

Language and Learning in East Timorese primary classrooms.

By Marie Quinn

Discussions about education in Timor-Leste since 1999 have tended to focus on the choice of language, assuming a language “problem” of having to deal with dual official languages and other national languages.

Indeed, language education policy has changed a number of times over the last eight years to accommodate changing orientations toward languages. However, this focus on *what* is to be used in classrooms masks a real problem in *how* to teach bilingually and thus support the stated education policy and achieve universal education. An important consideration is how students and teachers currently use languages to construct meaning in the classroom.

This paper presents findings from a study into languages used in the upper primary classrooms: which languages are being used and for what specific classroom purposes. This study identifies some of the linguistic and learning issues that occur to either help or hinder learning for Timorese children. It suggests that language policy in Timor-Leste should be broadened to support teachers into good teaching and learning practices in order to assist students to succeed at school and to learn different languages.