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Changes in Mother Tongue Education Policy in Papua New Guinea

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Introduction

Since the introduction on mother tongue (MT) education by the North Solomons (Bougainville) Provincial government in 1980 there have been four brief periods of policy change in Papua New Guinea. During the first period from 1980 to early 1989, MT education policy was non-formal with no national government institution involved in MT policy. Some provincial governments and NGOs working at the language community level initiated MT programs. During the second period from 1989 to 1995, the National Department of Education (NDOE) initiated a policy that expanded what was being done by some provincial governments and NGOs by 'encouraging' MT education and establishing minimal national infrastructure and funding to assist it. At the beginning of the third period from 1995 through 2012, a policy of education reform was approved by Parliament that included the establishment of a new level of formal education, elementary, for MT education. At this level MT was the medium of instruction for the first three years with oral English introduced at the second half of the third year. MT was to continue in primary school with a decreasing allocation of time as English increased. In the fourth period from 2013 to the present, as formulated in the Elementary Language Teachers Guides for Elementary Prep (EP), Elementary One (E1) and Elementary Two (E2), MT, now referred to as 'Home Language', is to be the medium of instruction for EP as well as a subject. English is taught as a subject in E1 and E2 with equal time allotted for Home Language.

In this paper I will discuss the different policies and their implementation in terms of four parameters: 1) Decentralized vs. centralized policy, 2) Materials production, 3) Trainers experienced in PNG language, literacy and culture and 4) Tertiary training in MT and multilingual education.

Decentralized non-formal period 1980-1989

The North Solomons Province began the post-independence (1975) move towards MT education in 1980. With decentralized government and indirect revenues from the copper mine, Bougainville Copper Limited, it was able to initiate a program independent of national government education policy. Responding to parents' concerns for the cultural alienation of children that they considered to be the result of English education, the MT program had as its goal strengthening traditional languages and cultures. Viles Tok Ples Skuls (Village Vernacular Schools) started with two languages and there was a plan to eventually reach all the languages in the province. Staff salaries from coordinator to village teachers were funded internally. An NGO, SIL, assisted with materials and literacy training. Unfortunately, this program was disrupted by the political crisis that began in 1989 just as the national government was initiating

assistance for MT programs.

East Britain Province began a MT program in 1983. This program had a strong community commitment requirement before a MT education program was started, one of which was providing teachers remuneration for the first year. Two SIL personnel were seconded to the program for ten years to provide technical assistance. Financial assistance for materials production was provided for part of that time by Canadian International Development Aid.

Enga Province began a MT program in 1985. Teachers' salaries were paid by the provincial government but later they struggled to find adequate funds. Technical assistance in literacy was provided for two years by Mary Stringer of SIL who introduced the Multi-Strategy Method of teaching literacy.

Oro Province had a program that was coordinated by the Education Research Unit (ERU) of the University of Papua New Guinea. Provincial input in terms of personnel and finance was weak and the strength of the program was primarily the contribution of NGOs and the ERU. New Ireland Province also had a program that benefited from the assistance of SIL in training and materials production through the secondment of a literacy adviser. Some other provinces provided coordination of literacy programs for children primarily through the offices of Non-Formal Education. Many of these the programs were primarily the results of NGOs working in specific language communities or in larger areas through Tok Pisin.

A number of language communities had MT programs with the assistance of NGOs. SIL personnel assisted with programs in Angor (1981), Gadsup (1983) and Amanab, Misima and Barai (1984). These language community programs were heavily dependent on outside assistance for materials and training. Some NGOs and provincial governments had literacy training programs but involvement by tertiary institutions was minimal.

A variety of methods for teaching literacy were successful. A new one was the Multi-Strategy Method (Faraclas and Stringer, 1988) that combined top-down whole language with bottom-up teaching of phonemes through syllables. Within SIL three methodologies were used: Gudschinsky type eclectic primers, whole language (Evans 1986) and Multi-strategy method (MSM). All of these methods were dependent on materials production.

During this period SIL developed a national training course for literacy that grew into the Supporting Tok Ples Education Program (STEP). Training was thorough covering many aspects of a literacy program taught through multiple month long modules followed by mentoring in the language area. It was centralized at Ukarumpa and required a heavy investment in terms of funds and personnel, both at the course and in the language communities. This type of commitment made it difficult to implement on a national scale.

An important feature of programs during this period was the commitment of some individuals, language communities, NGOS and provincial governments to providing MT programs. This community development feature was generally missing in the period when MT education later became a part of the formal education system.

Centralized National Department of Education Period 1989-1995

In the 1989 national budget Parliament approved funds for the establishment of a section within the National Department of Education (NDOE) for language and literacy. Three personnel from SIL were seconded to the Curriculum Development Division (CDD) of the NDOE as technical advisers. A National Literacy Committee was established that recommended a national literacy policy that was approved by the Secretary of Education in June 1989. This policy 'encouraged' MT preparatory (prep) schools and the maintenance of MT literacy in primary schools. Later that year Parliament approved a Literacy and Awareness program and stated that children should learn literacy in their MT. A National Literacy and Awareness Secretariat was established within the NDOE. Funds were provided to assist language communities and provinces with small grants for training and materials for their MT programs. The CDD produced a manual for bridging to English in primary school for students in Grade One who had attended MT prep schools.

Although this policy encouraged the maintenance of MT literacy in primary schools in the formal system, no teacher training colleges included training for MT education in their standard pre-service curriculum. However, some of these colleges conducted short modules taught by the seconded NGO personnel from the CDD, often assisted by other NGO personnel.

Materials for MT literacy were heavily dependent on printed books with pictures. Silk screen printers were used extensively enabling local production. SIL introduced shell books in which books with pictures could be printed in large numbers with the MT text hand written or printed by computers and printers. The CDD printed these in large quantities for use by local language communities.

A new method of teaching, interactive whole language, developed by Yasuko Nagai for the Maiwala prep school program, did not require printed books. This method combined whole language and phonics. The phonics method used was not printed-book dependent and the big books for the whole language component were hand produced by the language community. However, this was labor intensive, requiring short monthly production workshops for a year before classes could begin. Teacher training was integrated with the production of big books. The interactive whole language method was later used for teacher training by the NDOE after MT was introduced into the formal system.

Centralized Mother Tongue in formal education period 1995-2012

In 1995 Parliament introduced an Education Act that included structural and curriculum reforms. A new level of formal education, elementary, was introduced that included a Preparatory (EP) year through Elementary Two (E2). Elementary schools were more widespread than primary schools enabling wider access to formal education. The MT was to be the medium of instruction with oral English introduced in the latter part of E2. Bridging from MT literacy to English reading and writing was to be taught in a bridging class in Primary Grade Three. Very few teachers were trained to teach bridging to English.

Provincial governments were responsible for implementing the bilingual policy. The

research by Waters et. al. (1995) indicates that most provinces did not have the capacity or plans to implement the policy.

MT was to be continued through primary, decreasing yearly as English increased. The CDD produced general curriculum guides for teaching MT in primary schools. I am not aware of any primary school that attempted to develop the CDD curriculum in MT or implement teaching in MT. Some indications of the potential problems of implementing the bilingual policy were noted as early as 2003 in Litteral 2004.

The main requirement for schools of a language community to participate in MT education was that the language must have an approved orthography. Although this was an obstacle for many languages, the lack of capacity to develop a MT program was the main problem hindering implementation of the policy. At an elementary and community school in-service at Amanab, Sandaun Province in September 2008, the principal of Amanab primary school, Mr. Sonny Mai, gave four main reasons for the MT policy not being implement in primary schools in the area: 1) teachers were teaching outside their language area, 2) undeveloped areas did not have people with sufficient education to become teachers, 3) teachers had received no training in teaching in MT or in bridging to English, and 4) there was too much work for teachers to develop the curriculum and materials for teaching in MT.

On the other hand, in three languages with successful MT preparatory schools in the Amanab area, Abau, Amanab and Angor, NGO produced materials and training enabled MT literacy to continue on a small scale in some primary schools. This again illustrates the importance of commitment.

Materials production was a major problem for implementation of the multilingual policy. There was insufficient printing capacity to print materials for elementary schools in provinces with a few large languages and certainly not for those with large numbers of languages such as Morobe, Madang, East Sepik and West Sepik provinces. Although a Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) grant provided scanner-printers for all provinces and included SIL training for operators of the equipment, none of the provincial materials production centers operated successfully in producing sufficient materials for provincial MT programs.

Another problem of policy implementation was the inadequacy of personnel experienced in PNG languages, cultures and literacy. This ranges from international consultants to local teachers. Many NGO personnel had literacy training for working in minority languages as well as many years of experience through contact with local language communities and their cultures. On the other hand, most of the international consultants brought in by aid funds had qualifications in education but not experience with PNG languages, cultures and literacy. Primary school teachers trained to teach in English were retrained in short courses to become elementary trainers, yet many had no experience in teaching in their MT or any local language and no experience with developing curriculum and materials. Their training did not include the linguistic and literacy knowledge necessary to enable them to establish and operate MT programs. With the education reform, priority was given to teacher trainees with secondary education. Many of them had lived away from their language area for an extended period and

were not sufficiently fluent to teach in the MT or to develop curriculum and materials in it. With the non-formal MT programs, most teachers lacked secondary education but had adequate training and knowledge of the language, culture and literacy to teach in the MT, especially at the preparatory level. Most of them were disqualified to teach in the elementary system because they did not have secondary education.

Centralized early introduction of English and MT as subject policy: 2013 - present

After years of complaints from parents and teachers that children entering primary schools could not read, at the beginning of 2013 a new policy made English a subject beginning at the E1 level with the MT, now referred to as 'Home Language' a possible medium of instruction in EP and a subject in E1 and E2. Bilingual education at the primary level has been eliminated as a policy even though it had not been implemented under the former policy.

Volunteer Services Overseas (VSO) has developed a program for teaching English phonics that has been tested in many areas. Their personnel are also assisting many teacher training colleges in English instruction. A Creative Phonics workshop was conducted by SIL in late 2013 to train a select number of teachers college lecturers and NDOE staff in how to teach MT phonics. During the December-January 2013-14 over 2000 elementary teachers were trained to teach using Creative Phonics. These teachers were to begin implementing teaching MT as a subject. How well they were able to develop lessons after minimal training is a matter for research.

There were four problems that I observed with the training program by the time I left PNG in early 2014. 1) Most of those who were to be trainers did not have experience in developing a complete basic phonics program for a language. 2) Some trainers had been out of their language area for such an extended period of time that they were not comfortable in developing lesson plans that required knowledge of the language for writing sentences and stories. 3) Elementary trainers in the provinces had responsibility for the training and supervision of the elementary teachers yet had had not received training in phonics. 4) The training given at the SIL training course only went as far as how to teach five phonemes which meant that participants received only minimal information on how to develop the potential of a language in terms of vocabulary, sentences structures and different genres.

A positive development is that the NDOE has produced a set of Language Curriculum Guides (including English and Home Language) for EP, E1 and E2 (NDOE 2015).

Summary and Conclusions

Features of the first period are: 1) Decentralized non-formal policy promoting MT education, 2) adequate materials, 3) personnel experienced in literacy, language and culture and 4) no tertiary institutions providing pre-service training for MT education.

Features of the second period are: 1) Partial centralized policy supporting MT education, 2) generally adequate materials, 3) generally sufficient personnel with experience in literacy, language and culture, 4) no tertiary institutions providing pre-service training for MT education.

Features of the third period are: 1) Centralized policy supporting MT education in formal education, 2) inadequate materials, 3) personnel generally inexperienced in literacy, local languages and cultures; and 4) few tertiary institutions providing pre-service training for MT education except the Papua New Guinea Education Institute that began to provide pre-service and in-service training for elementary teachers..

Features of the fourth period are: 1) centralized policy demoting the MT and elevating English at the elementary level, 2) MT phonics bypasses some of the need of printed materials for initial literacy, 3) general inadequacy of personnel experienced with a thorough knowledge of literacy, language and culture, and 4) a few tertiary institutions, such as Enga Teacher Training College, becoming involved in MT education training.

Although MT education has been judged as a failure by many after it was introduced into the formal system, there is still an opportunity to demonstrate its value with the present policy of the use of MT as a subject instead of as a medium of instruction. With Home Language as a medium of instruction and as a subject two hours per day in EP and one hour per day in E1 and E2, there is much potential for significant MT education. The problem that remains is how to develop the potential for MT across the curriculum and not leave it underutilized like it was when elementary education was introduced. One positive indication is the participation of tertiary training institutions. Success will depend on trainers with adequate experience not only in MT but also in developing thorough MT education programs so they can be trainers and mentors, not just teacher/lecturers. This need for qualified trainers needs to apply at all levels of the education training process.

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