

# Language Policy in Education

*Presentation to Education Portfolio  
Committee*

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## Background

- LiEP (read together with the Norms and Standards for language policy in public schools) part of the national plan to
  - Promote multilingualism;
  - Develop all of South Africa's official languages; and
  - Ensure respect for all languages used in the country.

system to use language to ensure

- Appropriate cognitive development for all learners;
- Academic achievement for all learners whoever they are and wherever they are in the system; and

■ Premised on principle of maintaining home

## Key principles for implementation

- Learner chooses language of teaching upon application for admission;
- School Governing body required to determine school's language policy and state how it will promote multilingualism;
- Languages as subjects: a) at least one approved language in Grade 1 and 2; b) Offer LOLT and at least one additional approved language as subjects after Grade 3; c) From Grade 10 – 12, at least 2 languages: one as home language and the other as first additional language.

*can't be refused for language*

*lang. of learning & Teaching*

## From the national vision to the classroom

- What do schools understand by the LiEP?
- How has it impacted on practice at school level and in the classroom?
- What makes it possible (or militates against) the policy being implemented as intended?

## 1. Understanding the policy

- Understood largely in relation to the determination of Language of Learning and Teaching by both schools and officials – very limited reflection on the broader intentions of the policy;
- Dominant view amongst teachers and parents (spoken and unspoken) is that English is the key to a better life and the sooner children are taught in English the better; and
- Many schools feel they are already implementing the language policy as intended and therefore do not need to change anything at their school.

ie. how does it influence cognitive development

## 2. The policy in schools

- Contextual factors a huge determinant in the uptake of the LiEP.
- In majority of monolingual schools in townships, rural communities and farms – status quo remains. Mother tongue used in first three to four grades and then transition to a LOLT, different from the home language;
- English gaining dominance as a LOI.T (across all schools) being introduced even earlier than before, but in some instances (in Limpopo, for example) English as a medium of learning now used from as early as Grade R.
- English as a subject being introduced as early as Grade 1 and sometimes in Grade R.

ie Limpopo

you need to get literacy in home-language before moving on to new language



## The policy in schools

- Very few schools with own policies beyond determining the LOLT of the school, however
- Most schools that have had to admit learners from different backgrounds engaging more with LiEP issues even where there is no formally adopted language policy at the school;
- More affluent schools more inclined to have formally adopted language policies
- Limited evidence of strengthening of indigenous languages although growing evidence of their use across schools to help children understand what is being taught.

## Challenges to implementation

- Genuine lack of understanding of policy intentions; *not malice*
- Attitudes of both teachers and parents:
  - View of education in home language as inferior persists;
  - Belief that there is a limited role for Indigenous languages in a developing SA;
  - Limitations of indigenous languages as languages of learning ingrained.
- No real support to schools for the implementation. The LiEP largely remains at the level of intention and at worst, rhetoric;
- Innovation at primary level not matched by similar readiness to strengthen indigenous languages in High Schools.

*they think just picking language is enough*

## The pedagogical case

- Both national, regional and international studies draw a direct link between language of learning and academic achievement (recent Systemic Evaluation achievement in LOLT at 38%, with 6 out of 10 learners not achieving; the Southern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality II study of 14 southern African countries (2002) – only 14,6% had reached required level of literacy at grade 6;
- Achievement in Mathematics and Science in Systemic Evaluations both at Grade 3 and 6, as well as in the TIMMS study equally low.

## The pedagogical case

- “Language is not everything but without language everything is nothing”.

Ekkehard Wolff (2006)

## Re-stating the DoE's intention's captured through the LiEP

- At the center is the right of children to be educated in their mother tongue whilst having access to a global language, i.e. English;
- Supports the maintenance of home languages through additive bilingual curriculum delivery;
- Encourages research to inform policy and practice e.g current teaching of English in SA schools informed by international research on ESD teaching which not necessarily speaks to a L2 as a LOLT (learners in Grade 3 with 500 – 600 words instead of between 5 000 and 7 000 required across the curriculum.)

*O = English as a 2nd language*

## Conclusion

- LiEP presents a genuine opportunity to change practice in schools for the better and DoE will focus on strengthening its implementation and supporting innovation and research ;
- There may be gaps in the policy but biggest challenge is in making it work and strengthening teaching of languages overall;
- Weak implementation as well as a lack of understanding of the underlying principles leading to a widening of gap in academic achievement between the predominantly better off and better resourced, and the historically under resourced.