

Language-in-Education Policy Timor-Leste

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Outline of Presentation

- Overall linguistic Situation
- Language Policy in Timor-Leste
- Current Language-in-Education Policy Frameworks
- Future Plan for Language-in-Education Policy

Overall Linguistic Situation

- Timor-Leste is a highly multilingual society; one of the most linguistically diverse nations in the Asia and Pacific regions
- Most East Timorese speak at least three languages
- There are four major languages;
 - Tetum (Lingua Franca spoken by majority),
 - Portuguese (colonial language, spoken by minority, about 10%)
 - Indonesian (colonial language, spoken by large percentage, especially younger generation)
 - English (foreign language, spoken by minority, especially educated people)
- Around sixteen distinct indigenous languages spoken across the country as first languages;

Language Policy in Timor-Leste

- May 2002 – Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste comes into effect;
 - The Constitution recognizes Timor-Leste as multilingual society;
 - Article 13.1 of the Constitution defines co-official languages as Tetum and Portuguese;
 - Article 13.2 states that Tetum and other national languages shall be valued and developed by the state;
 - Article 159 defines English and Indonesian as working languages.
- As yet a process of national language planning has not been undertaken, nor has a detailed National Language Policy been drafted.

Current Language-in-Education Policy Frameworks

- The Basic Law for Education 14/2008 defines Tetum and Portuguese as the languages of instruction and learning throughout all levels of education;
- Article 12 states the objectives of developing the knowledge of the official languages and appreciation for the core values of Timorese history and culture.

The role of mother tongue or national languages is not defined in any of the current MoE laws or policies, however languages other than the official ones are used as LOI due to teacher's and student's low level of proficiency in Portuguese and sometimes Tetum.

Why is a new Language-in-Education Policy Needed?

- More than 40% of students enrolled in school do not complete their primary education;
- Some 50% of students nationally are enrolled in grades 1-4;
- The World Bank's EGRA (Early Grade Reading Assessment) study conducted in August 2009 showed that 70% of Grade 1 students could not read a word of a simple text presented to them in either Tetum or Portuguese;
- Many of Timor-Leste's national languages are dying out, particularly with the increased use nationally of Tetum;



Objectives of Policy Reform

- The policy affirms that mother tongue is appropriate for a forward looking new nation seeking both to **interact** with the wider world and to **retain and secure** its distinctive and separate identity;
- The policy recognises the need for disadvantaged, minority and rural populations to attend school and succeed at school;
- The policy supports Timor-Leste's fulfilment of its international obligations relating to Education for All and equality of access to education as referenced in the Millennium Development Goals.
- The policy recognises the role of all Timorese languages as fundamental elements of local and national identity;
- The policy aims to facilitate enhanced learning of the co-official languages, Portuguese and Tetum.



A Multilingual Education Policy for Timor-Leste

- Policy developed by a “Language in Education Working Group” formed in April 2010 and guided in its work by Dr Carol Benson (Univ of Stockholm) and Dr Joe Lo Bianco (Univ of Melbourne, Australia);
- Policy recommends use of mother tongue at pre-school and throughout first 4 years of primary education, with Tetum employed in early primary years to “scaffold” teaching and learning;
- Policy document being finalized, and implementation plan or “road map” to be developed with a view to presenting the final policy to the MoE by end 2010.



Conclusion

- Education is not the only way, but best public domain in preserving and promoting indigenous languages in Timor-Leste
- We recognize the challenges ahead in implementing the new policy