed a 'One Nation, One Language' policy and a single language, Nepali, was entrusted with all the power and prestige, while minority languages were looked upon as inferior and suppressed.

The situation has since changed with the new Constitution (2015) providing for all mother tongues spoken in Nepal to be national languages. In addition to Nepali language, a province shall select one or more national language(s) that is spoken by the majority in that province as the language of official business, as provided for by the provincial law. The Language Commission constituted recently will suggest on incorporation of additional languages as official languages.

3.2.7 Pakistan

Pakistan is extremely diverse linguistically. There has been an estimate of 72 living languages in Pakistan (Lewis et al., 2009) and another of 61 (Rahman, 2010). The major languages are Punjabi, Pashto, Sindhi, Siraiki, Urdu and Baluchi. There are also over 50 other languages, some of which are on the verge of extinction (Rahman, 2006).

The national language is Urdu, though it is the mother tongue of a minority of the population of Pakistan. The rationale for the privileging of Urdu, as given by the government, is that Urdu is so widespread that it is almost like the first language of all Pakistanis and since most jobs are available through Urdu, all children should be given access to it. It is a symbol of unity and helps in creating a unified 'Pakistani' identity. Being democratic and sensitive to the rights of the federating units, the state allows the use of provincial languages, if desired (Rahman, 2006).

Punjabi is a very widely spoken language with rich literature. However, it is neglected and not used in the official domain. Speakers of Sindhi and Pashto are proud of their languages. Sindhi is also used in the domains of power and is the major language of education in rural Sindh.

Pashto is not a major language of education nor is it used in the domains of power in Pakistan. However, its speakers see it as an identity marker. Educated Pashtuns often code-switch between Pashto and Urdu or English. Thus, the language is under some pressure. Baluchi and Brahvi are spoken by fewer people and are under much pressure from Urdu.

English continues to be used in the official sphere creating the language hierarchy where English is at the top followed by Urdu, Sindhi, Pashto and other local languages. Utility of Pashto is often questioned, leading to further shrinking of the number of dominant languages.

3.2.8 Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka as a nation comprises people from two main ethnic origins, namely, Sinhalese and Tamil, with smaller numbers of Malays, Persians, Chinese and Arabs. Sinhala is the lingua franca of Sri Lanka. Tamil is spoken by the South Indians who migrated to Sri Lanka during the British colonial rule. Around 18 per cent of the population is Tamil speaking.

The number of individual languages listed for Sri Lanka is seven, all of which are living languages.[13] Sinhala and Tamil languages bear equal status as the national and official languages of the country. English language is considered as the link language.

A major reason for the limited extent to which Sri Lankans have learnt each other's languages, Sinhala and Tamil, was identified by the National Education Commission in 2003. "In a plural society driven by ethnic and religious divisions, education has failed conspicuously to promote nation building by fostering mutual understanding and tolerance and respect for the rich cultural diversity of Sri Lankan society, and in the process has made little contribution to ensuring social cohesion and stability" (NEC 2003, p.11, cited in Perera, 2011).

Constitutional provisions for official and national languages made in different countries vary significantly; at one end of the spectrum is Nepal where all the mother tongues spoken in the country are recognized as national languages and at the other is Pakistan where only Urdu is given the status of national language. Language is part of a larger socio-historical context of a country, for example, Sinhala and Tamil in Sri Lanka, Bangla in Bangladesh, Dari and Pashto in Afghanistan or Urdu in Pakistan. These dominant languages, including English, are important because they are the vehicles of employment and upward mobility.

3.3 Understanding children's linguistic resources

The considerable linguistic diversity and multilingual environments in most regions of South Asian countries make planning for language-in-education policies and practices difficult. While there is considerable information about speech patterns of the adult population through large-scale census or sample surveys, there is usually very little reliable data about languages that children speak or understand when they first join school at age 5 or 6.

While social multilingualism is very common, it is quite likely that in some areas children do not know the regional language or the contact language at the time of joining school in Grade 1. The assumption that adults in an area are bilingual or multilingual may not apply to children. Similarly, the assumption that children belonging to families with a non-dominant language will not know the school language at all may not be true. Children, like the adults in the area, may speak a dialect or variant of a recognized or standard language, which could be very different from the standard form used in school.

Children may also speak a language that is not a 'pure language A' or 'pure language B', but their L1 (the language they speak fluently) may reflect the multilingual milieu of the area. Data about languages that children (at the threshold of joining school) know well or are somewhat familiar with need to be collected at decentralized levels, including school, as a crucial input for planning of effective language-in-education policies and programmes. This will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

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[13] https://www.ethnologue.com/country/LK.

3.4 Languages-in-education

3.4.1 An overview

Chapter 1 discussed the centrality of children's first languages (or a familiar language) in their overall cognitive and socio-emotional development and in helping children develop strong early language and literacy skills and construct knowledge by making use of their strong linguistic and cultural resources.

Table 12 shows that a large number of languages are spoken in the South Asian countries, but only very few are used in school education; even fewer are used as MoIs. Thus, a very large number of children in South Asia study through a language that is not their first language.

Table 12. Languages spoken and languages-in-education in primary schools

Country	Languages spoken	Medium of instruction[14]	Languages taught as subjects
Afghanistan	41	Dari or Pashto depending upon the region.	Pashto and Dari English language is being taught from the fourth grade
Bangladesh	41	Bangla	Bangla and English
India	780 Indian languages in 2010[15]	28 languages; several languages used as MoI in each state.[16] Mother-tongue-based early-exit transitional programmes in a few states use additional languages as MoI.[17]	42 languages
Maldives	2 (and a few dialects)[18]	English	English, Dhivehi
Nepal	123 mother tongues	Nepali, English or children's mother tongue can be used as a medium of instruction.	Nepali, English and a local language
Pakistan	61 languages	Urdu	English, Urdu, Sindhi, Pashto
Sri Lanka	3 principal languages: English, Sinhala and Tamil + (very small percentage) Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Malayalam and Telugu	English, Sinhala and Tamil	English, Sinhala and Tamil

Source: Azami, 2009; Hamid & Honan, 2012, p. 141; Jhingran, 2005; Yadava, 2014; Rahman, 2010, cited in Coleman & Capstick, 2012.

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[14] Medium of instruction here is only for public schools. English-medium private schools are burgeoning in each of these countries, ranging from low-fee paying to elite private schools.
[15] The People's Linguistic Survey of India (PLSI).
[16] Assam, a state in northeastern India, provides primary education in 10 languages as mediums of instruction.
[17] Odisha, a state in eastern India, has initiated MTB MLE programmes in 21 local languages.
[18] Malé, Huvadu, Fuvah Mulaku, Addu and Maliku Bas (Ethnologue, 2018).

3.4.2 Constitutional provisions, language-in-education policy and practice

Afghanistan

Constitutional provision: Pashto or Dari are the only two mediums of instruction in the different provinces and regions. The Constitution of Afghanistan, 2004, prescribes that in areas where the majority speak in any of the Uzbeki, Turkmani, Pachaie, Baluchi or Pamiri languages, that language, in addition to Pashto and Dari, shall be the third official language. Article 43 of the Constitution stipulates that the state shall provide opportunities to teach native languages in areas where they are spoken.

Practice: Local languages are taught as subjects and not used as MoIs. This means that children speaking these non-dominant languages continue to study through unfamiliar languages. This is a big bottleneck in achieving quality education. The Constitution enjoins the state to "design and apply effective programmes to foster and develop all languages". However, given decades of marginalization of languages, other than Dari and Pashto, it is an uphill task to develop curriculum, textbook and teacher training in these languages. For example, the Ministry of Education failed to find any author to write textbooks in the Pamiri language.

First language-based programmes: The Pashai language development project implemented by SERVE, a non-governmental organization (NGO), focused on adult literacy development in Pashai and Pashto languages. A script was developed for Pashai. Later, this work was extended to primary schools where children experience bilingual education. The project enjoys strong community support. It is reported that children receiving Pashai-Pashto instruction are faring better in school compared with those who received Pashto-only instruction (Bahry, 2013).[19]

Bangladesh

Policy: The medium of instruction in all government-run secular schools in Bangladesh is the national language, Bangla. In recognition of ethnic minorities, for the first time in the history of education in Bangladesh, the National Education Policy 2010 (Bangladesh)[20] states that one of its aims is "to facilitate learning in the mother languages of the indigenous peoples and small ethnic groups at the primary level of education", and that "measures will be taken to ensure the availability of teachers from ethnic groups and to prepare texts in their own languages so that ethnic children can learn their own indigenous languages. In these initiatives, especially in preparing textbooks the inclusion of respective indigenous communities will be ensured."

Practice: The policy is yet to be properly implemented. In 2017, pre-primary textbooks were developed in five ethnic languages for CHT districts, but teachers did not receive training in local languages,[21] except for the Shishur Khamatayan programme (SKP).

First language-based programmes: BRAC, an NGO which runs thousands of non-formal primary schools, provides instruction in the local language for children belonging to ethnic groups in specific areas until Grade 2. Since 2006, Save the Children has been implementing SKP, a two-year, mother-tongue-based preschool programme, in three districts of CHT. This bilingual, bicultural programme for four- and five-year-olds begins in L1 with L1 primers and storybooks. In the final six months of the second year, children are introduced to oral Bangla through appropriate second language teaching methods, preparing learners to begin Grade 1 in Bangla-medium primary schools.

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[19] More details about this programme are in UNESCO, 2016, available at www.unescobkk.org/fileadmin/user_upload/appeal/MLE/Case_Studies_Booklet.pdf
[20] https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/02.National-Education-Policy-2010-English.pdf, accessed 25 March 2018.
[21] www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/education/2017/08/09/pre-primary-education-indigenous-languages-failing

Research conducted in 2010 (Vijayakumar, 2010) concluded that the largest difference between MT-based preschool and non-MT-based preschool children was in the competency area of communication, language and literacy, in which MT children scored 26 percentage points higher than non-MT children.

Bhutan

Policy: Bhutan's English medium policy is a prominent feature of the country's system of government-run education, which distinguishes Bhutan from other countries in South and East Asia where local/national languages are most often used for instruction at the primary level (Farrell, Singh & Giri, 2011, cited in LaPrairie, 2014). Ever since the start of modern education in Bhutan, the medium of instruction has been English from the beginning of primary school. Dzongkha is taught as a subject. None of the other languages are used in primary education.

Practice: Passing Dzongkha as a subject is compulsory. Students do not learn to write Dzongkha too well even after studying it for many years and it is seen as a difficult subject. The main reason for this lack of interest in the language is that literacy in Dzongkha is not seen to add value for employment as the demand is only for English proficiency. The time allocated for Dzongkha as a subject is much less than for English.[22] No other language is formally used in schools.

India

Policy: Article 350A of the Indian Constitution states that every state and local authority shall endeavour to provide adequate facilities for instruction in the mother tongue at the primary stage of education for all children belonging to linguistic minority groups. This position has been reiterated in successive policy documents, including the Programme of Action, 1992, and the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009.

While there is a recognition of the diverse linguistic situations in India and also a constitutional provision for protecting the rights of citizens to preserve their language and culture, some languages, like Hindi, English and the state official languages, have been privileged for use in the formal domains. This pushes other languages (and speakers of these languages) towards the margins.

Practice: India seems to have done well in promoting the regional/state languages and their use in education. A total of 28 languages is used in the country as mediums of instruction at the primary stage and at least 42 are taught as language subjects. However, the less dominant languages are neglected in education with only six non-scheduled languages being used as MoI, and that too in states in northeastern India.

The issue of education in the mother tongue at the primary stage has not become a right and has remained only as something that is desirable. It is completely up to state governments to decide the languages to be used as mediums of instruction or subjects at the primary stage (Jhingran, 2009).

English in primary education: English is introduced as a subject in Grade I in most states. In a few states, it is introduced in Grade 3. In fact, literacy in English is also introduced from Grade 1 with teaching of the alphabet. Thus, young children begin with learning the school language, which is often an unfamiliar language, and English, which is not available in their environment.

[22] http://crossasia-repository.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/2617/1/13_SpdrPglt.pdf

First language-based programmes: Mother-tongue-based MLE programmes were initiated by state governments in the states of Andhra Pradesh and Odisha in 2004–2005. These programmes use the children's L1s (tribal languages) as the only language of teaching and early literacy instruction for the first three years in primary-level schooling.

The state's school language (L2) is introduced as a language subject for the development of oral communicative skills in the second year and for reading and writing skills in the third year of schooling. The state language is used as the medium of instruction from Grade 4, while the L1 continues as a subject until Grade 5.

The Odisha programme is being implemented in 2,000 primary schools in 21 mother tongues in situations where almost all children have the same L1. The preparatory work involved language development and curriculum and textbook development for Grades 1 to 5. Teachers from the same ethnic and linguistic background have been identified and more are being recruited to ensure that there are at least two teachers who have the same L1 background as the children (see the case study on Odisha in Chapter 5).

The Odisha MLE programme evaluation has shown positive effects on children's classroom achievement, school attendance and participation, and parental/community involvement. The state government of Odisha has also notified an MLE policy for the state. Some NGOs are also implementing early-exit transitional programmes in some tribal areas on a small scale.

In other states, the work for including children's languages has been more tokenistic in nature, e.g., introducing some lessons in language textbooks in non-dominant languages, developing language inventories of local language words for teachers, language training of teachers in non-dominant languages.

Maldives

Policy: English, although the second language, is introduced to children from when they begin preschool and acts as the main medium of instruction throughout primary and secondary school as well as at the tertiary level. Unlike other Asian contexts where options for gaining an education through the medium of a national/regional language exist, the Maldives does not offer such alternatives. Since the introduction of English-medium schools in the 1960s, all other forms of education were relegated to a second class status.

The curriculum and policy documents are written in English, the prescribed textbooks are produced in English and the examinations are set in English. Therefore, even though no explicit written policy has been developed by the authorities, the nature of the language policy is evident, as Spolsky (2003) and Corson (1999) have argued, from the tacit language practices.

When a child begins preschool (at about 3 years of age), the child is exposed to three languages: Dhivehi, English and Arabic (EDC, 2012, cited in Mohamed, 2013). At primary level (Grades 1–7), students study a total of nine subjects. Of these, only Dhivehi, Quran and Islam are taught in the first language. The rest are taught through the medium of English. English-medium instruction constitutes 75 per cent of the total time a child spends at primary school (UNESCO, 2011, cited in Mohamed, 2013).

Practice: Code mixing is common with both teachers and students using a mix of English and Dhivehi for their oral interactions. A study has indicated that teachers express discomfort in having to teach in a language that they themselves are not proficient in (Tam, 2011). As several studies have established, teachers teaching through the medium of their first language give more examples and analogies, their discourse is much richer and classroom interactions are more animated (Tam, 2011). Using English as the MoI has affected the richness of classroom interactions and necessitated teachers resorting to code switching. The low levels of student achievements in school-based and national assessments have been cause for concern (UNESCO, 2001; 2011, cited in Mohamed, 2013).

Nepal

Policy: The Education Act and the Constitution and all education sector plans for over a decade have provided for the right to basic education in the mother tongue. The curriculum for primary stage provides for use of Nepali or English or the mother tongue as the MoI in primary grades. The current policy of the Ministry of Education supports use of mother tongues as MoIs from preschool to Grade 3.

Nepali and English are compulsory subjects from Grade 1; eight periods a week are allocated for Nepali language subject and five periods a week for English. Mother tongue can be taught as a subject in the four periods allocated for a 'local subject'. The language spoken by the majority of students should be chosen while selecting the mother tongue for teaching in schools. The medium of instruction, viz., Nepali or English, is decided by the School Management Committee (SMC) in consultation with the local government. The current policy of the Ministry of Education supports use of mother tongues until Grade 3.

The School Sector Development Plan (2016–2023) lays out an elaborate set of approaches for different language situations. This includes use of children's L1 from preschool to Grade 3 before transition to Nepali and use of appropriate second language teaching practices. Nepal has been already implementing an ambitious Early Grade Reading Programme since 2015 to improve early literacy teaching practices. The implementation of the new federal structure will bring about more changes in the use of additional languages in education as individual provinces will decide on these issues.

Practice: While the policy and legal provisions for use of mother tongues in early grades as subjects or even as MoI have existed for some time, they have not been implemented in practice. Nepali is the MoI in over 75 per cent of public/community schools. MTs are taught as a subject in less than 5 per cent schools in early grades (could be as low as 1–2 per cent). Even in these schools, MTs are not taught formally and mostly confined to the oral domain while Nepali and English language and literacy instruction is initiated simultaneously in Grade 1.

Even though a provision exists to teach mother tongue as a subject, most schools use the additional time of 'local subject' to add instructional time for English. Over the past 5–7 years, 20–25 per cent primary schools in the government sector have shifted to the English medium, beginning with pre-primary, as a result of the delegation of this decision-making to SMCs. The main reasons for this shift to English medium include parental demand and the burgeoning private English-medium schools that are pulling children away from government schools.

First language-based programmes: A pilot programme of MTB MLE was implemented in 25–30 schools in different regions. The children's language was used as MoI and as a subject in early grades (1, 2 and 3). In one of the districts, children were taught in L1 in the first half of the day and Nepali in the second half. Schools in four out of six districts were multigrade.

Some schools continue MLE through the project supported by the Finnish government or INGO and NGO programmes (Save the Children, United Mission of Nepal and SIL) or other local initiatives. There is lack of clarity in the appropriate approach for MLE to be adopted in some of these initiatives (see the case study on Nepal in Chapter 5).

The School Sector Reform Programme, 2009–2015, had proposed extension of the MTB MLE approach to 7,500 schools, but this was not implemented. Several NGOs have been implementing MTB bilingual or multilingual education programmes in a small number of community schools. However, these have not received government support.

Pakistan

Policy: Urdu is the medium of instruction in all government schools. Of the 71 other indigenous languages, only Sindhi has an official role as medium of instruction in primary schools in Sindh and Pashto is taught in government schools as a subject (Coleman, 2010).

Practice: Rahman (1998, cited in Mohanty, 2010) describes Urdu as the language of Pakistani nationalism and English as the real language of power. English is the medium in elite private schools and also claimed to be the medium in low-fee charging private schools. Other languages are marginalized because of the exclusive focus on Urdu and English.

Parents also encourage use of recognized languages at home, which could be a "fatal blow"[23] to the marginalized languages. In Punjab, there is widespread culture-shaming of Punjabi. Parents, teachers and the peer group combine to embarrass students about speaking Punjabi. In all of the elitist English-medium schools the author visited, there were policies forbidding students from speaking Punjabi (Rahman, 2006).

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[23] Aslam Kamboh, Secretary, Schools, Ministry of Education, Punjab, interviewed in Lahore on 11 March 2010. He recognized that this process was happening in his province when he said, "Mothers have struck a fatal blow to Punjabi." This situation is not restricted to Pakistan, but has been identified in other countries as well (Coleman, 2010).

Sri Lanka

Policy: Sinhala and Tamil are the two national languages in Sri Lanka. Sri Lankan children attending government schools follow their education in either the Sinhala medium or the Tamil medium. Among government schools, 71.5 per cent offer education in the Sinhala medium of instruction and 27.8 per cent in the Tamil medium.

English is introduced orally and based on activity from Grade 1 and as a subject from Grade 3. The second national language (Sinhala for Tamil-medium students and Tamil for Sinhala-medium students) is introduced from Grade 3. Oral Tamil and oral Sinhala, in Sinhala-medium and Tamil-medium schools, respectively, are introduced from Grade 1 onwards and as a subject from Grade 3.

Bilingual education policy took root in Sri Lanka with a few subjects being taught in English and the rest in Sinhala/Tamil, depending upon the region (Walisundara & Hettiarachchi, 2016).

Practice: The multitude of language courses conducted in the country may display high scores in examinations and large numbers of successful learners, but the reality is that the majority cannot communicate effectively. Nearly 90 per cent of Sinhala-speaking people cannot communicate in Tamil and cannot communicate effectively in English and 70 per cent of Tamil-speaking people in Sri Lanka cannot communicate in Sinhala (Ten Year National Plan for a tri-lingual Sri Lanka, 2012–2021).

3.5 Languages-in-education: Other challenges

3.5.1 Issue of English

English is the language of power and socio-economic mobility in all South Asian countries. While English is the medium of instruction in public schools in Bhutan and Maldives from the first year in primary school, it is introduced as a subject in early grades in the other countries (see Table 13).

Even when it is taught as a subject, English is given undue importance and instructional time. In the burgeoning private schools, it is common to have English medium of instruction from the preschool stage. Parents aspire for English-medium education for their children hoping that they would be able to learn English well and improve their employment opportunities.

However, the teaching of English in government schools and the low-fee charging private schools is beset with huge problems. Most teachers are not proficient in English. They do not have the understanding or experience of good second language teaching practices. Due to their limited proficiency in English, teachers prefer to read from textbooks and initiate literacy through teaching of the alphabet very early in Grade 1, rather than create an environment of meaningful use of the language in oral form.

Children have few opportunities to listen to or speak English in familiar contexts. Many teachers use the local language to explain English text. However, the manner of use of the local or school language does not support acquisition of English. Memorization of texts and copy writing are the most common learning practices in early grade English classrooms. Textbooks are often difficult, not just for children, but for teachers too.

Table 13. Introduction of English in school

Country	Use of English at primary level
Afghanistan	Introduced as a subject in Grade 4
Bangladesh	As a subject from Grade 1 in Bangla-medium schools
Bhutan	In pre-primary grades
India	As a subject from Grade 1, in some states as a medium of instruction from Grade 1
Maldives	Pre-primary onwards
Nepal	As a subject from Grade 1 and also medium of instruction along with Nepali
Pakistan	As a subject from Grade 2
Sri Lanka	As a subject from Grade 3 onwards[24]

English is treated as an examination subject and the focus of teaching is to prepare children for written examinations. Higher-order comprehension work of thinking and reasoning is rarely seen in English language classes. Also, early grade classrooms do not have good children's reading materials for beginning readers or a print-rich environment to support English learning (NCERT, 2012; Mohanty, 2010; Coleman, 2010; Jhingran 2009; MoE, Nepal, 2016; Tam, 2011).

English is not just an unfamiliar language for children, they have very little exposure to it outside school. We have seen in Chapter 1 that an unfamiliar language should be first taught as a subject, not introduced as a medium of instruction, until children have developed a fair degree of competence in it. Even when English is taught in early grades, the focus should be on developing oral competence before teaching literacy. This is the model in Sri Lanka where English is introduced in oral form from Grade 1 and as a formal subject only in Grade 3.

[24] *Education First, Sri Lanka*, Ministry of Education Report, 2013.

Teaching of English requires teachers to have competence in the English language as well as a good understanding of second language teaching pedagogy. Salient strategies that are relevant for teaching-learning of a second language in early grades include initially building familiarity with the language; providing exposure to the language in meaningful and purposeful contexts in an input-rich communicational environment; using 'comprehensible input', i.e., use of language, oral or written, in a form that can be understood by children at any point in time; using contexts familiar to children; not insisting on production (speaking) by children; and using children's L1 in a strategic manner to promote English learning.

English textbooks and curricular expectations for early grade English learning also need to change. The focus in the initial years should be on developing familiarity with the language and oral competence.

3.5.2 Importance given to language teaching

The crucial role of language-in-learning across the curriculum is not understood in education systems throughout South Asia, from policymakers to teachers. Language, especially the school's first language, is generally conceived as a 'lighter' and less important subject in the overall curriculum.

Instructional time given for language is often less compared to mathematics, English or environmental studies. For example, in Nepal and several states in India, the school language, used as MoI at primary level (which is quite commonly not the children's L1) is taught for just one period a day, i.e., about 35 to 40 minutes per day.

Given the inadequate number of instructional days in primary schools and the very low 'time-on-task', it is extremely difficult for children to acquire grade-level competencies in the school language by the end of Grade 3. It is important to build a perspective throughout the education system about the crucial role of early language and literacy learning for the rest of academic learning at school.

3.5.3 Public-private disconnect

In almost all countries, low-fee charging private schools are burgeoning in urban and rural areas. They are often unregulated, and the practices of language teaching could be more problematic than government schools. Also, in several countries, these schools claim to provide English-medium education beginning at preschool, which, given the competence of teachers and the methods used, is harmful for children's cognitive and holistic development. The number of private schools, however, will continue to increase significantly, fuelled by parental demand.

3.5.4 Early childhood education

Children's L1 should be used as the medium of interaction in early childhood education. There could be some gradual exposure to the school language in natural and meaningful contexts familiar to children, especially in the last year of preschool. The policy about language in preschool education is often not clearly articulated. Private schools often use English as medium of instruction even at preschool stage.

One of the challenges in countries like India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka is that a different ministry (Women and Child Development) is responsible for early childhood education and it is difficult to coordinate policies and curriculums across preschool and primary level.

3.6 Conclusion

Non-dominant languages are considered inadequate and various limitations are imputed to them, which are not inherent weaknesses in these languages, but the result of long neglect and unequal treatment. Over time, these languages are marginalized with considerable domain shrinkage; languages are barely maintained in the domains of home and close in-group communication with clear signs of declining intergenerational transmission.

As the languages are pushed out of significant domains like education, they become further impoverished with limited functions restricting their scope for development. The fact that many are not a written language is held against their use in formal domains like education. In most of the countries the power enjoyed by the dominant national or regional languages is now threatened by English. This has caused further marginalization of the non-dominant languages.

There is a clear disconnect between language-in-education policies and children's need of early language and literacy development. A very large number of children in South Asian countries (with the possible exception of Sri Lanka) study through the medium of a language that is not their mother tongue. The choice of languages to be used as mediums of instruction is based often on considerations other than young children's developmental needs, including their self-esteem and effective learning.

The desire of governments (and parents) to ensure that children become proficient in national languages or English, which open gateways of employment and upward mobility, propels them to use these languages as mediums of instruction from the early school years. Often, political considerations, like promoting a national identity among diverse linguistic and ethnic populations, also lead to decisions of using only one or a few languages as mediums of instruction. Medium of instruction policy determines the social and linguistic groups that have access to political and economic opportunities and those that are disenfranchised (Coleman, 2010).

Sometimes, local languages are included as additional subjects, which only adds to the children's academic burden. There is no pedagogical approach to use local languages as a foundation to the gradual learning of languages of wider communication. It is also apparent that there is a considerable gulf between policies and actual implementation at school level. Policies are often framed with good intention, but they are not backed by the will and resources to translate them into field-level action.

The role of English in creating a further divide and marginalization has been called the linguistic 'double divide' by Mohanty (2010). This double divide is between English and the national or regional language on the one hand and the national language(s) and the non-dominant languages on the other hand.

4 TYPOLOGY OF SCHOOL-LEVEL SOCIOLINGUISTIC SITUATIONS AND LANGUAGE-IN-EDUCATION APPROACHES

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> "
> A language-across-the-curriculum perspective is important for primary education. Language is best acquired through different meaning-making contexts, and hence all teaching is in a sense language teaching.
>
> – NCERT, 2005
> "

The discussion in Chapter 3 focused on macro-level language situations in the South Asian countries, including mother tongues, regional and national languages, the extent and nature of multilingualism in each country along with their language-in-education policies. It was noted that there appears to be a disconnect between the language situations and the language-in-education policies, including the choice of mediums of instruction.

While the high-level analysis helped to paint a picture of incongruence between national policies and broad contexts, there is a need to understand sociolinguistic situations closer to the ground, including the school level, for planning of appropriate strategies that can support children's socio-emotional, linguistic and cognitive development in specific contexts.

In this chapter, a typology of different school situations is discussed along with approaches for use and sequencing of different languages as MoIs and subjects at preschool, primary and upper primary levels.

In South Asian contexts, children's L1s and the regional/national language have very different status in social, education and official domains. It is appropriate to call them non-dominant languages (NDL) and dominant languages (DL), respectively.

4.1 Typology of school/classroom sociolinguistic situations

4.1.1 Variables

The following variables can be used to describe school/classroom language situations in any context:

1. **Languages children know when they join Grade 1:** First language (L1), level of understanding of the language used as MoI (L2), and their exposure to L2 and other languages outside school.

2. **Composition of the classroom:** Almost all children have the same L1 or two or more L1s in the classroom. If they have different L1s, is there a lingua franca that most children are somewhat familiar with?

3. **Relationship between L1 and L2:** These could be from the same family of languages, could be variants of the same language or could be very different languages with different origins. Even when L1 (a non-dominant language or dialect) is a variant of the dominant language (L2), there could be problems of hierarchy and stigmatization of the non-standard dialect that could make it difficult to use in teaching-learning.

4. **Medium of instruction:** The standard variety of language as reflected in the curriculum (including textbooks).

5. **Language actually used for teaching-learning:** This could vary considerably, for example, (a) a strict L2 environment where children are not allowed to use L1; (b) while instruction is mainly in L2, children's L1 is used to explain difficult concepts, words or give complicated instructions; (c) teacher freely and extensively uses children's L1, virtually translating all L2 content into L1.

6. **Teacher proficiency in L1 and attitude towards children with NDL background:** The most inappropriate situation is when the teacher does not understand or speak children's L1. When teachers feel that the children's languages are 'sub-standard' or inferior, they are not likely to use them for teaching-learning. Sometimes, there is an attitudinal bias towards children's cultures too.

7. **Early language and literacy teaching practice:** These practices may or may not be supportive of children learning an unfamiliar language. Availability of children's reading materials and other teaching-learning materials in L1 and L2 could vary.

8. **Home and community related issues:** The following issues strongly influence the school's sociolinguistic context: (a) languages that are commonly used in the community; (b) the home literacy environment and learning support for children; (c) aspirations of parents and community about children learning the dominant language or national language and English; and (d) acceptance or demand for using the local language.

4.1.2 Categorizing school language situations

While the list of variables in section 4.1.1 may seem long to take into account to try to classify school-level sociolinguistic situations, the initial mapping can be done using only a few of these variables:

1. Children's understanding of language used as MoI at entry to Grade 1

2. Number of children's first languages in a classroom and availability/understanding of a lingua franca

3. Availability of teachers who know children's L1

4. Relationship between L1 and L2 (MoI)

A very simple classification of school language situations based only on children's oral language competence is presented in Nepal's School Sector Development Plan (Ministry of Education, 2016) (see Table 14). School sociolinguistic situations can be of many more types.

Table 14. Language situation school types in Nepal

School type	Children's language at the time of preschool/Grade 1 entry	Estimated percentage
Type 1	Almost all children speak Nepali (either as their MT or acquired)	60–70%
Type 2	Almost all children have an L1 other than Nepali	10–15%
Type 3	Children have diverse L1s without a common familiar language	15–20%

4.1.3 Simple sociolinguistic mapping

To be able to develop appropriate language-in-education approaches and interventions, it is important to carry out simple sociolinguistic mapping in the identified area, including the aspects mentioned above, viz., children's language competence when they join school; languages in the community; teachers' language proficiencies and parental/community attitudes towards local and dominant languages.

Once it is decided to initiate an L1-oriented programme, the mapping could be extended to include understanding of children's contexts and experiences, collection of local folk tales, cultural stories and important themes in those contexts.

4.2 Multilingual approach to teaching-learning

South Asian societies, in general, are multilingual. Children also need to develop multilingual competence in two or more languages while using their strong first language resources in the initial years. However, teaching in primary school is often dominated by a national or regional language and sometimes English. It is important that the education system develops a *multilingual habitus*[25] or outlook where children's existing linguistic and cultural resources are valued and used in education. This requires a shift from the focus on dominant languages only.

Box 4. Essential elements of a multilingual approach to teaching-learning

1. Children's languages find place in the classroom and are used as resources for learning additional languages and content in other subjects. Thus, a multilingual education classroom would not use only one language (say the DL). The teacher would use and allow and encourage children to respond in their L1, read aloud or tell stories in both the NDL and DL, explain difficult words and concepts using L1, and children use their L1s in group discussions.

2. Languages are not taught and learnt in water-tight compartments. Children learn new languages by using their strong, familiar language as a scaffold. The use of 'mixed' language is a powerful strategy in the process of learning unfamiliar languages.

3. An MLE classroom reflects tolerance and mutual respect for all children's languages and cultures. Only one language (DL) does not remain dominant.

4. A multilingual approach for teaching-learning can be used across the curriculum where any difficult text or concept or higher-order thinking and reasoning work is carried out using children's L1.

5. A multilingual (and multicultural) approach helps to bring children's cultures and experiences into the classroom in a planned manner, alongside the dominant culture represented in the textbook.

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[25] See Benson (2013) for a discussion on *multilingual habitus.*

4.3 Bilingual/multilingual education

Bilingual education is usually defined as the use of two languages (L1 and L2) as mediums of instruction, sequentially or simultaneously, during school education (e.g., primary and upper primary). When more languages are added so that more than two languages are taught as subjects or used as MoI, it is commonly referred to as multilingual education.

The objective of MLE is that children gain communicative and academic competence in these two or three languages by the end of school. An MLE model is already being used in Sri Lanka where children study through the medium of Sinhala or Tamil (their L1) and the other national language and English is added in Grade 3.

In India too, three languages are taught in several states between primary and upper primary, but children's L1 (NDL) may not be one of them. When additional languages are used only as subjects and not for teaching content, there is a possibility that children may not develop strong academic competence in them.

While using children's L1s is crucial for learning, they also need to develop competence in the regional/national language and English. The use of children's L1 as the medium of instruction at preschool and primary level and adding DLs as language subjects is the most appropriate approach for multilingual education. This L1-based MLE approach is discussed in section 4.4.2. However, in some situations, e.g., when children with two or more first languages are in the same classroom, this may not be feasible.

4.4 Approaches to using and sequencing of languages for different language situations

Two major objectives should guide decisions about the use and sequencing of languages as MoIs and subjects:

1. Languages in which children are expected to gain communicative and academic competence, including literacy at the end of eight years of primary and upper primary education; and

2. Teaching-learning process should use children's linguistic and cultural resources in a pedagogically sound manner (e.g., positive self-image, active learning, building on what children already know), for their language and literacy development and learning of other subjects.

Children are usually expected to be bilingual/multilingual and multiliterate in two or more languages of wider communication, including the regional/national languages and English. The use of children's familiar language in the primary years of schooling, preferably as a medium of instruction, is the key to better learning of other languages as also improved learning of other subjects (see Chapter 1).

Given these two 'facts', the most appropriate approach is where children's L1 (usually NDLs) is used as the foundation in preschool and primary education, and other languages, like the regional/national language, are added in different grades. However, sociolinguistic situations are diverse and approaches for use of languages-in-education need to respond to these contexts.

It is possible to classify the different approaches of use and sequencing of languages as MoIs and subjects and for programme interventions into four major groups (see Table 15). Only those approaches that address situations where children's home languages (usually NDLs in the education domain) are different from the school MoI (DL) are included. These approaches do not take into account political or resource constraints or even demand from communities.

Table 15. Four major approaches for use and sequencing of languages in primary education*

	Approach for primary level	Additional points	School type (Ref: Table 16)
1	Introducing and using children's L1 as medium of education for extended period	A transition to the national language is planned at the end of upper primary (Grade 8).	5 and 7
2	First language-based multilingual programme	L1 as MoI; late transition (at the end of primary) to L2 as MoI is preferable. L2 taught as subject for 3–4 years before being used as MoI; L1 should continue as subject post primary.	4 and 5
3	Learning through L2 as MoI with oral L1 use and L1 development	Effective second language teaching strategies; extensive and strategic use of children's L1 throughout primary. Appropriate use of L1 and L2 depending on children's understanding of L2 at different points.	2 and 3
4	Using diverse languages in the classroom as a resource to develop L2 and English competence	A variety of strategies including translation and translanguaging focused on the use of children's language resources. Requires high degree of teacher competence and belief in respecting and supporting diversity. Not many working models available.	6

*Table 16 provides a more detailed analysis of types of sociolinguistic situations and appropriate approaches.

4.4.1 Approach 1: Using children's L1 as medium of education for extended period

Situation type: Situation type 7, see Table 16

Children's L1 is a dominant and written regional language with literature, but not used in education. Teachers speak the children's language, which is also the regional DL.

In this case, L1 could be made the MoI for 6–8 years of education. This could be done in a phased manner beginning with primary grades. The national language and/or English could be added after 2–3 years. Adequate preparation for developing curriculum and teacher professional development will be needed before implementation. This will also require a high degree of political will and a strong demand from the linguistic group for inclusion of its language in education.

4.4.2 Approach 2: First language-based multilingual programme (L1-based MLE approach)

Situation type: Situation type 5 and 6, see Table 16.

First-language-based multilingual education, commonly called mother-tongue-based multilingual education develops academic competence in L1 first by using L1 as the MoI. Other languages are developed on the foundation of L1 (see section 1.11).

Initially, any unfamiliar language is taught only as a subject for 3–5 years. After children have developed some academic competence in this language (L2), it could also be used as MoI along with L1 (for some subjects). Later, L2 could also become the only MoI, while L1 and English are taught as subjects. L1 needs to find place for instruction in the classroom even when the official MoI is shifted from L1 to L2 to explain concepts, check for understanding and for higher-order thinking and expression by children.

Through this model, children can achieve a high degree of proficiency in both L1 and L2. A high quality ECE programme that provides for L1 development for 2–3 years before primary school can be a good start for L1-based education. UNESCO's MTB MLE Resource Kit (UNESCO, 2016) is a very useful resource for understanding mother-tongue-based approaches and programmes.

Models of MTB MLE

1. Additive approach: The approach is called an additive approach when additional languages are added to the curriculum, e.g., L2 and English, without removing L1. Here L1 is retained as a subject (say, at least until the end of upper primary Grade 8) even after the MoI shifts to L2.

2. Subtractive approach: The approach is a subtractive approach when L1 is removed from the curriculum after L2 becomes the MoI, say, within 2–3 years in primary school.

3. Early-exit: Here the transition from L1 to L2 as MoI is planned within 2 to 3 years of primary school. When L1 is completely removed from the curriculum after L2 is introduced as MoI, it is a subtractive model of transition. In some early-exit models, while the MoI shifts to L2 in Grades 3 or 4, L1 is retained as a subject until Grade 5 or 6.

4. Late-exit: Here the transition from L1 to L2 as MoI is planned after 5–6 years of primary school. Children acquire CALP skills in L1 by that time and also a good understanding of L2.

Early-exit programmes have the least benefit for children's learning of L2 and other subjects. Most of the programmes of bilingual/multilingual education in South and Southeast Asia are of the early-exit transitional variety (see the Odisha case study in Chapter 5).

Box 5. Requirements of MTB MLE programmes

MTB MLE programmes are usually developed for ethnic minority groups and non-dominant languages that may not be written and may never have been used in formal domains.

- Extensive work of language development and orthography development is required with the involvement of educationists, linguists and community representatives.

- Textbooks and other students' materials have to be developed in L1. This is usually done for one grade at a time. The curriculum should incorporate local knowledge and culture through collaboration with local communities.

- Significant social and political mobilization may be needed to generate interest and support from the local community and the education system for use of the NDL in education.

- The approach requires intensive work in the preparatory period as well as continued academic development, teacher support and monitoring.

- Another major requirement is to ensure availability of teachers from that language background. This could be a huge challenge. Some of the steps needed include:

  o Redeployment of teachers from other areas, special local recruitments by lowering qualification and a sustained effort to help candidates from the community acquire the requisite educational and professional qualification.

  o Some programmes, e.g., Philippines, have introduced bilingual assistants in schools where teachers do not know the children's L1. This could be a good strategy in the initial stage of work; however, this can be only an interim measure.

  o Teachers (with an L1 background), who have never used the NDL as MoI will require extensive training and academic support on an ongoing basis. This entire preparatory process could take 18–24 months.

  o An ECE component that is L1 based should be developed alongside   to provide a strong L1 oral and emergent literacy foundation before Grade 1.

Table 16. School sociolinguistic situations* and language-in-education approaches appropriate for children**

School type	Sociolinguistic situation	Use of L1/NDL	Use of DL (standard variety)	Teaching-learning approaches and strategies
Type 1	Almost all children speak the standard variety of L2/DL at home (already being used as MoI).	–	As MoI from Grade 1	Improved first language teaching strategies with a comprehensive approach that focuses on thinking and reasoning. Availability of children's reading materials. Oral support for children with different L1/NDL if teacher knows.
Type 2	Children's L1 (almost all children) is similar to L2 (it could be a variant/dialect); they have a moderate to good understanding of L2 at entry to Grade 1; literate home environment; some exposure to L2 outside school; teachers know children's L1.	Oral use in Grade 1; later as needed	As MoI from Grade 1	Depending on extent of L2 understanding and exposure, a flexible approach with (a) use of oral L1 along with L2 during Grade 1; (b) explicit bridging of L1 and L2 vocabulary; (c) use of L1 words in initial literacy; and (d) strategic use of L1 as needed for difficult concepts and fluent expression by children even in later grades.
Type 3	Children's L1 (almost all children) has similarity with L2 (related languages or a variant or even a mix of L2 and local languages); children have limited understanding of L2; limited or no exposure to L2 outside school; low parental support and home literacy; L1 has low prestige and cannot be used as MoI immediately; teachers know children's L1.	Oral use in early grades; later as needed	L2 as MoI with L1 scaffolding	Use and development of children's L1 in oral domain throughout primary along with simple read-aloud books in L1 and L2. Appropriate strategies for teaching second language. Higher-order comprehension and expression work in L1 as long as necessary. Use of 'mixed language' is accepted as a stage in language learning. Children's culture and familiar contexts used extensively (see section 4.4.3).

*These are not monolithic situations. Each type has many variations and dimensions and should be viewed as a broad category.
**To be read with suggestions for ECE and teaching of English (see Notes).

Table 16 (cont.)

School type	Sociolinguistic situation	Use of L1/NDL	Use of DL (standard variety)	Teaching-learning approaches and strategies
Type 4	Children's L1 (almost all children) is very different from the L2 (completely unrelated languages); children have limited or no understanding of L2; limited or no exposure to L2 outside school; low parental support and home literacy; sense of group or ethnic identity that can lead to acceptance of use of L1 in education. L1 needs development for use in education; teachers have the same language background as children or can be deployed/recruited.	L1 as MoI for 5–6 years of primary school; L1 exclusively for the first 3–4 years; thereafter with L2 for Grades 4 to 6	L2 as subject for 3 years; L1 and L2 used as MoI for Grades 4 to 6. L2 as sole MoI thereafter	L1-based MLE (MTB MLE) approach (see section 4.4.2). A late-exit model is ideal but may not be feasible initially in terms of community or government support and L1 development. Children's cultural context should be the foundation of the bilingual/multilingual curriculum. It may take time for development of the language for use as MoI, development of the curriculum/textbooks and teacher professional development. In the interim, oral use of L1 should be initiated.
Type 5	Children's L1 (almost all children) is a recognized language used as MoI in other parts of the state or country but not in schools in this area (e.g., migrant population); there is exposure to L2 outside school; teachers with children's L1 background may not be available.	L1 as MoI through primary and later or a late-exit transitional MLE programme	L2 as subject	If the community has a strong sense of identity and values their language and culture, they could demand L1-medium schools at upper primary and secondary level.

Table 16 (cont.)

School type	Sociolinguistic situation	Use of L1/NDL	Use of DL (standard variety)	Teaching-learning approaches and strategies
Type 6	Children of different first language backgrounds in same class; teachers know one or two L1s and/or lingua franca. a. There is a 'lingua franca' or contact language, which children understand to some extent at entry to Grade 1. b. There is no contact language or young children do not have an understanding in Grade 1.	a. Lingua franca used as MoI or orally. b. Using children's L1s as a resource.	L2 as MoI	The use of the lingua franca as MoI will depend on factors like its acceptance among communities, the number of schools, extent of development of the language needed for its use as MoI. It could also be used orally to support learning of L2 over a period of time. Appropriate second language teaching strategies along with encouragement for use of children's L1s (see section 4.4.4).
Type 7	Children's L1 is a strong language with literature and a dominant language, but not used as MoI for political considerations; it is quite different from the language used presently as MoI; teachers are proficient in this language, some may not know the script.	Use L1 as MoI through upper primary school (and even later)	L2 as subject; can be used as MoI from secondary	Appropriate first and second language and literacy teaching practices.

Notes

Early childhood education: All interaction or instruction should be in children's L1. If children have diverse L1s, a somewhat familiar language (lingua franca) could be used while supporting children to use their own L1s. Gradual exposure to DL in familiar and meaningful contexts can be provided.

English: English can be introduced as a formal subject in Grade 3. Prior to that, children could be exposed to oral English in familiar, culturally appropriate contexts through rhymes, picture cards, storytelling and conversation to develop some familiarity and basic vocabulary. An even more delayed introduction of English literacy is appropriate in contexts where children are learning literacies in more than one language already (L1 and DL). English should not be used as a medium of instruction in early grades.

Children's reading materials in L1 and L2: An integral part of early language and literacy teaching. For approaches where L1 is used orally in early grades or used as MoI, children's reading materials will need to be prepared in L1 using familiar themes and contexts.

Appropriate first and second language teaching strategies: Mere use of L1 is not enough. Teachers need to use appropriate early literacy instruction strategies (e.g., meaningful and purposeful use of language; vocabulary development; using L1 as scaffold; respect for all languages).

MTB MLE policies in South Asia

Only two MTB MLE policies could be identified in South Asia for introducing NDLs as MoI at primary level. The Nepal government's policy states that mother tongues can be used as MoI from preschool to Grade 3. From Grade 4, Nepali or English would be the MoIs. However, the policy has not been backed by detailed planning and guidelines and schools have not opted for MT-medium education.

The State Government of Odisha in India developed an elaborate MLE policy and guidelines[26] in 2014 for children belonging to tribal population groups. The policy applies to schools where at least 90 per cent children in a school belong to one language group. It provides for use of MT as MoI for five years with L2 being introduced in Grade 2 and English in Grade 3. The MT will continue to be used as a subject until Grade 8.

Teachers who have proficiency in the MT, L2 and L3 will be recruited locally and relaxation of qualifications will be provided for communities/languages where qualified teachers are not available. In certain communities, the state government would support potential candidates over a period of time to complete their school education and be selected as teachers.

The guidelines list elaborate programmes for pre- and in-service training of teachers and regular monitoring and academic support as also the process of development of local languages and writing of textbooks with language-specific resource groups in collaboration with communities. The guidelines also fix institutional responsibility and provide for strengthening specific institutions to support MLE.

The 'almost all children in a classroom have the same non-dominant L1' is not a widely prevalent situation in some countries, like India and Nepal. Some estimates in India and Nepal have suggested that only 10–15 per cent of schools fall in this category. However, these are usually marginalized communities and quality education for them has to be prioritized. Language mapping projects are needed to ascertain the actual prevalence of different sociolinguistic situations.

4.4.3 Approach 3: Learning through L2 as MoI with oral L1 use and L1 development

Situation type: Types 2 and 3, see Table 16.

This is an imperfect approach from the children's perspective, but it is needed to cater to a very large number of schools in some countries. To be able to meet the second objective of using children's linguistic and cultural resources in a pedagogically sound manner (see section 4.4), this approach must ensure that children's language and cultural resources find a strong place in the teaching-learning process; a *multilingual habitus* will need to be developed in policy and practice. Section 1.12 highlights some basic principles for a classroom that values children's language, culture and knowledge.

L1 and L2 will need to be used for specific objectives in a balanced manner during the initial years. For example, initially, L1 would be important for developing oral language skills and listening comprehension, explaining difficult words, concepts and texts, using extended talk for learning and to develop higher-order thinking and reasoning and fluent communication by children. Initially, the focus of L2 learning would be to acquire conversational fluency by providing 'comprehensible input', simple conversation and vocabulary development. Later, L2 could also be used for higher-order comprehension tasks.

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[26] http://sme.odisha.gov.in/resolution/2014/14118.pdf

There cannot be any formula for the balance between use of L1 and L2. The teacher will have to be guided by the children's level of understanding and ability to produce in L2 to decide how the use of these languages can be adjusted.

Also, the use of L1 by the teacher can and should continue throughout primary to explain difficult vocabulary and concepts. Use of L1 by children should be encouraged for fluent expression and tasks like extended conversation and higher-order cognitive tasks. Throughout the primary level, use of 'mixed language' would be natural.

Some important principles and strategies for teaching-learning of an unfamiliar language, especially the use of children's L1 to scaffold learning of L2 that is also the MoI are outlined in section 1.12. Children would acquire communicative and academic literacy skills in L2, but would also develop strong oral language abilities, including some degree of cognitive competence in L1.

Box 6. Non-negotiables for children studying through L2

1. Students' L1s are valued and used by the teacher and children and not discouraged in the classroom. Use of L1 and its development continues throughout primary grades as needed.

2. Affirming students' identities and cultures and including familiar contexts from children's lives inside the classroom.

3. Appropriate strategies for teaching second language should be used, especially for scaffolding meaning.

4. Teachers are bilingual and have proficiency in both L1 and L2.

5. Assessments of learning take into account delayed L2 learning. This should be factored in while defining expected learning outcomes. Given the right conditions, such students should be able to achieve expected grade-level L2 skills by the end of the primary stage.

6. A quality preschool/ECE programme that supports oral development of L1 (for example, Papua New Guinea).

4.4.4 Approach 4: Using classroom multilingualism as a resource to develop L2 (and English) competence

Situation type: Type 6, see Table 16.

The general approach would be similar to the one outlined for Approach 2. Some strategies that are advocated for teaching-learning of the target language (L2) are translation from one language to another by the teacher and children, comparing and contrasting languages by the teacher, translanguaging, and carrying on a conversation between the teacher and children and among children using different languages.

It is a difficult situation for the teacher because of multiple first languages in the classroom. The teacher may understand only one of the children's languages. Also, helping several groups of children use their L1s to develop a good understanding of L2 in a limited timeframe would be a challenge. Unlike Approach 2 where there is significant use of L1 by the teacher and children, it is difficult to create guided opportunities with teacher support for each L1 group.

Most of the strategies mentioned earlier work better when children are a little older (8–10 years old) since they need to develop strong language and literacy skills in one language to transfer their understanding and thinking about language to another language (metalinguistic awareness). Therefore, it is difficult to work with young children to develop their different L1s and also L2.

The teacher must have considerable patience, be ready to learn new languages from children, have a strong belief in the use of multilingualism as a resource and understand strategies appropriate for such a classroom. There are few programmes implementing this approach and not enough research to suggest what works in these situations.

Box 7. Translanguaging

> Translanguaging involves flexible use of language resources available for children to communicate fluently without thinking about which language they have used or used words of more than one language in a sentence. It is also a pedagogy not just to scaffold learning of L2, but a way of teaching-learning that sees languages used together to facilitate best communication and learning. It could involve the teacher and children using different languages in the same conversation, children translating words and sentences from one language to another and use of a 'mixed language' in the same oral or written text.

Other options

There could be a local lingua franca in the immediate social environment that children may understand to some extent. This could be used as a proxy L1 for all children. Children of the same L1 could be grouped together and encouraged to work together. Older children who belong to the same L1 could also guide younger children. Community volunteers could help in supporting specific groups of children.

4.5 Conclusion

The bottom line is that children's linguistic and cultural resources and identities should be affirmed and used in any effort to develop a language-in-education policy or intervention programmes. While beginning with L1 as medium of instruction is the most appropriate, there are some situations where this may not be feasible.

Implementing any of the approaches to bring children's L1s into the classroom as an instrument of learning requires significant change in attitudes within the government, but also among civil society organizations as well as communities. Developing a *multilingual habitus* requires a change in mindset at all levels. Equally important is credible evidence of positive results from MLE programmes, which is quite limited at present in this region.

5 MOTHER-TONGUE-BASED MULTILINGUAL PROGRAMMES: CASE STUDIES FROM INDIA AND NEPAL

> "The evidence is strong that MLE programmes, where children's L1 is used, sharply accelerate the acquisition of reading skills, though this advantage appears to be significantly reduced in early-exit programmes where instruction shifts to L2 within 2–3 years.
>
> – Walter, 2013

Two case studies are presented in this chapter, one from Odisha, a state in India, and the other from Nepal. Both programmes arose out of the need of children who suffered serious disadvantage because they have limited understanding of the language used as the medium of instruction.

Both programmes have used a mother-tongue-based approach for multilingual education and introduced children's MTs as MoIs for 3–4 years of primary education. The use of MTs is important to help children learn better and to also bring their culture and contexts into the classroom and foster greater self-esteem and positive self-image.

5.1 Odisha MTB MLE programme

5.1.1 Genesis

> Location: Odisha, a state in eastern India
> Duration: 2005–ongoing
> Present scale: 1,500 schools with 70,000 children in 21 tribal languages

In Odisha, 22.8 per cent of the population belong to 62 distinct tribal groups with about 40 different languages and many more dialects. The tribal population has much lower literacy rates and tribal children have high drop-out rates and lower learning outcomes than the other social groups in the state.

In the mid-1990s, a study on 'Education for Tribal Children' identified two major factors that contributed to the low achievement levels of tribal children: (a) teachers in tribal areas were from non-tribal communities who often looked down upon tribal cultures and languages as inferior; and (b) children did not understand the language used as the MoI.

During 1997–1999, initiatives for training teachers on beliefs and attitudes about tribal languages and cultures were conducted for 20,000 teachers. Bilingual primers were developed for six L1s with community involvement. The project received support from senior leadership of the education department but floundered for several years thereafter because of change in leadership in the state education department.

The multilingual education initiative was revived in 2005–2006 with strong political commitment from the Minister for Tribal Development and the Chief Minister of the state with a mandate for introducing 10 tribal languages as MoI in the early primary grades. Mobilization also helped generate a demand from several associations of tribal groups for inclusion of their languages in primary schools.

5.1.2 Objectives of the programme

- Ensure equitable quality education for children of tribal groups.

- Improve tribal students' literacy and learning through use of mother tongue in early grades.

- Help students learn state and national languages well.

- Empower the tribal children to develop self-esteem and confidence.

- Develop respect among tribal children for their language and culture.

Table 17. Grade-wise language use, Odisha

Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
L1 oral and literacy	L1 oral and literacy L2 oral (and beginning literacy)	L1 further language and literacy development L2 oral fluency and literacy L3 (English) oral	L1 and L2 as language subjects L3 reading and writing	L1, L2 and L3 are language subjects
L1 is MoI	L1 is MoI	L1 is MoI	L2 as MoI Environmental Studies in L1	L2 is MoI for all subjects

5.1.3 Programme description

Premise of the programme
Language barrier, the difference between tribal children's home language and the school language, is a major challenge to children's comprehension and adversely affects their participation, retention and learning outcomes. Children's language, culture and context should find place in the teaching-learning process.

A simple linguistic survey was conducted in identified areas to understand the proportion of children of a particular home language background in each school. Only those schools where at least 90 per cent of children belonged to one home language (MT) background were selected and the children had very little understanding of the MoI (L2) when they joined school.

Programme approach and strategy
The tribal L1 is the MoI for the first three years of primary education. Development of oral L2 begins from Grade 2. Oral English (L3) is introduced from Grade 3. From Grade 4, the MoI shifts to L2, while L1 and English continue to be taught as subjects.

The underlying assumption is that children develop a reasonable understanding of L2 in two years and can then learn through that language. Teaching of L1 as a subject is discontinued from Grade 6 (upper primary stage). Until Grade 5, the programme works on an additive approach where additional languages are added sequentially, without removing the children's L1 (see Table 17).

Curricular materials

Textbooks were developed in 21 languages for Grades 1–5 with involvement of local teachers and community representatives. Linguists were also involved since an orthography had to be developed for all the languages that were not written. Supplementary material in the form of storybook, big books and picture conversation charts that reflect the local context were created.

For a few L1s, local educated youth had to be recruited (with a relaxation in the qualification) as qualified teachers were not available. All textbooks and materials in L1 were developed in the script used in the state for L2.

Bilingual teachers

Teachers with the same language (L1) background were selected or transferred from other schools so that each school has two teachers who are proficient in L1 and L2.

Local culture and context

The curriculum was developed on a theme-based web of local culture. Schools and classrooms have a strong reflection of tribal culture with use of pictures and artefacts.

Community involvement

Community members and traditional tribal organizations were involved in collecting local materials and writing/reviewing content. Community storytellers, village elders and mothers were involved in school activities. Children were encouraged to regularly learn about community and culture through activities, such as storytelling, art and craft, traditional games, music and dance, quiz, mathematics and science fairs, nature study and village projects.

Teacher training, academic support and monitoring

Every MLE teacher was provided 15 days training on the approach, curriculum and materials. Resource persons were also trained for regular monitoring and support to teachers.

5.1.4 Evaluation findings

An evaluation of the programme conducted in 2011 (NCERT, 2011) found:

1. Better achievement in language and maths for children in MLE schools compared to similar non-MLE schools (where MoI was L2).

2. Better attendance, participation and self-confidence of children; greater teacher satisfaction; positive parental feedback and community involvement.

3. L1 teachers were not adequate in some schools.

4. Academic support and monitoring needed to be strengthened.

5. In some schools, L2 was still used as MoI.

6. A significant number of schools did not have children from only one L1 background. There were children with other L1s or who spoke a variant of the state language, Odiya (L2). In such schools, the children who belonged to a different language background were neglected or the teacher decided to use L2 for instruction.

5.1.5 Learning from the programme

Design
This is an early-exit transitional programme where the MoI shifts to L2 by Grade 4. It is likely that children have not developed adequate cognitive academic language proficiency in L2 by the time the dense and abstract content of Grade 4 is introduced because they have been learning L2 for only two years (in Grades 2 and 3) at that stage. The bridging/language transfer approach from L1 to L2 is not clearly defined or understood by teachers. L1 and L2 are taught separately with little interaction between languages.

Government commitment is crucial to success
In recent years, the quality of training and academic support and community engagement have suffered mainly because of reduced commitment to the cause and lack of leadership at the state level. The curriculum development process for the 11 new languages has been routinized and textbooks have been almost translated from the state language (Odiya) textbooks.

Leadership and key programme staff
Developing and implementing a first-language-based multilingual education programme is a very intensive process requiring commitment from the senior education leadership as well as key staff in the programme. Key individuals who helped conceptualize the Odisha MLE programme continued to be associated with it for several years.

Comprehensive approach
The Odisha MTB MLE programme follows a comprehensive approach with the following dimensions of work: a strong technical resource group to guide the programme; development of the orthography of the languages; strong academic work in curriculum, textbook and other culturally relevant material development in mother tongue and additional languages; frequent teacher training; regular academic support; community and parent engagement; research and documentation; and placement of adequate bilingual teachers.

Local culture and community involvement
One of the strengths of this programme is the inclusion of local culture and children's contexts/experiences in the MT curriculum.

Technical support from national and international experts
It is important to create and support resource groups for different languages for curriculum development, training and academic support. At the time of development of programme design and curriculum and t extbooks, experts who have worked on bilingual/multilingual programmes and have a strong experience of issues of second language learning and language transfer pedagogy need to be associated from national and international level.

From programme to policy
Mobilization of ethnic groups and their associations helped create a demand for use of their languages in education. The political leadership also saw it as an opportunity to show support to the otherwise marginalized groups. The programme's successful and sustained implementation at a reasonable scale over several years also contributed to its influence. The Odisha government notified an MLE policy for tribal language groups in 2014, which was based on the design of this programme.

5.2 Nepal MTB MLE programme

Location: Nepal
Duration: 2007–2009
Scale: 21 schools in six districts of the country

5.2.1 Genesis

Nepal is a multilingual, multi-ethnic and multicultural country with some 123 mother tongues spoken by 103 caste and ethnic groups. In Nepal, as in the other South Asian countries, the linguistic diversity is coupled with language hierarchy and social stratification. Though around 48 per cent of the population speak Nepali as their L1, about 50 per cent of schoolgoing children speak languages other than Nepali.

The Centre for Education Research, Innovation and Development (2004–2009) reported that there was disparity in levels of achievement across ethnic and cultural groups. The interim Constitution (2007) of Nepal states that "each community shall have the right to get basic education in their mother tongue as provided in the law" (Article 17.1).

However, children who do not speak Nepali at home face a huge linguistic barrier in school education. The Ministry of Education implemented a pilot project, Multilingual Education Programme aimed at all non-Nepali Speaking Students in Primary Schools of Nepal (hereafter, 'MLE programme'), with the support of the Government of Finland from 2007–2009. One of the dimensions of the MLE programme was a small-scale intervention to build models of MLE in primary schools, which is presented in this case study.

5.2.2 Objectives of the programme

- Creating a conducive policy environment for MLE.

- Developing an institutional structure that will facilitate a bottom-up implementation of sustainable MLE and coordinate MLE activities.

- Strengthening the capacity at central, district and community level to implement MLE.

- Creating and establishing models of learning environments that facilitate non-Nepali speaking students' learning and prepare them to continue their education after the primary level.

- Establishing models of creating support networks of schools implementing MLE.

The programme was guided by an MLE team formed at the national level that included international consultants.

5.2.3 MLE programme description

Initially seven schools were selected in six targeted districts,[27] which represented the three regions, viz., Mountains, Hills and Terai. Eight minority languages[28] representing all the four language families were included. The languages were also a mix of both endangered languages and the ones spoken by many people. The schools selected for the pilot included both monolingual and multilingual classrooms.

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[27] Jhapa, Dhankuta, Sunsari, Rasuwa, Palpa and Kanchanpur.
[28] Athapahariya Rai, Rana Tharu, Magar, Tamang, Santhal, Uraw, Maithili and Rajbansi.

Programme approach and strategy

The basic approach was mother-tongue-based MLE wherein all the children study through their mother tongues from ECE to Grade 3 and Nepali was taught as a second language (subject) from Grade 1. From Grade 4 onwards, Nepali was used as the medium of instruction and the MT continued as a subject. All pilot schools were expected to expand the approach to two more neighbouring schools.

Programme roll out

Depending upon the type of classrooms (children with same MT, children with different MTs and teachers' competence in children's language), these models of teaching were followed:

a.   Grade teaching: One teacher teaches all subjects if she/he is proficient in MT

b.   Subject-wise teaching: Different subjects are taught by different teachers across grades

c.   Multigrade teaching: Groups of same MT students across grades formed

Curricular materials and community participation

Community members were invited to the school to share their knowledge, stories and songs in their mother tongues with the children. A group of older children wrote up these stories, mostly in Devanagari script (except in Santhali and Tamang). The children drew pictures based on these stories.

Booklets were developed in MTs and translated into Nepali and English. These booklets served as a model as appropriate context-based culturally sensitive teaching-learning material. Teacher and students enjoyed the content and feel of the booklet since it was written in their language. Posters were also made based on the stories and A4-size posters were also given to the children.

Training, academic support and monitoring

Two-week long international consultative workshops were conducted with support from the Finnish government. These workshops helped the mother tongue teachers and material writers to understand the concept of MTB MLE, along with strategies to teach in different language classroom situations. A seminar was also organized on teaching Nepali as a second language and the proceedings were published and shared with the teachers.

As in the case of Odisha, the MLE programmes emphasized the need to reorient teachers in their attitude and behaviours. Efforts were made to prepare teachers to make their instructional plans with the local people who are aware of the traditions, heritage and practices.

Response of children

Children started taking keen interest in the classroom processes and started asking questions. Student absenteeism was reduced. This strongly supports the research findings on the centrality of children's language, context and culture in their active engagement in the classroom.

5.2.4 Implementation challenges

Community participation

By design the community was the crucial stakeholder in the whole process, but their awareness about the importance of MT in education and their role was not clear to them. Parents seem to be in favour of introduction of three languages (MT+ Nepali+ English) right from Grade 1. Some were also in favour of English as the MoI. None of the schools formed school development management committees since nobody was aware of this.

Teacher preparation

The concept of MLE could not be fully imbibed by some teachers. Many classrooms were multilingual with children from two or more MTs. Guidance on using an MT-based approach in multilingual situations was not available to teachers. Though teachers were trained to use MT as MoI, there was some confusion in their minds. This resulted in different models of use of MT being followed – MT as medium of instruction, MT and Nepali both as mediums of instruction and MT being taught only as a subject.

Resources

Teachers were not sure if the textbooks written by them would be printed. The books for all subjects in eight languages were printed only towards the end of 2009. This was a major factor for the limited use of MT as the full MoI.

In the multilingual groups, 100 children were found sitting in one classroom due to the lack of space. Availability of teachers who could speak children's MT was also a challenge in some schools, resulting in multigrade teaching.

Position after 2009

Several pilot schools discontinued the MT MLE practice owing to the challenges described and lack of support from the government. Some schools have adopted English as MoI. The schools that were in addition to those in the pilot were found not to be practising MLE because of lack of materials, trained teachers and low community support. The School Sector Reform Program, 2009–2016, had planned expansion of MT MLE to 7,500 schools, but even the pilot programme could not be sustained beyond December 2009.

5.2.5 Learning from the Nepal MLE programme

The MLE programme was an important initiative as it attempted to identify models of MLE in different sociolinguistic situations in Nepal. The MLE programme involved leading international experts to ensure strong technical guidance. The programme attempted a bottom-up approach by involving local communities in decision making and bringing the local culture and knowledge into the classroom.

However, in some locations, parents were not convinced and preferred the use of Nepali and English. This underscores the importance of a strong community awareness programme to build parental conviction on use of MT and how children would learn the national language and English well with the MT foundation.

More work is needed to develop strategies for multilingual situations where children from different L1s are in the same classroom. It is important to ensure that textbooks and other materials reach schools in time. Availability of adequate teachers who know the children's MTs is a basic prerequisite for implementing an MTB MLE programme.

The Nepal MLE programme was implemented as an externally supported project. It could not be followed up through the regular education system. This shows that dedicated units that are responsible for MLE should be created in the education department and other agencies to ensure sustained work. The implementation of the MLE programme also demonstrated the need for adequate resources for books and materials, academic follow-up and monitoring.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHILDREN'S LANGUAGE AND LITERACY LEARNING IN PRIMARY GRADES

> " Language and literacy teaching, therefore, goes beyond development of reading and writing skills and should aim to enable students to use language and literacy skills and practices for a wide variety of purposes to participate meaningfully and in an empowered manner in society.
>
> – CECED & CARE, 2016 "

Language issues and socio-political situations are so diverse across different countries, and even within a country, that it is not appropriate to suggest a common set of recommendations for all countries. This chapter consolidates and builds on principles and approaches discussed in the previous chapters.

The recommendations focus on important principles that could guide policy, advocacy and programme interventions. Alongside, options for action by various stakeholders in different domains are also suggested.

6.1 Basic guiding principles for all stakeholders: Focus on the child and her learning

1. Strong early literacy skills are crucial for all future learning. Language and literacy education should also lead to development of higher-order thinking and reasoning abilities. Effective teaching-learning of early literacy involves active engagement of children and use of appropriate strategies for teaching reading and writing through a balanced approach.

    Children from marginalized communities with little or no exposure to literacy activities and print at home need additional support to acquire literacy related skills. Availability of children's storybooks and other graded reading materials is essential for developing reading skills and habit.

2. Children need to develop strong communicative and literacy competence in two or more languages during school, including the regional or national language and English. Development and use of their first language (L1), the language they know best when they first join preschool or school, provides the best foundation in the early years for learning other languages and learning subject matter content.

    Apart from their language, children's culture and experiences need to find a respectful place in the classroom for developing their self-confidence and self-esteem, which is crucial for better learning.

3. Children face a huge burden of incomprehension in the early years when they study through the medium of an unfamiliar language (L2) as they struggle to understand the language as also new and unfamiliar content in that language. Using children's mother tongue or L1 as the medium of instruction for as many years as possible, while teaching L2 as a subject, is the best approach for improving student learning.

    Starting with children's L1 as MoI but transitioning to a different language as MoI within 2–3 years of primary school does not provide the strong foundation of L1 needed for learning other languages and academic language proficiency, which is the basis for all learning in later grades.

    In case using children's L1 as MoI is not feasible, L1 should be used and developed in the oral domain to support higher-order comprehension, thinking and reasoning, fluent expression and for scaffolding learning of the school language. Alongside, other best practices for teaching-learning of the second language as a subject should be followed.

These principles should be seen as an integral part of the agenda for improving quality of primary education and enhancing student learning. They are merely an elaboration of a crucial dimension of quality early childhood and primary education, viz., building a strong foundation of competence in two or more languages and literacies.

They reflect a clear paradigm shift in the teaching and learning of language in early childhood education and primary school and the importance given to children's languages. This shift has clear implications for policy, government initiatives, orientation of language education programmes and focus of advocacy and mobilization efforts.

6.2 Other influences on language use in education

While the principles that have equitable children's learning as the central theme should be the guiding force for work in the area of language-in-education, decisions and actions will be influenced by other dimensions too. Education is not (and cannot be) a purely technical or 'neutral' enterprise, but instead operates within a wider social, political and economic context. This wider context creates the 'political economy' of language that presents both opportunities and constraints for language questions in education (Seel et al., 2017). These influences can be of varying types (see Box 8).

**Box 8. Influences on language use in education**

1. Countries or provinces with diverse linguistic and ethnic communities may feel the need to promote a sense of national/regional identity by requiring the use of national languages in school education.

2. Parents and many politicians argue that children should learn the national or state language and English well to succeed in getting jobs. The aspiration for English-medium education is high and rising in most countries in the region. Parents also may prefer private schools for this reason, among others.

3. Minority ethnolinguistic communities, their associations and political representatives could argue that imposing mother tongue education will add to the disadvantage of children from these marginalized communities as they will not be able to learn the languages of power.

4. Some communities may be shifting away from their ancestral languages and/or not using them with their children.

5. Some ethnic groups having a strong sense of identity may raise demands for including their languages in school education, even if they are added as additional subjects.

6. Government agencies may feel that the task of introducing many local languages in education is too demanding and expensive. They are already too stretched with maintaining reasonable quality in the existing varied schools and their curricula. Some educators and administrators could also consider local languages or 'non-standard dialects' to be unworthy of use in education.

7. Some civil society organizations working for linguistic and other rights of marginalized communities may be looked at with suspicion.

6.3 Three-pronged action: Many agents of change

The three pillars that can create a virtuous cycle of change are policy, advocacy and mobilization, and programmes for improving early language education (see Figure 6). There are many stakeholders who could play a crucial role in bringing about a change in the current situation of language education at the primary level.

Successful models of bilingual education require the collaboration of more than one or two actors. Development of the language itself, of curricular materials, teacher training, advocacy with the community and financial support all imply a range of participants in the process (Ball, 2011).

Figure 6. Different stakeholders in policy, programmes and advocacy
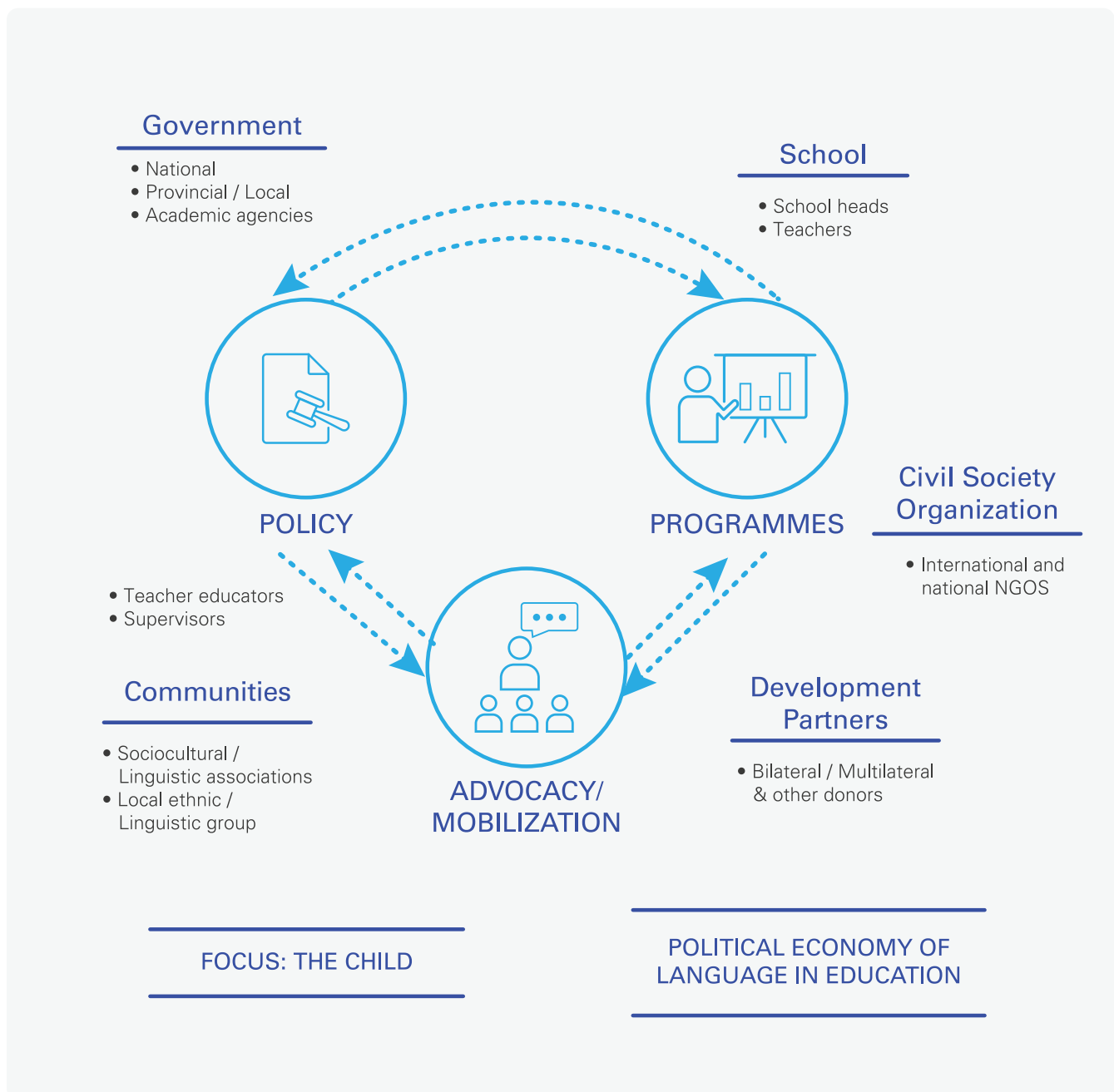
6.3.1 What should come first? Policy or programmes?

Ideally, an appropriate language-in-education policy should guide the implementation of multilingual education programmes. However, this does not always happen. Also, sometimes, a good MLE policy is formulated but does not get implemented. A supportive policy helps civil society organizations (CSOs) take initiative in implementing programmes for inclusion of children's languages in ECE and primary schools.

Sometimes, policies are ambiguous on issues of language used in classrooms for instruction. The curriculum may include some reference to use of home language in the early years, but teachers may not be aware of it. Some teachers may create a strict L2 environment, while others may use children's L1s to varying extent.

At other times, instructions to use or not use children's languages may be communicated informally through the education supervisors. It is always better to have a policy that sets out expected use of children's language in the classroom in clear terms, even when it is not included as an MoI.

Programmes and projects that show good results also influence policy, especially when they have been implemented over a sustained period of time, e.g., the Odisha MLE programme. Influential international agencies and development partners, like UNICEF, USAID and the World Bank, have supported projects on early grade reading and multilingual education and built advocacy around them to influence policy. What is needed, at least initially, is flexibility in the policy or guidelines that allow local initiatives and projects that can, in turn, create an environment for further change in policy.

In several countries in Southeast Asia, local and international NGOs have created entry points for using local language in early grades in the oral domain, even though legislation and policy were not supportive. Government agencies could design and implement L1-based multilingual education programmes or collaborate with or support CSOs for this purpose.

Government agencies could also take part in and support mobilization efforts on the issue of inclusion of children's languages. CSOs have a crucial role in advocacy, mobilizing and collaborating with communities, implementing pilot programmes and sharing evidence from their work, developing children's reading materials in non-dominant languages and providing technical support to governments for multilingual education strategies.

Decisions on use of languages in education are political in nature. Conviction and commitment within the political leadership of the government for improving quality of early childhood and primary education and for use of children's languages is the key to the planning and success of initiatives in this area. The government and its agencies at various levels – national, provincial or local – have the most important role to play in this agenda for change.

6.4 Creating an environment for initiating change

A good entry point for dialogue and discussion on early literacy and multilingual education is to focus on student learning rather than a linguistic rights or language preservation perspective. A discussion within the education system would help focus attention on the crucial role of early literacy as a foundation for all future learning and the need for reforming the teaching-learning of literacy in early grades.

In addition, it is possible to build consensus about the contribution of the 'language factor' in low reading and learning levels among children who come from a home language background. Such discussions yield better results if teachers are also included because they are acutely aware of the 'problem' of non-comprehension and 'slow learning' among these children.

Bringing children's languages into the classroom in a formal manner is as much a policy issue as about beliefs and attitudes within the education system. While these may be difficult to change quickly, a broad-based reflection on these issues with the involvement of several stakeholders is crucial to create an environment for change.

Over time, the effort should be to develop a consensus around the importance of multilingualism inside the classroom, the need for respecting non-dominant languages, cultures and local knowledge, the role of a familiar language in learning and the importance of developing strong competence in L1 and how that would help better learning of the national language and English. This set of attitudes and positive values within the education system about multilingualism and non-dominant languages can be called a *multilingual habitus* (see section 4.2).

Agencies like UNICEF can play an important role in supporting and facilitating these discussions and reflections at national, regional and local levels. These dialogues and debates need to happen with the initiative and involvement of policymakers, educational administrators, teacher educators and teachers.

6.5 Policy initiatives to begin with

While it is ideal for a country or province to develop a comprehensive policy for early literacy development and multilingual education that includes the sequence and use of languages as MoIs and subjects, this may not always be feasible in one go. Outlined here are a few policy formulations that could be taken up first:

1. **Emphasis on early literacy**

    Policy or guidelines that emphasize the importance of a strong foundation of early language education, especially early reading and literacy. The policy or programme guidelines could include provision of increased instructional time for teaching-learning of language, emphasis on oral language development, focus on reading skills, classroom libraries with books in two or more languages, teaching-learning materials and appropriate strategies for early literacy instruction (see section 1.6).[29]

2. **Stating early language and literacy outcomes in a multilingual formulation**

    Learning outcomes for language can be reformulated to include outcomes in more than one language, including L1. Outcomes for L1 can be included in the oral domain (listening comprehension, fluent expression, higher-order thinking and reasoning) to begin with. Later, once L1 is formally introduced, the outcomes could include literacy related outcomes for L1 as well.

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[29] Please see the guidelines for 'Early reading and writing with comprehension and early mathematics programme of the Government of India', http://mhrd.gov.in/padhe-bharat-badhe-bharat-early-reading-and-writing-comprehension-and-early-mathematics-programme.

3. Oral use of children's first languages and appropriate second language teaching strategies for L2

This could be a formulation that encourages teachers to use children's local languages in early grades and as needed during primary and upper primary levels to support children's active engagement and learning. Teachers could be advised to collect local folk tales and rhymes and use local themes for conversation, interactive storytelling and children's experience sharing.

While this is a very limited approach, it could sensitize the system to how using children's language(s) helps in developing higher-order comprehension, scaffolding learning, building on their experiences, enhancing children's self-esteem and strengthening school-community linkages.

Along with oral use of MTs, the policy needs to state that appropriate strategies for teaching L2 (MoI) as a second or unfamiliar language will be used (see section 1.12).

4. Early childhood education in the mother tongue

Sometimes the preschool curriculum does not state this explicitly. While preschool teachers/workers are usually local and use the children's language, the teaching-learning materials could be in the dominant, unfamiliar language. Teachers also are likely to receive training in the dominant language used in school.

5. Disallowing use of English as MoI in ECE or early grades

English should be taught as a subject for several years before introducing it as MoI. Even as a subject, the initial focus in early grades should be on oral acquisition through exposure to spoken English, before being taught as a formal subject from Grade 3. In some countries, like Nepal, government schools face a lot of pressure to introduce English as MoI because of the competition from private schools. Therefore, the policy cannot be confined only to government and government-aided schools.

On grounds of inappropriateness for children's development, governments should consider extending the policy of 'no English medium' in early grades to private schools too. This is, of course, not easy to implement. In countries like Nepal, Bhutan and Maldives, where English is already being used as an MoI, this issue should be debated widely. The policy should focus on improving the teaching of English as a subject.

6. Continuum between ECE and early grades

Through policy, the curriculum for ECE and early primary grades could be organized as a continuum by treating this as one stage of early learning. The curriculum should be based on the principles of using children's contexts and languages and age-appropriate development of oral language and literacy. In some countries this may require convergence between different ministries.

7. Classroom libraries in every school

Classroom libraries with books in two or more languages (DL and NDL) should be made a part of the policy for minimum provisioning of primary schools.

6.6 Comprehensive policy for multilingual education

A comprehensive policy should emphasize the importance of the multilingual approach in primary and upper primary education for all situations, i.e., development of multilingual capabilities in children through (a) respect and use of children's mother tongues in teaching and learning, and (b) effective learning of additional languages of regional/national importance through formal school instruction.

The multilingual education approach includes a range of approaches that emphasize the crucial role of children's L1 in ECE and primary school. Most appropriate would be the use of L1s as mediums of instruction for as long as possible with the addition of the L2 (state/national language) and English in a phased manner in an L1-based bilingual/multilingual education approach. An early transition to the use of L2 as MoI should be avoided.

The policy should define when other languages would be introduced and how the foundation of L1 should be used for teaching and learning of these languages. Some guidance on use of scripts for L1 could also be provided. In situations where use of L1 as MoI is not feasible (initially), a clearly defined and extended use and development of oral L1 should be provided for, alongside appropriate strategies for teaching and learning of an unfamiliar language (L2) and its use as MoI (see section 4.4 for the different L1-based approaches).

6.7 Suggestions for MLE programme design

1. **The design, preparatory work and implementation of an MLE programme should be comprehensive**

   This should include sociolinguistic mapping, orthography and language development (as needed) of the L1s to be used as MoIs, strong academic work in curriculum and textbook development based on local knowledge and cultures, and a clear strategy to support a transition to L2 at an appropriate stage.

   It should also include development of children's reading materials in L1 and additional languages, continuous teacher professional development, regular academic support to teachers, establishing strong school-community linkages, research and documentation, and ensuring availability of adequate bilingual teachers in the selected schools.

   An MT-based ECE component should be included in the programme design. The programme will have limited impact if some of these dimensions are not included. The choice of the L1-based approach should be based on the findings of sociolinguistic situation analysis and dialogue with the local communities.

   The preparatory work for an MLE programme in a new language may require at least one and a half to two years. Awareness campaigns and meetings with parents and community members are crucial for them to understand the value in children beginning with L1-medium education and that they would learn the national language and English well, despite some initial delay.

2. Inclusion of L1 use in early grade reading projects

Several internationally funded large-scale early grade reading programmes are being implemented in countries like Pakistan (Pakistan Reading project), Nepal (Nepal Early Grade Reading Programme) and India (several states). Their programme designs need to include the use of children's L1s for oral language development and early literacy. Teacher preparation under these projects should include development of both L1(s) and L2 and appropriate practices for teaching of additional languages.

3. Development and publication of instructional materials and storybooks in NDLs and other languages

The lack of good developmentally appropriate children's reading materials and books in L1 as well as other languages is a big constraint in developing reading skills. International NGOs and agencies need to support development and publication of children's literature in many languages, including NDLs, through big, well-resourced projects. These materials should reflect local cultures and children's contexts and should not be merely translated from other languages.

4. Developing and implementing MLE pilot projects for situations where children of several L1s are in the same classroom (see section 4.4.4)

This is an approach that has not been developed fully or implemented, not just in South Asia, but across the world. Given that such language situations are common in the region, it is important that MLE programme designs are developed and implemented in some countries.

5. Community mobilization for MLE

This is essential in the preparatory phase through dialogue with parents, traditional community leaders, representatives of sociocultural associations and public representatives from the local community. It would take time to convince the community about the approach and how it would result in better learning for their children in all subjects, including the regional/national language and English.

Such mobilization happens more easily when the community already has a strong sense of identity and pride in their culture and language. It helps to create a compact between the school, parents, community and the local educational administration around school improvement and the new approach, which lists each group's responsibilities and expected outcomes. Other initiatives can include:

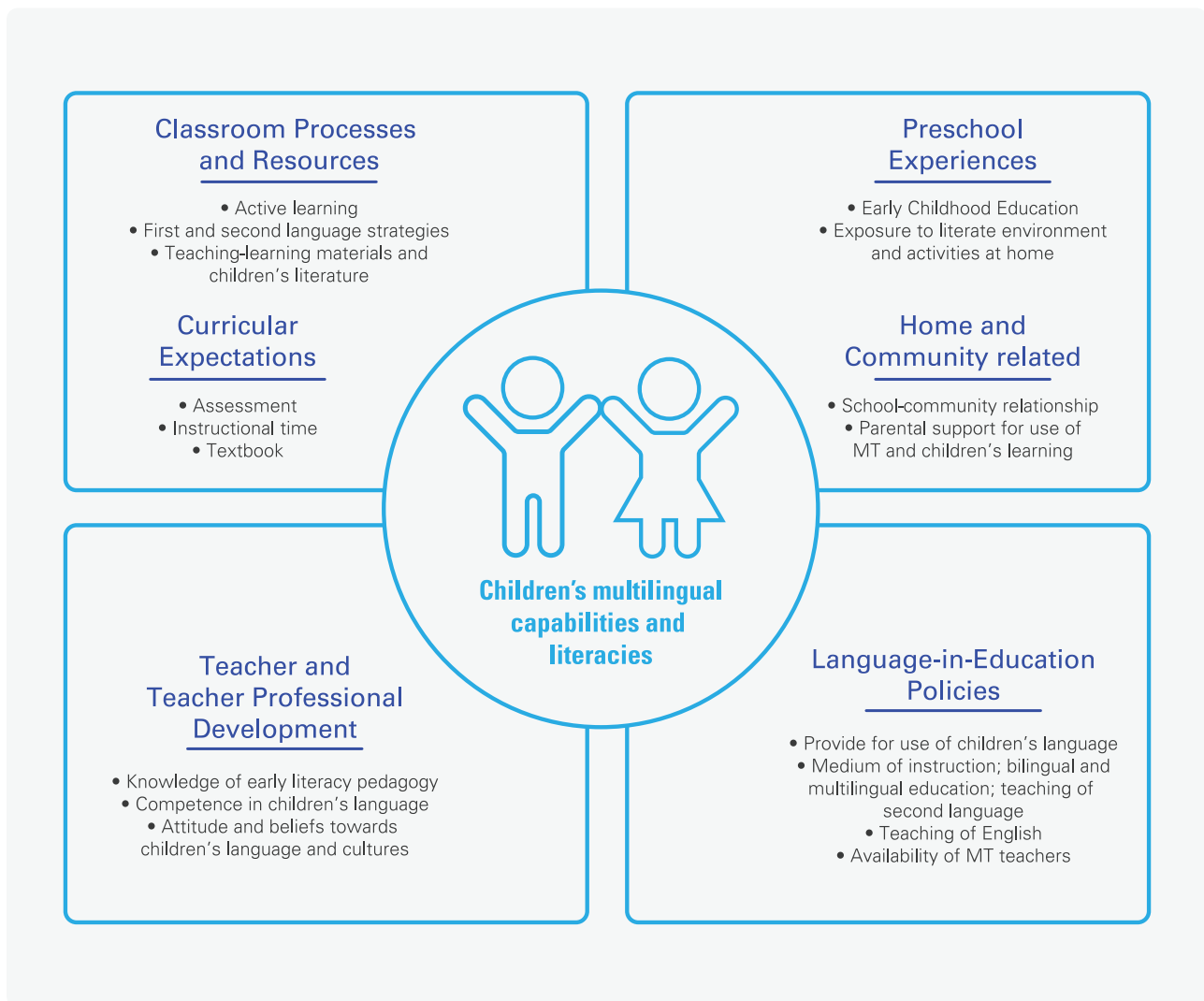- Inviting parents and other members of the community for school programmes in which the multilingual repertoire of the community is used in an elaborate manner.

- Ensuring their participation in taking certain decisions on school issues.

- Bringing in experts from local community for specific language and topics related to local knowledge.

- Aligning language texts and overall school activities around the life of the community.

Agencies like UNICEF and INGOs could extend their present work and support more MLE pilot projects at a reasonable scale in the South Asian countries.

6.8 Agenda for change: Dimensions of action

Figure 7 outlines the different dimensions of action needed to plan and implement a comprehensive shift in early literacy and multilingual education (see Chapters 2 and 4).

Figure 7. Language education and language-in-education: Agenda for change

Classroom Processes and Resources
- Active learning
- First and second language strategies
- Teaching-learning materials and children's literature

Curricular Expectations
- Assessment
- Instructional time
- Textbook

Preschool Experiences
- Early Childhood Education
- Exposure to literate environment and activities at home

Home and Community related
- School-community relationship
- Parental support for use of MT and children's learning

Children's multilingual capabilities and literacies

Teacher and Teacher Professional Development
- Knowledge of early literacy pedagogy
- Competence in children's language
- Attitude and beliefs towards children's language and cultures

Language-in-Education Policies
- Provide for use of children's language
- Medium of instruction; bilingual and multilingual education; teaching of second language
- Teaching of English
- Availability of MT teachers

6.9 Priority areas of action by government agencies

1. Teacher deployment and recruitment for specific languages

 L1-based approaches cannot be implemented unless schools have teachers with bilingual/ multilingual proficiency, including fluency in children's languages. Some teachers with L1 background could be redeployed from other areas. More importantly, selection of new teachers should take into account the need for teachers of specific language backgrounds. This language-wise requirement will need to be built into the teacher selection process.

Some marginalized ethnic and linguistic groups may not have school or college graduates who fulfil the minimum qualification for selection as a teacher. The government could support youth in these areas to acquire the required qualification and groom them over a few years to become teachers in local schools. This will be a strong message of empowerment for that community.

2. Teacher education focus on early language and literacy and multilingual education

Both pre-service teacher education and in-service professional development need to prioritize teachers' understanding of appropriate language and literacy teaching-learning approaches and strategies for early grades, e.g., the need to focus on oral language development and reading comprehension.

re-service education should also include development of positive attitudes towards diversity and other languages and cultures and understanding children's varied home contexts and implications for teaching and learning of early literacy. The curriculum for both pre-service and in-service training programmes should emphasize the importance of L1 in early education and strategies for bilingual/ multilingual education, including learning of unfamiliar languages.

Training programmes will need to be experiential in nature with effective demonstration of strategies, also through videos of actual classroom teaching and learning. This will require extensive preparation of teacher educators in teacher education institutions through a structured capacity building programme.

3. National (and state/provincial) curriculum agencies to support early literacy and MLE work

This could include (a) development of curriculum, including textbooks and children's materials in languages selected to be taught in school as MoI or subjects, and (b) changes in existing language textbooks and assessments to focus on neglected aspects, such as reading comprehension and higher-order skills of thinking. The national agency may not be equipped to take on this work and would need technical support, additional staff and a long-term professional development programme for the academic staff.

4. Publishing in NDLs and DLs

Governments could promote and incentivize the private sector to publish many more high quality children's storybooks in several languages.

5. Teacher development for teaching English

In the South Asian countries, English learning is highly valued. Governments need to invest in improving teachers' own competence in English as well as skills for teaching English, using a range of second language teaching strategies with scaffolding from children's familiar languages.

This is a huge agenda since English is taught from early grades in all the countries, at least as a subject. Improved teaching and learning of English, especially spoken English in primary grades could be really helpful in renegotiating the need for early introduction of English as MoI.

6. Sociolinguistic mapping

This should be the basis for decisions about approaches to introducing L1s. Several rough and ready instruments for sociolinguistic mapping are available that focus on understanding young children's language competence at the time of entry to school and other variables to identify the school situation type.

7. Increased resources for ECE and primary education

This includes a higher share of existing budgetary resources as well as prioritizing early literacy and multilingual education within funds that could become available from projects and programmes supported by multilateral/bilateral development partners.

There is no doubt that governments should play a pivotal role in making this paradigm shift in early literacy and multilingual education. However, partnerships with international agencies, such as UNICEF, INGOs as well as national and local NGOs, will be crucial for taking this change to scale. Governments could exercise their power of convening these organizations for strategizing, developing appropriate models, large-scale mobilization and getting their support for specific MLE programmes and projects.

Improving teaching and learning of early literacy as the foundation for all future learning and including children's non-dominant languages in teaching and learning at primary level are two of the most important initiatives for ensuring inclusive and equitable student learning. Without making a big shift in these two aspects, the targets of equitable pre-primary and primary education laid out in Sustainable Development Goal 4 will remain a mirage.

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