

## **Integration of Local Languages into Education Policy and Programs of Nepal**

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This paper outlines a recommended plan for integrating local languages and cultures into the national educational policy in Nepal. Although Nepal has made progress in eradicating illiteracy, earning UNESCO's Confucius Prize for Literacy in 2010, 37% of the population still cannot read or write. Further 12% of children are not in school and the dropout rate is 17%. These numbers are comprised largely of ethnic and language minorities who live in remote areas of the country. There are as many as 140 languages in dialects in Nepal and large geographical differences mean that different language groups also have different perceptions.

Nepal's constitution makes provisions for primary education in the national languages, but due to the unwritten status of many ethnic languages, policymakers feel that mother tongue education in these languages should be delayed. This paper argues that the oral use of the mother tongue should begin immediately in the primary years and, in the meantime, standardized script and orthography should be developed for these languages through the aid of linguists and the government so that textbooks and reading materials can eventually be created.

As for the integration of local culture in addition to language, local folklore can be a rich source of stories, poems, folk dances, et cetera for the classroom and essential for the socialization of young children. To properly include these, the teacher must be local as well. Many government-appointed teachers are not from the locality, and the government must transfer them to more appropriate locations. In the case of some Sherpa communities, there aren't any local teachers who possess the nationally requirement of a school certificate. In these cases, willing teachers who have completed the 8<sup>th</sup> grade should be allowed to teach primary school, as long as they are local. Further, the community must be involved in gathering local material for oral teaching. In the long term, this should be reinforced with reading and writing in the local language, although the model of multilingual education recommended by Susan Malone is also relevant to Nepal.

In 2010, the Nepali government adopted MLE guidelines, and English, Nepali and the local language are being taught simultaneously. But although children should eventually be taught the languages of wider communication, primary education must begin with the mother tongue, or else the teaching will be meaningless.