Imagining Humanist Language Policy: Best Practices and Practical Steps for Improving Learning

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Purpose of this presentation

• Provide information about a recently developed resource of use to those working to improve reading and learning outcomes
  – Rationale
  – Purpose
  – Audience
  – Content
  – Tools
Rationale for Developing the Guide

• Recent results from a variety of learning assessments have underscored the need to improve education quality
• The language(s) used to provide education are inextricably linked to learning outcomes
• Yet planning for language use in education remains a challenge, for many reasons
  – Lack of understanding of the link between language of instruction and education access and outcomes
  – Lack of technical knowledge about LOI issues amongst planners
  – No or insufficient (long-term) planning and coordination related to LOI
  – Lack of political will or other socio-political concerns
Rationale for Developing the Guide

• Appropriate use of language in the classroom is directly related to USAID education goals
  – Goal 1: Improved reading skills for 100 million children in primary grades
  – Goal 3: Increased equitable access to education in crisis and conflict environments for 15 million learners

• USAID has identified LOI policies and practices as one of seven key areas for which technical guidance is needed with regards to the development and implementation of effective, sustainable and scalable early grade reading programs.

“Language of Instruction: As reading is a process of learning to match sounds to symbols (letters), it is much easier for students to learn to read in a language they speak and understand. A strong foundation in a first language, especially during the early years of school, is crucial to educational success. In countries where appropriate language policies exist, USAID projects should be designed in accordance with these policies. Where appropriate policies do not exist, USAID should engage in policy dialogue with host country governments and partners in an attempt to improve policy, as on other technical issues.”

USAID 2011 Education Strategy: Technical notes, p. 4
Overview of the Guide

• **Purpose**
  – Serve as a practical guide with respect to language-in-education issues, particularly as they relate to USAID education strategy goals

• **Methodology**
  – Review of academic research on language development, reading acquisition, and language use in education, as well as practitioner experiences providing instruction in sub-Saharan Africa

• **Content and Organization**
  – Rationale for language planning
  – Factors to consider when planning for language use in education
  – Steps to take and conditions for success
  – Planning tools and resources
Factors to consider when planning for language use in education

| Research on language and literacy | • Children learn better when instruction is in L1  
• A strong L1 foundation facilitates L2 acquisition, proficiency  
• Academic learning requires proficiency in the LOI  
• Many factors influence how long it takes to acquire sufficient language proficiency for academic learning |
| Goals of the education system | • Access and equity  
• Learning goals  
• Language acquisition  
• Cost effectiveness |
| Sociolinguistic context | • Language composition of communities (monolingual, bilingual, multilingual)  
• Language development and standardization |
| Educational context | • Instructional time available  
• Curriculum and materials  
• Teacher language proficiency, qualifications and training  
• Teacher recruitment, placement and support |
Steps to Take and Conditions for Success

1. Engage a wide range of stakeholders
   - Successful planning and implementation require the involvement, support and resources of a wide range of stakeholders
   - Need to be aware of people’s knowledge, attitudes and vested interests in language use in schools

**Stakeholders to include:**
- Ministry of Education officials
- Teachers and teacher unions
- Teacher training colleges
- Subject specialists/experts
- Curriculum and textbook developers
- Language associations and linguistic institutions
- NGOs that support education
- Parents and community members and associations
2. Conduct situational analysis
   - Conduct language mapping
   - Gather information on resources available in various languages

School-based language mapping: The example of Mali

To improve the country’s ability to provide L1-based instruction, a language-mapping exercise supported by USAID found that all children in one region shared the same L1 in 68% of schools. In 90% of the remaining schools, the children/community used one of just four languages as a lingua franca or common language (Rhodes, 2012; USAID/Mali, 2011).
Steps to Take and Conditions for Success

3. Identify languages to use in the classroom and pedagogical approaches for instruction
   - Should be in line with research on language development and acquisition, as well as goals of education system
4. Support language and orthography standardization and development

– An agreed-upon orthography (writing system) should exist for all languages used in the classroom

**USAID support for language standardization: Uganda case study**

Prior to developing reading materials in 12 Ugandan languages under the USAID School Health and Reading Program, project staff worked intensely with technical experts over 6 months to review and standardize orthographies. Teaching and learning materials were then developed using the agreed-upon orthographies.
Steps to Take and Conditions for Success

5. Develop curriculum, materials and assessments for target languages
   - Language teams and subject specialists can work together to create similar materials in different languages

Curriculum and materials for multiple grades and languages: Ethiopia case study

In Ethiopia, the USAID READ Technical Assistance project assisted the Ministry of Education and regional education bureaus to revise the L1 national syllabus for grades 1-8, adapt the syllabus for the seven Ethiopian languages most widely spoken as L1, and develop student books and teachers’ guides to support the development of reading and writing skills in the classroom.
6. Align teacher training and placement with languages and instructional approach

- Teachers’ language proficiency
- Pre-service and in-service synchronization
General Recommendations for Effective Planning for Language Use in Education

- Develop and implement a plan; consider language policy
- Develop budget, short- and long-term goals
- Monitor and evaluate outcomes; refine approach and plan as needed
Tools and Resources Included in the Guide

Situational analysis questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 4. Questions to explore language and educational context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instructional time</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. How much time is currently available for teaching curricular subject material?</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. How much time is currently available for teaching reading and writing in the L1?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. How much time is currently available for teaching the L2/Lx as a subject?</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Have any studies been conducted to measure instructional time available in schools? How does the amount and quality of instructional time available potentially facilitate or hinder children’s ability to learn both academic content and languages?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Curriculum and materials</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Does the curriculum differentiate when and how to use specific languages for LOI versus teaching these languages as subjects?</td>
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<td>6. Does the curriculum differentiate providing literacy instruction for L1 versus L2/Lx learners?</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. In what languages are teaching and learning resources currently available for teachers and learners? Does this match policy and practice with regard to language of instruction?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. What resources need to be developed to effectively provide instruction in target L1 languages? What individuals or institutions can contribute to resource development? What would be the process for doing so?</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. What resources exist outside the classroom that could be used and/or adapted for the formal education system?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Country situational analysis worksheet for planning for language use in education

Country: _______________________

This worksheet can be used to conduct a situational analysis and consolidate information needed to guide planning. It should be adapted as appropriate for the geographic distinctions and languages in the country. Information gaps in the worksheet can be used to identify areas for which information needs to be gathered to make informed decisions.

Part 1: General information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Notes/Data Source</th>
<th>Lang 1</th>
<th>Lang 2</th>
<th>Lang 3</th>
<th>Lang 4</th>
<th>Lang 5</th>
<th>Lang 6</th>
<th>Lang 7</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Existence of policies related to language use in the country (specify details and obtain copies; may include national policies, constitutional references, or other documentation)</td>
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<td>Existence of guidelines or other working documents for language use in schools</td>
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<td>Previous experience within the country providing L1-based instruction (formal/nonformal)</td>
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Part 2: Language and education context

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Notes/Data Source</th>
<th>Lang 1</th>
<th>Lang 2</th>
<th>Lang 3</th>
<th>Lang 4</th>
<th>Lang 5</th>
<th>Lang 6</th>
<th>Lang 7</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Learning outcomes data</td>
<td>Report outcomes by language and/or region</td>
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<tr>
<td>National</td>
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<td>Region 1</td>
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<td>Region 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Region 3, Etc.</td>
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B. % of population using language as L1

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<th>Lang 3</th>
<th>Lang 4</th>
<th>Lang 5</th>
<th>Lang 6</th>
<th>Lang 7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>Consult updated language maps. Indicate languages/regions with large out-of-school populations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Region 1</td>
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Key Take-Aways

• There is no “one size fits all” with regards to LOI planning, but research and experience serve as useful guides
• In many contexts, we need to try what best practices indicate will work well, then monitor, evaluate and refine the approach as necessary
• LOI planning is a long-term endeavor
• Maintaining the status quo of teaching in unfamiliar languages is more costly (in financial resources and human capital lost) than planning for the use of familiar languages in education
Thank you

Discussion and Questions
