

# **English language and medium of instruction in basic education in low- and middle-income countries: a British Council perspective**

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# **English language and medium of instruction in basic education in low- and middle-income countries: a British Council perspective**

John Simpson

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# Glossary

<b>CALP</b>	Cognitive and academic language proficiency
<b>CEFR</b>	Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
<b>DFID</b>	Department for International Development (UK government)
<b>EAL</b>	English as an additional language
<b>EaS</b>	English as subject
<b>EGRA</b>	Early grade reading assessment
<b>EMI</b>	English as medium of instruction
<b>L1/L2</b>	First language/second language
<b>LiE</b>	Language-in-education
<b>Mol</b>	Medium of instruction
<b>NDL</b>	Non-dominant language
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development
<b>TVET</b>	Technical and vocational education and training
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development

## कार्यकारी सारांश

न्यून र मध्यम आय भएका देशहरूको आधारभूत शिक्षा पद्धतिमा अंग्रेजी भाषा माथिको यस ब्रिटिस काउन्सिल स्थिति पत्र खासगरी दक्षिण एशिया र उप सहारा अफ्रिकाका राष्ट्रमण्डलमा शैक्षणिक माध्यमका रूपमा अंग्रेजी (EMI) को व्यापक प्रयोगको मान्यताबाट सुरु हुन्छ । EMI त्यस्तो परिस्थितिसँग सम्बन्धित छ जहाँ अंग्रेजी अतिरिक्त भाषा भएका सिकारुहरूले आफ्नो शिक्षाका केही वा सम्पूर्ण कुरा अंग्रेजीमा प्राप्त गर्छन् अर्थात् शिक्षा चक्रको कुनै चरणमा । खासगरी आधारभूत शिक्षामा, EMI नीति विरोधापपूर्ण छ र विशेष गरेर प्राथमिक विद्यालय तहमा EMI अभ्यास विवादास्पद छ ।

यस पत्रले आधारभूत शिक्षामा EMI का केही जटिलता, अन्यौलता र चुनौतिहरू प्रस्तुत गर्नुका साथै शिक्षणको माध्यम र सिकाइ उपलब्धी बीचको सम्बन्धमा उपलब्ध प्रमाणहरूको सार खिच्दै मातृभाषामा आधारित बहुभाषा शिक्षामा अंग्रेजीका लागि ब्रिटिस काउन्सिलको स्थिति झल्काउँछ ।

अंग्रेजीमा दखल बनाउने साधनका रूपमा EMI को जोडदार मागले अभ्यासका दुई अलग-अलग क्षेत्रहरू: EMI र विषयका रूपमा अंग्रेजीलाई जोड्दछ । भाषा र सिकाइसँग भाषा सिकाइ (EaS) को अन्यौलले विद्यालयका विद्यार्थीहरूलाई अप्ठेरो सृजना भएको छ र यसले समावेशी तथा समान गुणस्तरीय शिक्षामा अवरोध खडा गर्नसक्छ । गुणस्तरीय EaS मार्फत् भन्दा अंग्रेजीमा दक्षता हासिल गर्न EMI अझ राम्रो वा निश्चित उपाय हो भन्ने व्यापकरूपले आत्मसात गरिएको विचारलाई समर्थन गर्ने थोरै वा कुनै पनि प्रमाण छैनन् ।

विशेषज्ञहरूको अनुमानमा, पाठ्यक्रम भरीका सिकाइको सहयोगका लागि आवश्यक संज्ञानात्मक र प्राज्ञिक भाषा दक्षता (CALP) विकास गर्न विद्यार्थीहरूलाई छदेखि आठ वर्ष लाग्छ । दक्षिण एशिया र उप सहारा अफ्रीकामा सामान्यतया पाइए अनुसार, माथिल्लो प्राथमिक तह पश्चात् पाठ्यक्रम भरीका सिकाइ दीगो बनाउन तल्लो प्राथमिक तहमा वा त्यस पछि नै EMI मा जान अंग्रेजीको आधार निकै सतही हुन्छ । त्यसैले, EMI को पूर्व परिचय सुधारात्मक वर्षको सिकाइलाई हानि र शैक्षिक उपलब्धीलाई सिमित गराउने ठानिएको छ ।

मुख्य दाताहरू र विकास साभेदारहरूद्वारा MoI मा लिइएको प्रमाणमा आधारित स्थितिले आधारभूत शिक्षाको मातृभाषामा आधारित बहुभाषिक शिक्षा नमूनालाई समर्थन गर्छ । मातृभाषा वा परिचित स्वदेशी भाषाको प्रयोगद्वारा राम्रो तवरले व्यवस्थित बहुभाषिक कार्यक्रममा बालबालिकाहरूको सहभागिताले अंग्रेजी लगायत सबै विषयहरूको सिकाइलाई आड दिन्छ भन्ने देखाउने प्रसस्त आँकडाहरूमा यो आधारित छ । MoI मा ब्रिटिस काउन्सिलको स्थितिले समेत न्यून तथा मध्यम आय भएका देशहरूको आधारभूत शिक्षामा मातृभाषामा आधारित बहुभाषिक शिक्षा दृष्टिकोणलाई प्रतिविम्बित गर्छ र यो कुरा निम्नलिखित कथनहरूमा प्रतिविम्बित हुन्छ :

- मौलिक समस्याहरूमा सूचित स्थिति हासिल गर्न अंग्रेजीमा हाम्रो कार्यका लागि प्रमाणमा आधारित दृष्टिकोण आवश्यक पर्छ ।

- महत्वपूर्ण अनुसन्धान निष्कर्षका अनुसार न्यून वा मध्यम आय भएका देशहरूका साना विद्यार्थीहरूलाई अंग्रेजीमा भन्दा उनीहरूको आफ्नै वा परिचित भाषामा सिकायो भने उनीहरूले सिक्न लागेको राम्ररी बुझ्छन् तथा शिक्षा, अर्थ र समाजका लागि लाभ सहित शैक्षिकरूपले (एउटा विषयका रूपमा L2 समेतमा) बढी सफल हुन्छन् ।
- आफ्नै वा परिचित भाषा दुवैमा विद्यालय पाठ्यक्रमको पहुँच र गुणस्तरीय अंग्रेजी भाषा सिकाइ अनुभव प्राप्तिमा विद्यार्थीहरूको अधिकार छ ।
- EaS को शिक्षण बलियो बनाएर अंग्रेजीको दक्षतालाई राम्रो मद्दत हुन्छ । त्यसैकारण, न्यून र मध्यम आय भएका देशहरूको प्राथमिक तहमा EMI कहिले पनि फाइदाजनक छैन न त यो हामीले समर्थन गर्ने नीति वा अभ्यास नै हो ।

EaS मा शिक्षण र सिकाइको गुणस्तर सुधारमा केन्द्रीत भई 'हानी नगर्नु' भन्ने सिद्धान्तको प्रयोगले आधारभूत शिक्षामा अंग्रेजीको लागि समर्थनको अनुरोधमा समीक्षा गर्न सकिन्छ ।

- प्राथमिक तहमा विषयका रूपमा अंग्रेजीमा शिक्षक शिक्षा र गुणस्तरीय शिक्षण विकास गरी अंग्रेजी भाषा सिकाइ अवसरहरूको समान पहुँच बढाउन मद्दत पुऱ्याउन सकिन्छ । विपन्न समूह, गरिव वा सिमान्तकृत - आदिवासी अल्पसंख्यकबाट आउने ग्रामीण बालबालिका, युवा महिला सिकारुहरू आदिसम्म पुग्ने विशेष चुनौतिको हामी सबैले सामना गर्नुपर्छ ।
- EMI विवाद जटिल र बहुमुखी छ, जसका लागि कक्षाकोठा र शिक्षण सिकाइ प्रक्रियामा खास जोड दिएर थप अनुसन्धान आवश्यक पर्छ । मातृभाषामा आधारित बहुभाषीक शिक्षालाई बाधा खडा गरेर बहुभाषी कक्षाकोठामा MoI र विद्यार्थी आफैका भाषाका रूपमा क्षेत्रीय र राष्ट्रिय भाषा बीच बेमेल हुनसक्छ । यसबाहेक, विद्यार्थीहरूको भाषामा कुराकानी गर्न नसक्ने शिक्षकहरू भएका बहुभाषी शिक्षा सन्दर्भहरू पनि छन् ।
- कहिलेकाहीं शिक्षा मन्त्रालयले आत्मसात गरेका MoI भाषा नीति र शैक्षिक साभेदारका बीच संलग्नताको अभाव हुनसक्छ । त्यस्तो अवस्थामा, L2 दक्षताको अन्तरलाई सम्बोधन गर्ने उपाय र साधनको पहिचान गरी मातृभाषामा आधारित बहुभाषी शिक्षा प्रारूप भित्र विषयका रूपमा अंग्रेजीमा गुणस्तरीय कार्य बृद्धि गर्न सबैजना सँगै मिलेर काम गर्नसक्छन् ।
- ब्रिटिस काउन्सिलले मातृभाषामा आधारित बहुभाषी शिक्षामा अंग्रेजीको बारेमा आफ्नो स्थिति सम्बन्धमा स्पष्टरूपले कुराकानी गर्ने उद्देश्य राख्दै ब्रिटिस काउन्सिलले मातृभाषा माथि अंग्रेजीलाई जोड दिन खोजेको भनी उठेका गलत धारणा रोक्न चाहन्छ ।

मूख्य सन्दर्भहरूको सूची यो पत्रको अन्त्यमा दिइएको छ (परिशिष्ट घ)



# Executive summary

This British Council position paper on English language in the basic education systems of low- and middle-income countries starts with recognition of the widespread use of English as medium of instruction (EMI), especially in Commonwealth countries of South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.

EMI refers to a situation where learners for whom English is an additional language are receiving some or all of their education in English, i.e. at any stage of the education cycle. EMI policy, particularly in basic education, is controversial and EMI practice, especially at primary school level, is contested.

This paper presents some of the complexities, confusions and challenges of EMI in basic education, summarises available evidence on the relationship between medium of instruction (Moi) and learning outcomes, and outlines the British Council's position on English in mother tongue-based multilingual education.

Strong demand for EMI as a means of promoting fluency in English conflates two distinct areas of practice: EMI and English as subject (EaS). The confusion of language learning (EaS) with language *and* learning has created difficulties for schoolchildren and can pose a barrier to inclusive and equitable quality education. There is little or no evidence to support the widely held view that EMI is a better or surer way to attain fluency in English than via quality EaS.

Expert estimates are that it takes pupils six to eight years to develop the cognitive and academic language proficiency (CALP) needed to support learning across the curriculum. A move to EMI in or just after lower primary, commonly found in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, yields too shallow a foundation of English to sustain learning across the curriculum from the upper primary years onwards. Early introduction of EMI is thus viewed as impairing learning in the formative years and limiting educational attainment.

The evidence-based position on Moi taken by major donors and development partners is one that supports a mother tongue-based multilingual education model of basic education. It rests on a wealth of data showing that children's participation in well-designed multilingual programmes underpins learning in all subjects, including English, through use of the mother tongue or a familiar indigenous language.

The British Council's position on Moi likewise reflects a mother tongue-based multilingual education approach to basic education in low- and middle-income countries and is reflected in the following statements:

- An evidence-based approach to our work in English is necessary to arrive at an informed position on salient issues.
- Important research findings show that if young students in low- or middle-income countries are taught in their own or a familiar language, rather than English, they are more likely to understand what they are learning and be more successful academically (including in L2 as a subject) with benefits to education, the economy and society.
- Students have the right to access both the school curriculum in their own or a familiar language and to receive quality English language learning experiences.
- Fluency in English is best served through strengthening the teaching of EaS. Therefore EMI at primary school level in low- or middle-income countries is not always beneficial nor is it a policy or practice we support.

- Requests for support for English in basic education can be reviewed using the ‘do no harm’ principle, focusing on improving the quality of teaching and learning in EaS.
- At primary level support can be channeled to develop quality teaching and teacher education in English as a subject and to promote equal access to English language learning opportunities. Reaching disadvantaged groups, the poorest or marginalised – rural children, those from ethnic minorities, young female learners, etc. – presents a particular challenge, which all should seek to meet.
- The Mol debate is complicated and multi-faceted, requiring further research with a particular focus on classrooms and teaching/learning processes. In multilingual classrooms there may be a mismatch between a regional or national language as Mol and students’ own language(s), forming a barrier to mother tongue-based multilingual education. Further, there are multilingual education contexts where teachers are not conversant with the language of the students.
- At times there may be a lack of alignment between the Mol language policies adopted by ministries of education and that of educational partners. In such cases, all may work together to identify ways and means of addressing the L2 proficiency gap, and to enhance the quality of work in English as subject within a mother tongue-based multilingual education framework.
- The British Council aims to clearly communicate its position on English in mother tongue-based multilingual education, and seeks to prevent misconceptions arising about the British Council seeking to promote English over mother tongue.

A list of key references is given at the end of this paper (Appendix D).

# 1

## Introduction

### English-medium education – a growing trend

Ten years ago, the British Council-sponsored study, *English Next*, reported learners of English growing in number and decreasing in age, with EaS introduced earlier in the education cycle than before, at primary school (Graddol, 2006: 10). Twin drivers of this trend were identified as parental pressure and government ambitions for a country to be bilingual. Later in the cycle, the spread of English was seen as coinciding with the internationalisation of higher education: an estimated 1,500 master's programmes in 2003–04 were offered in English in countries where it is not the first language, with over half the world's international students taught in English and more English-medium courses being set up in higher education institutions (Graddol, 2006: 74 and 76).

Increase in the teaching of English to young learners to provide a foundation for content and language integrated learning or English-medium education in secondary school – along with the expectation that at least part of university-level study would be undertaken through English – was a key reason given in *English Next* as to why this new orthodoxy had emerged. While the main focus of this study was on *learning English*, and while beginning to do so in primary school was identified as a recent innovation, something not foreseen in *English Next* was a new trend of *learning in English* at primary level. This learning would previously have taken place in another language.<sup>1</sup>

Motivating factors for the widespread use of EMI in newly independent Commonwealth countries – despite UNESCO's oft-referred-to (1953) statement that an indigenous language is preferable as MoI – include English being viewed as a 'neutral', 'modern' and 'scientific' language, and a means of unifying young states with considerable linguistic diversity.<sup>2</sup> In the current context of globalisation, EMI links to a commonly held view of, and aspiration to, proficiency in English as an indicator of a country's economic development. At community level, such a view may be reinforced by enrolment in an EMI-branded school,<sup>3</sup> which is seen as indexed to status, with

ability in English (however modest) perceived as a mark of education – linked to a belief that to know English is to be 'educated'.

It is within such historical and socio-economic contexts that EMI is situated. Particularly prevalent in the Commonwealth countries of Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, it has also spread to other contexts with relatively little history or footprint of English.

### Towards a definition of EMI

In discussing this surge of interest and activity in EMI around the world, this paper is broadly referring to the use of the English language in education systems at all levels: early years, primary, secondary, tertiary and TVET, to teach and learn other subjects – such as mathematics, science and social studies – in a context where for the majority of learners and teachers English is an additional language. For present purposes, EMI refers to a controversial policy and contested practice within basic education in low- and middle-income countries whereby EAL learners receive, largely from EAL teachers, some or all of their education in English.<sup>4</sup>

What is not being talked about when referring to EMI is the teaching of EaS, especially EAL, on the school or university timetable. While there is some blurring of the boundaries between EMI and EaS, the distinction is clear in most contexts; yet, the discourse and debate around EMI is rife with confusion between these two concepts. While it may seem easy to distinguish the two (EMI and EaS), they are surprisingly often conflated in educational debates, especially when such debates, suffused with parental aspirations for offspring, take on a political hue and are played out in the media.

1 The report did, however, recognise: *It is in Africa that the most heated debates about the place of English-medium education are now arising. English competes as a medium of education with other post-colonial languages such as French and Portuguese, as well as with local mother tongues.* (Graddol, 2006: 83).

2 Some language-in-education experts describe this as a conflation of national language policy and language in education policy.

3 It does not necessarily follow that English is used for teaching and learning in EMI-branded schools.

4 A feature too of competitive higher education environments in OECD countries, this facet of EMI isn't discussed here.

## Focus of this EMI position paper

The main focus of this position paper on EMI is the basic education cycle – particularly primary school level – in low-income Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia countries where English is generally not the first language and levels of English proficiency among learners (often teachers too) are frequently low.

## Why is it important to discuss EMI?

As implied above, EMI is neither simple nor straightforward; rather it is quite a complex, confusing and challenging phenomenon. This paper seeks to present some of the complexities, confusions and challenges of EMI in basic education. Taken together, these suggest it is important for donors and development partners to reflect carefully when responding to requests for support to EMI at primary level – especially in Sub-Saharan African and South Asian primary schools where this is a highly contested policy and high-risk practice.

In the field of language in education, the choice of Mol is both a complex and controversial issue, touching on a broad range of issues – identity, cultural values, aspirations, etc. A large body of evidence has been gathered over the years on the relationship between Mol and learning outcomes in basic education, resulting in international agencies such as UNESCO, UNICEF, UNHCR, USAID and DFID taking evidence-led positions on this and disseminating their views widely. As more requests to support EMI are made, there needs to be greater awareness by all concerned of this evidence base and of the positions taken by donors and development partners. Since the British Council is often turned to for advice on English language it makes sense for it to have a clear and consistent position on EMI, one that aligns with the evidence on Mol and learning outcomes.

Having stated this, it is by no means easy to take a position on EMI overall, as there are many different contexts in which it occurs, a wide range of characteristics it displays in these contexts and often major discrepancies between stated policy and practice. For example, EMI in European higher education can be linked to the spread of English beyond native-speaking countries to increased student mobility, as well as to higher education institutions seeking to increase their share of a growing market. By contrast, EMI in basic education within low-income Sub-Saharan African and South Asian countries tends to be driven by political and personal considerations: official policy – made while government is in office or given as an election pledge – allied to parental aspirations for their children. It may also be motivated by local decisions to adopt English as ‘the default position’ when in multilingual classrooms. Granting these important differences, in weighing up support requests for English in basic education, donors and development partners should consider its likely effect on learning processes and outcomes as well as stakeholder rights – an important one for basic education being students’ right to access the curriculum and assessment in a language that enables performance of knowledge, skills and attitudes rather than creating a barrier to such. This paper outlines the British Council’s position on EMI – see also the statement in Appendix A.

# 2

## Mol in basic education: complexities, challenges and confusions

### 2.1 Some complexities surrounding Mol – and associated risks of EMI

#### Lack of clarity on language use in classrooms

The dearth of credible data on language use in education – few governments appear to collect data on this important aspect of learning and assessment – means there are often not clear and consistent insights into Mol in schools as a sound basis for understanding current practices. Might what goes on in the classroom from a language perspective – even in so-called EMI schools – be largely mother tongue teaching? Or possibly mother tongue used alongside a regional or national language, with perhaps some English in a multilingual mix? How much English has to be heard in a subject lesson for it to count as EMI? Or used by whom: both teacher and learners, or teacher only?

There is little reliable data nor any theoretical underpinning/model for current EMI research, which is mainly descriptive and/or perceptions-based. This, together with the lack of reliable data on current patterns of language use in classrooms, and without agreement on what the threshold of English language use is for subject teaching to be considered EMI (as distinct from mother tongue teaching, dominant language use or code-switching of sorts), make it difficult to assess whether EMI actually takes place – or if it does, to what degree. Lack of clarity about classroom language use also forms a challenge to establishing a baseline to measure change against; and creates uncertainty as to whether existing conditions can support effective EMI practice, thus increasing the risk of EMI not being successfully introduced or sustained.

#### Mother tongue-based multilingual education – a growing policy choice

At the same time as EMI is trending, there is an increase in the adoption of language-in-education (LiE) policies – based on a considerable body of research evidence – promoting the use of local, regional or national languages in basic education,

especially at primary school level. Supported by major organisations such as the World Bank, UNESCO, UNICEF, USAID and DFID, this general move to bilingual or multilingual education policy formation is seen as recognition of various things: the multilingual nature of developing countries; the need, as children enter formal education, to form a strong bridge between the language of the home and that of the school; the contribution of a familiar language to the quality of teaching and learning by its use as Mol; and the positive effects of mother tongue-based multilingual education on learning outcomes. Given the research evidence strongly pointing to the efficacy of mother tongue-based multilingual education and given the recent increase in adoption of mother tongue-based multilingual education policies – despite the many challenges to its implementation<sup>5</sup> (see Section 3 for further information) – promoting EMI for primary school pupils may be seen as unhelpful, complicating matters and posing a large risk to foundational learning.

#### Growth of EMI in low-fee private schools

EMI operates within both the state sector and private education, the latter encompassing a wide range of school types, from low-cost, uncertain quality to high-fee institutions working to international standards. In some Sub-Saharan African and South Asian contexts, the rise of low-fee private schools – frequently labelled ‘EMI’, though actual language practice may be unknown – has prompted governments to respond by introducing EMI into state schools, including from the early years, to try and match the private education offer. Parental demand for EMI – linked to common language-learning myths such as ‘the earlier the child starts to learn English’, and ‘the more English, the better’ – is a key driver in many contexts, along with political support for education policies viewed as popular.<sup>6</sup> Together, these groups form a powerful alliance that requires careful and sustained advocacy work on the part of LiE experts to effectively counter; there is some evidence from Mol research that where

5 Such as many smaller languages not having an orthography or lexicon developed for formal education; or there being an insufficient number of teachers who speak these languages or are trained to teach in them.

6 Reporting a wide sense of dissatisfaction with government schooling, which operates in Indian languages, Erling, et al. (2017) suggest Mol is often blamed for more general problems with the education system.



parents are shown their children perform better academically in the mother tongue than in EMI, they are willing to support a mother tongue-based multilingual education approach.

There are three further complications. Firstly, where there is evidence of teaching being better in low-fee private schools or of pupils in such schools achieving better learning outcomes than their state school peers, this can often be explained by greater teacher accountability – increased teacher presence and teaching activity – than in state schools, rather than by use of EMI itself... in so far as English-only is actually used.<sup>7</sup>

Secondly, introducing EMI into public education systems characterised by severe resource constraints, untrained and unqualified teachers, large classes, limited time on task, etc. risks exacerbating the adverse impact of these other important factors on the quality of teaching and learning – a serious risk that arguably is best avoided by not agreeing to support EMI at primary school level, whether through its introduction or expansion.

Thirdly, if the language of the school is English (or another European language), this limits many parents' opportunities to understand and support their children's schooling; likewise, to take part in parent-teacher associations, parent-teacher committees and the school environment.

## 2.2 Some challenges to EMI in basic education

### EMI policy and practice gap

A challenge to the successful introduction of EMI in basic education in developing countries is the tendency for there to be a gap between policy and practice. This can be noticeable in cases where EMI is framed by government more as a school or classroom requirement than a pedagogic model that teachers need support with to implement effectively. Governments may thus introduce EMI with insufficient regard to the pedagogic challenges and barriers to learning that the policy creates; or without a strategic implementation plan that has been devised around EMI as a pedagogic model. Before agreeing to support implementation of EMI policy, providers of technical assistance would do well to consider the challenges this brings about and assess the degree to which all local stakeholders are 'signed up' to it, are supported to understand EMI as a pedagogic model and capable of implementing this well.

### The L2 proficiency gap: learners' and teachers' limited English

One of the key challenges to introducing and making effective EMI in basic education contexts where English is an additional language is the English proficiency of learners, teachers, head teachers and administrators – the latter especially at decentralised levels of the support system. This widely recognised L2 proficiency gap constitutes a major barrier to learners' (and teachers') ability to successfully engage with the curriculum and achieve learning outcomes.

In many Sub-Saharan African and South Asian countries, independent evaluation of pupils' English derives partly from scores obtained in early grade reading assessments (EGRA), often conducted at national level with test data placed in the public domain. EGRA results in EAL are generally very weak, with many children shown to have little ability in reading and understanding basic texts – an essential skill for learning through English. In most cases, evidence of pupil readiness for EMI as indexed by their reading ability in English, which would support this Mol choice at primary level, is simply not there. Low-level English ability among learners in low- or middle-income countries is often compounded by their having insufficient exposure to the language or opportunities to practise it outside the classroom so as to grow language-for-learning knowledge and skills, especially in rural areas where large numbers reside.

Successful EMI also requires subject teachers who are proficient in English. Such teachers, though, are often in short supply in low- or middle-income countries where English is not the first language and stakes are high, since failure at the early stages of education may be difficult to remedy later (Erling et al., 2016). If a proficiency scale such as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is used to benchmark teachers' English, what standard is deemed necessary for delivering the curriculum in English within basic education: a basic user (A1–A2), an independent user (B1–B2) or a proficient user (C1–C2)? Once a target level has been agreed with stakeholders, and using reliable baseline evidence of proficiency level(s), what distance do teachers have to travel to reach this, and how long will the journey take?

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<sup>7</sup> Ashley Day et al. (2014) *The role and impact of private schools in developing countries: a rigorous review of the evidence*. DFID Evidence Brief.

In selecting a target level for teachers (and learners), it's important to have a convincing rationale for this; likewise, it is vital to have clear plans for Mol arrangements in the interim, while teachers (and learners) are helped to prepare for EMI by a variety of means that address the L2 proficiency gap.

Viewed as an equity and social justice issue in low- or middle-income countries, the L2 proficiency gap needs to be addressed in its various aspects for EMI to be successful. The language of the *curriculum* and *textbooks* must be aligned with learners' (and teachers') existing levels of English, with subject-based *activities* and *teaching* which is language-supportive, i.e. takes into account the learners' proficiency gap and includes language support for understanding of content. Achieving accessible and equitable *assessment* in EAL may entail consideration of various accommodations so as to enable learners to demonstrate in English knowledge and skills gained in a range of subjects.

Dealing successfully with the L2 proficiency gap that constrains pupils' ability to learn and display subject knowledge in English – and teachers' capacity to deliver the curriculum in the language – is vital. Yet with increasing academic load and cognitive demands of subject matter at successive grade levels – along with correspondingly higher-level communication needs in English – how can the L2 proficiency gap be narrowed or closed so as to make EMI effective, rather than remain or widen over time? There seems no immediate answer or ready-made solution to this basic dilemma, one that is crucially important to learning outcomes at a time when education systems in low- or middle-income countries are changing their curriculum to a competency-based one and the language demands of this on learners and teachers increase, putting further strain on all who are tasked to work in EMI.

### **Early switch to EMI**

A further challenge to effective EMI is the implementation model used in many Sub-Saharan African countries. This is marked by an early switch to EMI at the end of lower primary, with insufficient time for the necessary CALP to be acquired to sustain learning via EMI. The kinds of language registers that support formal study demand much time and effort to acquire; expert estimates are that it takes pupils six to eight years under favourable

conditions to develop the CALP needed to support learning across the curriculum.<sup>8</sup> Viewed in this light, the foundation laid in English after only short exposure to it as a subject – in the quite challenging classroom environments of developing countries – is often too shallow to support learning in it across the curriculum. As EGRA results reveal across numerous countries, many young children – including in upper primary classes – struggle to read a short, simple text in English with any degree of comprehension, which does not bode well for attempts to learn or support learning in English across the curriculum, particularly at primary school level.

### **Lack of transition to EMI**

A related challenge to the early switch to English as Mol is the lack of both a proper transition to EMI and use of a specialist pedagogy during the Mol transition period. Rather than a carefully planned and well-undertaken transition from mother tongue to EMI at a time when learners and teachers are deemed ready for this, what often happens is that early on a sudden and abrupt switch is demanded from one Mol to another, with little support given to learners or guidance offered to teachers on how to effect change in ways that help protect learning gains up to this point. The lack of evidence in many contexts for adoption of a phased approach to EMI underlines the scale of challenge to introducing this, beginning with awareness raising and advocacy about its necessity. Likewise, there is little recognition of the fact that there are quite distinct pedagogies that teachers need to become competent in if they are to successfully deliver the curriculum in each Mol phase: the teaching methodology appropriate to a shared mother tongue or L1; teaching techniques for the transition phase, where judicious and purposeful use of code-switching or translanguaging allows for the use of two languages (mother tongue and English) in the classroom when early learning gains in mother tongue are at risk from the introduction of a new language as Mol; and, once the transition from mother tongue to English Mol has been effected, the use of EMI teaching techniques and methods that best facilitate learning.

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<sup>8</sup> Heugh, 2007; Thomas and Collier, 1997.

## 2.3 Some confusions surrounding EMI

In addition to the various complexities and challenges outlined above, there are several confusions surrounding EMI that it is important for donors and development partners to be aware of and take into account when responding to requests for support to EMI policy and/or practice from whichever quarter these may come.

### Frequent changes of Mol policy

Latent tensions are inherent in language policy in low- and middle-income countries between the desire to foster local identity and culture on the one hand, and to meet educational and socio-economic aspirations on the other. One of the hallmarks of Mol as education policy in low- and middle-income countries is the frequency with which policy changes. This unstable feature of education policy raises the question of how well informed or secure in their knowledge of complex LiE issues decision makers are so as to comfortably deal with the range and variety of drivers affecting policy decisions, and to think through the teaching and learning implications of available choices.

Frequent changes of Mol policy create an unstable operating context for LiE interventions and do not allow enough time for policy implementation or impact assessment. Where a language of instruction reform project has already begun, a change of language policy can put it at risk. Given this, and before committing to an intervention, it seems sensible for implementing agencies to reflect carefully on the policy environment – including the political economy – and to consider whether there is likely to be another change of Mol policy within the lifetime of the project, say three to five years? If so, how might this impact on operations? Would the intervention still be considered necessary or desirable? And what effect would its curtailment likely have on the implementer's relationship with government and funding partner?

### What exactly is meant by EMI?

Another source of confusion stems from uncertainty as to what the term EMI is being used to denote in a given context: does it refer to classroom practice (if so, has this been observed or assessed, and to what extent is it indeed EMI, whatever this is taken to mean?)<sup>9</sup> or possibly something quite different; or to an aspiration (e.g. on the part of parents and/or government); or possibly to a product label (in terms of courses or programmes being promoted); or even to a marketing tool (e.g. used by private schools or government agencies to boost enrolment figures and funds dependent on these)?

Viewed in this light, it requires as clear a sense as possible of what the term EMI actually means in any situation, and to what end it is being used. This is important to ensure that EMI is not being appropriated for purposes other than educational (political capital, financial gain, etc.).

### EaS and EMI

Confusion between EaS and EMI is rife in the Mol debate, particularly as regards the best route to fluency in English. Strong demand for EMI as a means of promoting fluency in English conflates these distinct areas of practice and confuses underlying issues while creating a barrier to quality education. There is little evidence that EMI in itself increases English proficiency<sup>10</sup> (Borg, 2016); and countries with accepted higher levels of English<sup>11</sup> do not operate EMI systems in basic education – rather, they invest in quality teaching of EaS. Likewise, EMI-focused evidence – which shows that it takes six to eight years of quality EaS to first gain CALP in the language so as to be able to sustain learning of other subjects in it – does not support the often-used early exit model of EMI.<sup>12</sup> While pupils may be helped to prepare for a move to EMI in the longer term – which may entail revising the primary English syllabus to ensure a focus on CALP and acquisition of core language aspects of other subjects – research evidence supports maintenance of mother tongue teaching, both to promote academic achievement and as means of improving performance in EaS.

9 For example, a colleague in India writes: *I noticed on recent visits to low-cost private schools in Delhi that the textbooks were in English but delivery in Hindi, which I think is a common 'approach'* (email correspondence).

10 '... the idea that merely taking a content class taught in English will lead to substantial linguistic gains is dubious (Chapple, 2015: 4); '... in China, Lei and Hu (2014) did not find significant differences in the English proficiency of students in EMI and Chinese-medium programmes' (quotes from Borg, 2016).

11 Such as the Netherlands, Scandinavian and other European countries.

12 Heugh, 2007; Thomas and Collier, 1997.



### **Confused Mol practice**

Challenges in implementing mother tongue-based multilingual education policy, such as lack of sufficient learning and teaching materials in non-dominant languages or trained mother tongue teachers, along with resistant attitudes in some quarters to mother tongue teaching,<sup>13</sup> compound matters and may lead policymakers towards selecting a regional or official language as Mol (e.g. Amharic in Ethiopia, Hindi in northern India, Swahili in Tanzania, Urdu in Pakistan). This can lead to many students in a given context learning all subjects in a second, dominant language rather than in their own, suggesting a need for subject teaching using L2 methodology. Even where a regional or official language has a larger footprint than English and is a cognate to local languages (i.e. linguistically closer than is English), governments may prefer to promote EMI.<sup>14</sup> However, given the weight of evidence in favour of mother tongue teaching at primary level, English language teaching providers should be careful not to take advantage of such situations by supporting EMI during the initial stage of formal education, since this is very likely to impair learning and educational attainment. This issue is further addressed in Section 3.

### **The British Council's position in relation to mainstream education thinking on Mol**

The evidence-led mother tongue-based multilingual education position taken by major donors and education partners is one that the British Council signed up to in 2012.<sup>15</sup> This statement of language-in-education principles reflects the British Council's position on Mol and leads to the conclusion that introducing EMI at primary level in low- or middle-income countries is not a policy decision or practice that should be supported.

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13 While mother tongue teaching lobbyists have been successful in promoting policies that support greater use of local languages in formal education, there can be stiff resistance from some parents, educators and politicians who view local languages as offering insufficient opportunity for educational advancement and gaining well-paid jobs.

14 In some cases, parents with little sentimental value for another African language may not want to use the regional language, preferring to go straight for English.

15 Appendix A has a statement of these language-in-education principles.

# 3

## Continuing realities of EMI

Despite evidence on the benefits of mother tongue-based multilingual education, implementing it effectively is both complex and challenging. Among the biggest obstacles to using local languages in the classroom are a shortage of teachers who speak the languages, a lack of textbooks in these languages and an insufficient number of teachers trained to teach through these languages.<sup>16</sup>

In addition, many local languages remain to be codified and/or standardised; their lexicons have to be developed for curricular subjects and for the teaching and learning of these, including the requisite cognitive and academic language; and the discourse functions of local languages need to be extended into and accepted for scholastic purposes. While such mother tongue-based multilingual education challenges do not invalidate the use of local languages for helping to achieve learning outcomes, these processes can take considerable time to complete. The political will required to see these reforms through and to produce adequate numbers of textbooks in different mother tongues may not be strong in all cases.

Further, traditionally there have been quite negative attitudes to translanguaging, so that these are often not readily accepted by policymakers as pedagogic solutions to enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in bilingual or multilingual education systems or supporting the transition from mother tongue to EMI.

Use of EMI as a monolingual solution to the challenge of multilingual classroom is thus likely to remain in basic education in low- or middle-income countries for the foreseeable future, for the above reasons and others:

- Even if mother tongue-based multilingual education were to be extended in the education cycle, e.g. to end of upper primary or lower secondary, EMI would most likely continue for some time at upper secondary and tertiary levels, with continuing need for sound planning and support to ensure its success.
- A corollary to this is the challenge for English to be taught well as a subject (for at least six to eight years) and the ground prepared for it to become the Mol at an agreed stage of education.
- Likewise, the need will remain for technical assistance to a well-designed and implemented transition (rarely seen) from L1 to EMI, irrespective of when this occurs in the education cycle, to facilitate both the recoding of all that has been learned thus far in L1 into English and the scaffolding of new knowledge/skills in English onto those existing in L1.

That stated, the major challenge to effective EMI – learners' (often also teachers') English proficiency – remains to be addressed. For students to successfully engage the curriculum and achieve learning outcomes for basic education, this L2 proficiency gap needs to be tackled in its various guises: the language of the *curriculum* and *textbooks* must be aligned with learners' levels of English; subject-based *activities* and *teaching* need to be undertaken in language-supportive ways that help render content comprehensible; and *assessment* in EAL must be accessible and equitable, for example via appropriate accommodations to students' ability to display knowledge or skills in EAL.

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<sup>16</sup> The cost of addressing these needs to be weighed against the social, political and economic cost of low levels of learning achievement from continued monolingual policies, including EMI.

# 4

## British Council position on English in mother tongue-based multilingual education

- An evidence-based approach to our work in English is necessary to arrive at an informed position on salient issues.
- Important research findings show that if young students in low- or middle-income countries are taught in their own or a familiar language, rather than English, they are more likely to understand what they are learning and be more successful academically (including in L2 as a subject) with benefits to education, the economy and society.
- Students have the right to access both the school curriculum in their own or a familiar language and to receive quality English language learning experiences.
- Fluency in English is best served through strengthening the teaching of EaS. Therefore EMI at primary school level in low- or middle-income countries is not beneficial nor is it a policy or practice we support.
- Requests for support for English in basic education can be reviewed using the ‘do no harm’ principle, focusing on improving the quality of teaching and learning in EaS.
- At primary level support can be channeled to develop quality teaching and teacher education in English as a subject and to promote equal access to English language learning opportunities. Reaching disadvantaged groups, the poorest or marginalised – rural children, those from ethnic minorities, young female learners, etc. – presents a particular challenge, which all should seek to meet.
- The Mol debate is complicated and multi-faceted, requiring further research with a particular focus on classrooms and teaching/learning processes. In multilingual classrooms there may be a mismatch between a regional or national language as Mol and students’ own language(s), forming a barrier to mother tongue-based multilingual education. Further, there are multilingual education contexts where teachers are not conversant with the language of the students.
- At times there may be a lack of alignment between the Mol language policies adopted by ministries of education and that of educational partners. In such cases, all may work together to identify ways and means of addressing the L2 proficiency gap, and to enhance the quality of work in English as subject within a mother tongue-based multilingual education framework.
- The British Council aims to clearly communicate its position on English in mother tongue-based multilingual education, and seeks to prevent misconceptions arising about the British Council seeking to promote English over mother tongue.

This position is summarised in the short Juba Declaration (Appendix A) and will be reviewed on a regular basis in line with new findings into Mol within the field of language policy, planning or practice.

# 5

## British Council work on Mol and LiE

- Convening international conferences and publishing proceedings: Juba, Cape Town, Delhi.
- Hosting symposia/panel discussions – for example IATEFL 2014.
- Supporting staff and externals to speak on Mol issues at international conferences.
- Commissioning research and publishing the findings – for example Oxford University’s EMI study, Open University’s research into EMI in Ghana and India.
- Partnering with Bristol University on a research project into textbook readability for EMI in Rwanda.
- Partnering with the universities of Cambridge and Reading on *Multilingualism and multi-literacy: raising learning outcomes in challenging contexts in primary schools across India*.
- Providing consultancy services to ministries of education – for example Rwanda, Ghana, Kenya – on language policy reform.

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# Appendix A – The Juba Language-in-Education Conference: concluding statement of principles

Academics from across Sub-Saharan Africa and experts from the African Academy of Languages (ACALAN), UNESCO, UNICEF and Summer Institute of Linguistics met in Juba in March 2012 for a British Council conference on LiE policy in South Sudan organised by the British Council with support and funding from UNICEF and DFID. Our research and discussions have resulted in the following statement of general principles, which we believe should be applied in South Sudan and elsewhere. These principles are aligned with the policy guide on the integration of African languages and cultures into education systems, which was adopted by ministers of education of 18 African countries following a conference in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, from 20 to 22 January 2010 and subsequent exchanges. They are also aligned with the Khartoum Declaration on the link between culture and education adopted by the sixth Summit of the Heads of States and Government of the African Union held in Khartoum, Sudan, from 16 to 24 January 2006; and with the Second Decade of Education for Africa (2006–15) launched during the Second Extraordinary Meeting of the Conference of Ministers of Education of the African Union (COMEDAF) between 4 and 7 September 2006 in Maputo, Mozambique.

As professionals in the fields of language and education, we reaffirm our belief in the following principles that should be applied to LiE policies and practices across Africa. We commit to championing these principles within our own organisations and the wider community.

- We believe in linguistic equity: all languages must be protected, respected and developed.
- We value the multilingual nature of African society. It is a resource to be celebrated and used.
- African languages should be used in partnership with international languages such as English, French, Spanish, Portuguese and Arabic, both through strong models of mother tongue-based multilingual education and throughout African society.
- Parents, the state and civil society must be informed of the educational, social, cultural, economic and political benefits of the use of African languages alongside European languages and included in discussions concerning multilingual education.

- Learners should be taught in basic (i.e. up to lower secondary level) formal and non-formal education through the language they know best. This gives them the best basis for developing academic language proficiency required in all subjects. Unfamiliar languages should be taught through second language teaching methodologies.
- Other languages (including further African languages or European languages) should only be used as a medium of instruction after learners have developed academic reading and writing competency in the language they are familiar with, and after they have gained a sufficient level of academic proficiency in the second language through studying that language as a subject. This principle applies to all languages that are not a learner's mother tongue. When the language education model chosen requires transition from one language of instruction to another, that transition should be gradual and not sudden.
- Effective teaching, with a socio-culturally relevant curriculum, is the most important element in quality education. African societies should use a variety of ways to develop and value good teachers.
- The teaching of reading and writing is particularly important and must be improved – increased training is needed in this area.
- Non-formal education should form part of the education system. It includes community-based early childhood education, alternative basic education for out-of-school children, youth and adults, and skills training for youth and adults. Effective approaches use bi/multilingual language models and are connected to the community and world of work.

## Signatories

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# Appendix B – Main ways that Mol is framed within LiE debates

Mol is complex and multi-faceted, with each side of the prism – pedagogical, political, socio-economic and philosophical/mythological – casting its own light on the myriad issues. Commonly used conceptual frameworks to explain language, and that inform thinking on Mol, are:

## ■ Language as capital ... for socio-economic opportunity and development

Policymakers often hold an instrumentalist view of language, which links the use – and desirability – of English in education to economic development. From this instrumentalist viewpoint, language skills are perceived as a form of (cultural) capital in (local/regional/ global) markets, with ‘currencies’ accorded different value. Where such capital is viewed as unequally divided, this is seen by many researchers as linking to broader notions of equity and social justice (see below); English/EMI is viewed as essentially privileging the ‘haves’/urban elites and increasing inequality among the (rural) poor with limited access to it.

## ■ Language as a marker of equity and social justice

This position derives from several related observations: that the degree of alignment between home and school language has a critical bearing on learning opportunities and outcomes; that language (e.g. English in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia) can disadvantage or marginalise children when they are taught in an unfamiliar one; and that language often interacts with culture and poverty to increase the risk of being left behind, in particular students from the rural poor. The Mol issue, linked to learning outcomes and achievement, occupies much of the space within this theoretical framework and is largely occupied by the mother tongue-based multilingual education lobby, which strongly advocates increased use of mother tongue teaching and reduction or even elimination of EMI. Agencies promoting English in low- or middle-income countries or thought to be advocating EMI in such contexts may be viewed as a legitimate target of critics who perceive this as furthering inequality and impeding the cause of equity and social justice as viewed through a mother tongue-based multilingual education lens.<sup>17</sup>

## ■ Language as a right... the right to be educated in one’s own or a familiar language

This links to a non-dominant language (NDL) rights agenda where English or a major indigenous language may be viewed as an ‘oppressive’ language, ‘keeping down’ or even ‘killing off’ NDL languages by virtue of its perceived dominant position. Although governments in low- and middle-income countries hear this argument voiced often, they can be wary of a rights-based, NDL approach to advocacy of mother tongue-based multilingual education, seeing such as having the potential to cause ethnic tension or threaten the unity of a young, multilingual/multi-ethnic state by fragmentation of social groups and increased competition for scarce resources, thereby posing obstacles to vital nation-building processes. While this may be so in certain cases, it does not mean that English language teaching providers should seek to take advantage of government ambivalence to notions of ‘unity in diversity’ or of fostering the use of local languages so as to promote EMI.

## ■ Language as capability

This offers an alternative theoretical framework by focusing on the need for human capabilities to be developed in both local languages and languages of wider communication. From an equity and social justice perspective, this necessarily includes development of the linguistic capabilities of disadvantaged groups. Besides embracing bilingual/multilingual approaches to education, it links to notions of building capacity (knowledge, skills and attitudes) and extending language repertoires by increased access to relevant languages, which may include English. A key challenge here is how to make English accessible to all, in particular historically marginalised groups such as the rural poor and female learners, such that no one is left behind in the ‘journey to development and personal fulfilment’.

<sup>17</sup> Note, as seen in the section on ‘language as capability’, that access can also be considered to include access to languages of wider communication, including English, an issue that can also be seen as one of equity and social justice.



# Appendix C – Brief summary of research into Mol and learning achievement

- EMI is often discussed within the Mol research literature, which is mainly produced within a mother tongue-based multilingual education framework. While at times the work draws less on empirical evidence than on authors' own experience in a given context, this is not to discount the ideas presented, rather to recognise Mol as a complicated issue requiring further research.
- Notwithstanding this caveat, a strong body of evidence suggests that children's participation in well-designed multilingual programmes can improve learning in their mother tongue, as well as in a more widely used national or regional language, in subjects across the curriculum.<sup>18</sup>
- Another key finding is that six to eight years of education in a language are necessary to develop the CALP and literacy required for scholastic achievement. Studies suggest that multilingual education needs to continue over this length of time for children's learning to be effective and learning gaps reduced.
- A similar length of time is needed for learners to acquire the requisite proficiency in English for it to become an effective Mol. (Note: this indicates that one of the most commonly adopted language of instruction policies in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, the early exit model, is not currently evidence-led.)
- A further finding is that LiE policy doesn't always match the linguistic landscape of the context, and so there is mismatch between mother tongue policy and the actual languages that students (and/or teachers) speak.

## Language of instruction reports in general

- RTI's (2015) brief for USAID: *Improving Learning Outcomes through Mother Tongue-based Education*
- Carol Benson's (2010) language of instruction briefing paper: *Language of instruction as the key to educational quality: implementing multilingual education* (SIDA)
- Helen Pinnock's (2009) *Language and Education: the missing link* (Save the Children and CfBT)

## Language of instruction reports in Sub-Saharan Africa

- Eddie William's (2010) 'Language policy, politics and development in Africa', in *Dreams and Realities: Developing Countries and the English Language* (British Council).

Drawing on the observation that Africa is the only continent where the majority of children start school using a foreign language, Williams argues that this language policy is a significant contributory factor to the lack of development on the continent.

- EdQual Research Consortium's (2010) Policy Brief on *Language of instruction and quality of learning in Tanzania and Ghana* (Bristol University)

The main research findings were:

- In Tanzania, and to a lesser extent in Ghana, teachers used a wider range of teaching and learner involvement strategies when they taught lessons in African languages than in English.
- In both Tanzania and Ghana, a short professional development workshop for teachers improved teaching practices and learner involvement in both languages.
- In Ghana, teaching and learning was obstructed by the unavailability of textbooks in the local African language of instruction.
- In both Ghana and Tanzania, textbooks written in English were difficult for learners to read.

- Heugh et al.'s (2007) *Study on Mol in primary schools in Ethiopia* (MoE).

This report found that the federal government's policy of maintaining Amharic as Mol throughout the primary cycle and not switching to EMI until the start of lower secondary school resulted in improved student performance in core subjects – including English – compared with regions adopting earlier exit to EMI.

<sup>18</sup> In Ethiopia, for example, Grade 8 pupils learning in their mother tongue performed better in mathematics, biology, chemistry and physics than pupils in English-only schooling (Heugh et al., 2007).



- LOITASA's briefing paper (Language of instruction in Tanzania and South Africa) 2007–12.

The research in both countries showed that children learn much better when taught in a language they master. The spread of scores in the classes is also smaller. The interaction between students and teachers is different, livelier and of a much higher quality if the language is one students and teachers alike master well. In that case students are active, compete to answer, come up with questions and debate with the teacher.

- Martha Qorro's article, *Does Language of Instruction Affect Quality of Education?* (HakiElimu's Working Paper Series).

The paper attempts to explain what quality of education is in relation to the language of instruction factor, citing two issues that have been misunderstood: teaching English and teaching in English. The paper also attempts to show that the assumption made by many people in Tanzania of using EMI to give students a chance to learn it is false. Two language hypotheses, Cummins' (1979) language development interdependence hypothesis and Krashen's (1985) comprehensible input hypothesis, are used to illustrate why the use of the first literacy language (Swahili), which the majority of students understand, is an important factor in improving both the quality of education and the quality of English language teaching as practised by those who are trained and qualified to do so.

Some of the main findings or arguments from research into Mol that derive from the mother tongue-based multilingual education position are that learning in the L1:

- has an important relationship to learning processes and literacy development
- impacts positively on learners' identity
- signals to learners that their language and culture are valued
- facilitates a smooth transition between home and school
- lays the foundation for performance in L2 (English) and other subjects (maths, science, etc.)
- encourages child-centred, active and participatory instructional approaches
- makes education culturally relevant and enables parental involvement.

# Appendix D – Key references on Mol issues in basic education in low- or middle-income countries

## Short reports and briefing papers

Barron, S (2012) *Why language matters for the MDGs* (UNESCO Bangkok).

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- Erling, E et al. (2017) *Multilingual Classrooms: Opportunities and challenges in Low- and Middle-income English Medium Instruction Contexts*. British Council and Education Development Trust
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- Williams, E (2006) *Bridges and barriers: language in African education and development*. Manchester: St Jerome.

## Appendix E – Language and learning principles relevant to the Mol debate

- Proficiency in the language of learning enables it to be a channel for education; an inadequate level of language ability creates a barrier to scholastic success.
- Children learn best in the language they know best.
- The longer the first or familiar language is used in teaching and learning, generally the better the educational outcomes, including proficiency in other languages; conversely, an English only or early switch to EMI depresses reading ability and learning outcomes over time.
- Teachers teach or facilitate learning most effectively in the language they are most familiar with; related to this, teachers using EMI tend to have a narrower range of teaching styles and strategies, which can limit them to forms of ‘safe talk’ in the classroom, thereby restricting students’ opportunities for learning.
- To achieve fluency in a language does not mean having to use it as Mol in basic education. Countries with high levels of English proficiency – Scandinavian countries, the Netherlands etc. – use their own languages, not English, as Mol in basic education, and teach English well as a foreign language/L2.

## Appendix F – Common EMI scenarios

In this section we look at some common EMI scenarios in basic education within low- or middle-income countries and offer some practical advice on addressing issues therein.

### The government would like to introduce EMI from Grade 1 (beginning of primary school) and wants support for the implementation of such a policy.

This signals a very high risk of EMI doing harm to young children’s learning. An initial strategy could be to try and dissuade the government from going ahead with such a policy. Of the many arguments against it, the following can be used:

- there is no real evidence of EMI from Grade 1 actually working
- young pupils will find it very difficult to study in a language they don’t understand
- young pupils will struggle in learning to read in an unfamiliar language
- Mol research shows clearly and consistently that mother tongue teaching in the early years produces better learning outcomes than EMI
- major donors and development partners (World Bank, UNESCO, UNICEF, USAID, DFID, Save the Children, etc.) support learning through the mother tongue/familiar language in the early years
- the British Council supports mother tongue-based teaching during this period of schooling.

As support to government, and where funding is available from donors or development partners one (or more) of the following might be suggested:

- provide **thought leadership** and/or **consultancy services** on international research and best practice in Mol to help inform revision of language policy
- assist in strengthening the quality of teaching English as a subject (including in the early years, if this is where it’s introduced) as preparation for it later becoming the Mol
- help increase access to English language learning opportunities for young pupils as may be appropriate
- review the early years’ English language syllabus so that basic links can be made to other subject areas and some ground prepared (e.g. via simple subject vocabulary) for EMI.

Should the government remain intent on pursuing this policy, Plan B might be to:

- undertake a situation analysis that includes an assessment of the readiness of the education system (particularly pupils and teachers) for EMI from Grade 1. *(The advantage of this is that it allows evidence to be gathered that will likely help support the above arguments and, ideally, persuade the government that EMI from Grade 1 is both unsuitable and unworkable.)*

If the government wishes to start implementing the policy, Plan C would be to suggest trying a pilot preferably along with a comparative mother tongue teaching study. *(The study is likely to replicate results found elsewhere, that young pupils perform better in mother tongue teaching, which may thus help avert the large-scale introduction of EMI from Grade 1.)*

An alternative approach (Plan D) would be **capacity building** or **teacher education**, with a focus on improving teachers’ English levels and classroom practices so they are better able to make appropriate use of code-switching or translanguaging in the classroom as a means of facilitating learning.

As can be gathered from the above, in this scenario the aim is not to get entangled with a policy – or involved in its large-scale implementation – that is harmful to learning and education outcomes; a key concern to be kept in mind.

### The government would like to introduce EMI from Grade 4 (beginning of upper primary) and wants support for the implementation of such a policy.

This situation is also far from ideal. Given that it takes six to eight years of studying English as a subject to acquire the CALP needed to sustain learning in it across the curriculum, and given that the quality of English language teaching currently available in low- or middle-income countries is uneven, the foundation of English laid in P1–P3 is generally too shallow to support EMI at this relatively early stage of the education cycle.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Related to this is the argument that the focus of early years’ EoS should largely be oral English, thus not interfering with young children’s acquisition of initial literacy and learning-to-learn skills in their own language.

It would be helpful to persuade the government to delay the introduction of EMI until at least the end of the primary cycle so as to buy time for laying a solid foundation in EaS in support of learning – assuming that English language teaching is (or can be) of sufficient quality to enable this to happen.

Should government continue with the policy, another option is to stress the need for a gradual transition from mother tongue teaching to EMI (partly to protect the learning gained in mother tongue in P1–P3 and partly to allow for scaffolding of new learning in English on to existing learning in the mother tongue) and to suggest that the upper primary cycle be used for such a phased approach.

Doing so can also assist the introduction of a language-supportive model for engaging the curriculum in English as an additional language (see Appendix H for an outline of this approach). Note: this also links to Sustainable Development Goal 4, quality education, by extending the focus on this from learning outcomes to a review of the curriculum, textbooks, pedagogy and assessment for education in the medium of English as a means of enhancing both the quality of EMI and of educational attainment through it.

Within a systems-wide transformative model of EMI, **capacity building** plays an important part. As mentioned above, this might take the form of support to improvement of teachers' English levels and classroom practices so they are better able to make use of code-switching or translanguaging in the classroom. See also the first case study in Appendix G (language-supportive textbooks and teaching) for an illustration of how it is possible to work with materials writers, illustrators and editors, as well as government officials, in the design of textbooks in English for learners who have limited proficiency in the language. *(Note: While not guaranteeing complete success, language-supportive interventions of this kind may help mitigate some of the risks to learning in an early exit to EMI in cases where a government does not agree to delaying this move until the end of primary school.)*

### **The government would like to introduce EMI from Grade 7 (beginning of lower secondary) and wants support for the implementation of such a policy.**

In this case, since EMI is being introduced later in the basic education cycle and, presumably, allows for at least six years' prior study of EaS, the risks to learning of introducing EMI at this point in the cycle may be considered not as high as attempting to do so in Grade 1 or Grade 4. This is not to say, though, that introducing EMI at the beginning of lower secondary means a straightforward or wholly successful change process, particularly if standards of teaching EaS in primary school are low or of uneven quality. While the reasons are varied for students struggling to learn all subjects in English from lower secondary, one of the main factors cited is the poor quality of English language teaching at primary school level – another argument for focusing support on enhancing the quality of English language teaching in basic education, rather than promoting EMI, particularly in the primary cycle.

A key strategy for increasing the possibility of effective learning taking place in English from lower secondary level onwards is to build in **a language-supportive transition phase from mother tongue teaching to EMI**. For an example of such support, in the shape of a coursebook designed to prepare Form 1 students i.e. secondary level, to study through the medium of English, see the case study on Tanzania in Appendix G.



# Appendix G – Case studies of support to English in basic education in developing countries

## **Supporting Teachers’ English via Mentoring (STEM) project AND the Language-supportive Textbooks and Pedagogy (LAST) project, Rwanda**

Quality education through the medium of English greatly depends on teachers’ and learners’ proficiency in the language and is central to achieving a number of key educational goals: effective delivery of the curriculum, academic success and lifelong learning opportunities. Despite recent improvements, the English proficiency levels of primary school teachers in Rwanda are still short of those needed to implement the new, competency-based curriculum in line with recent government education policy.

Through technical assistance to the government of Rwanda we promote language policy dialogue and bilingual education practices to strengthen the transition from teaching and learning in the mother tongue to doing so in English. Working with local partners, the STEM project provides primary school teachers of all subjects with professional development materials, school-based mentoring and peer group support opportunities to develop their English language skills so as to ensure a quality education for all students.

STEM is an innovation designed to develop the confidence and competence of upper primary school teachers to teach in English. Using a blended learning approach, it is innovative and cost-effective. The STEM resource consists of guided self-study materials (print and audio) designed to strengthen the classroom English of primary school teachers. The materials are used individually or in peer support groups facilitated by school-based personnel and/or mentors, thus minimising the need for face-to-face training and encouraging peer support and guided self-study.

Feedback on the progress made by STEM participating teachers has been very positive, with upper primary school teachers demonstrating considerable improvements in their classroom English as well as the ability to apply new pedagogical techniques. Participating teachers are encouraging and supporting students and fellow teachers alike. Pupils are reported to be more motivated and engaged with English, participating more in lessons.

Complementing this and drawing on UK expertise, the LAST project shares with publishers and staff of the Rwandan Education Board best practice in the design of teaching and learning materials for learners studying in English who have limited proficiency in the language.

English-medium textbooks are often inaccessible to learners with low levels of English language. Further, subject teachers are not always trained in how to use or adapt textbooks for promoting learning in a second language (L2), essential for developing both CALP and subject knowledge.

The purpose of LAST was to develop language-supportive learning and teaching materials in mathematics, science and social studies suitable for upper primary pupils learning in L2/English. Rwandan materials writers and illustrators worked with UK experts and local publishing companies to develop quality, curriculum-aligned prototype textbooks to improve learning and teaching by making the books easier for pupils and teachers to understand than existing learning and teaching materials.

Guidelines produced on the design of language-supportive learning and teaching materials for use in EMI were accepted by the Rwandan Education Board and became a requirement for publishers submitting textbooks for evaluation in the procurement of subject-based materials for upper primary grade levels. The LAST materials are the first step in embedding high-quality, relevant and language-appropriate learning and teaching materials in the curriculum.

### **The LAST approach**

- Bilingual vocabulary support.
- Good-quality, contextually relevant illustrations.
- Pupils talking in L1 (Kinyarwanda) first to try out ideas.
- Pupils then talking in L2 (English).
- Supporting learners’ reading, writing, speaking and listening by providing clearly set out, topic-relevant support activities.
- Dual-language teachers’ guides (in Kinyarwanda and English) to complement the materials.

We also monitored and evaluated the impact of our work and disseminated learnings to a wide audience. A total of **1,075** pupils were tested in **16 schools in four districts**, before and after the introduction of the new Primary 4 materials and accompanying teacher training. After just **four months**, learners in intervention schools achieved **16 per cent higher** in vocabulary and comprehension tests than those in control schools that did not use the materials or receive the teacher training.

### **The Bihar Language Initiative for Secondary Schools (BLISS), India**

In India, the British Council, DFID and the Bihar State Government partnered on BLISS (2012–17). The project aimed to provide a coherent, high-quality and sustainable model for English teacher development in Bihar. 200 teacher educators were selected and trained in child-friendly and interactive teaching practices and they have gone on to train 3,200 secondary school teachers who teach up to 1.6 million students across the state. There was significant improvement in teacher educator language proficiency, with 80 per cent of those tested achieving an improved score on language assessments after initial training, and 75 per cent of teachers trained using English in the classroom most of the time (compared to 15 per cent at baseline). BLISS used UK expertise in monitoring and evaluation framework design, resource development, research and external impact evaluation.

### **The Education Quality Improvement Programme in Tanzania – English Language Teaching project**

The aim of the Education Quality Improvement Programme in Tanzania – English Language Teaching project (EQUIPT-ELT) – was to improve the quality of primary and secondary education in Tanzania by increasing the capacity of students through improvements to the quality of teaching at primary and secondary levels, with a specific focus on English for communication. EQUIPT-ELT ran from November 2012 until 31 March 2016.

Swahili is the medium of learning in primary schools in Tanzania, while English is taught as a subject. The Mol changes from Swahili to English at secondary school, which creates a learning gap as students have difficulty coping with the secondary curriculum. The high rate of failure and low achievement at secondary education level is evidence for the existence of this language barrier for many learners. Research has also shown that many Tanzanian teachers lack the ability to communicate effectively in English.

The EQUIPT-ELT project was part of a wider £57 million DFID-funded programme designed to address these issues. EQUIPT supports the government of Tanzania by improving the quality of education in primary schools and will increase the number of children, particularly girls, able to transfer to secondary education. The outcome of the programme is better quality education, especially for girls.

Main activities undertaken during project implementation were:

- revision and updating of baseline course for use in Form 1, rolled out to 23 per cent of schools in 2016 and to be used in all government of Tanzania secondary schools from 2017
- training trainers and teachers in the interactive methodology associated with the course
- support to tutors to improve teaching and learning, with a specific focus on skills and ability to communicate in English
- support to tutors to deliver quality teaching, specifically on methodology and quality teaching of English language
- development of teaching material (English for subject teaching) to be used in teacher training colleges.

#### **Three outputs were agreed to achieve the outcome, in two phases:**

- **output 1:** teacher training college tutors and student teachers improve their capacity to teach, with specific focus on skills and ability to communicate in English
- **output 2:** teacher training colleges have an improved capacity to deliver quality teaching
- **output 3:** the project integrates and shares learning and research with complementary education initiatives implemented by the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training and other stakeholders.

The baseline course was comprehensively revised and student and teacher books were officially endorsed by the Commissioner for Education as meeting government quality standards for inclusion in the national secondary curriculum from January 2017.

- 99,200 baseline books were distributed to Form 1 students across 803 secondary schools in 30 districts and 13 regions (approximately 23 per cent of all students who transitioned to an English-medium secondary curriculum in 2016)



- 361 regional and district education officers, quality assurers and teacher trainers from all 30 districts were prepared to assume key responsibilities during the roll-out of the new baseline course.

The following products and resources were handed over to the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology:

- revised baseline course (teacher and students books) and training materials, ready for national roll-out from January 2017
- English for subject teaching – a course supporting English language and methodology improvement in teachers' colleges
- performance management framework for teacher training colleges
- college directory of skilled human resources.

Arguably the single greatest achievement of the EQUIPT-ELT project is the much-revised baseline course, designed to prepare Form 1 students to study through the medium of English, which leaves behind a substantial legacy. That the baseline course has been officially endorsed as meeting government quality standards for inclusion in the national secondary curriculum, against the backdrop of national elections and a changing political landscape, is a major accomplishment. This is a major step in the development of high-quality English-medium education and pedagogical practice that will benefit generations of ambitious, talented and dedicated young Tanzanians.

### **The English for Education College Trainers (EfECT) project, Burma**

EfECT is funded by the UK's DFID and the British Council. The project has seen 50 expatriate trainers working with over 2,200 of Burma's teacher educators across 25 different education colleges and other teacher training organisations since September 2014. Of the core beneficiaries who took up the provision during the first year of the project, 97 per cent improved their English proficiency as measured by the Aptis test and over 75 per cent improved their English proficiency by at least one CEFR level. A survey of beneficiaries showed that the teacher educators overwhelmingly rated their confidence in English as improved, both in terms of use of English in their job role and use of English more widely. A mid-project external evaluation of the

project has stated that the project has met all the targets set in the DFID log frame and that the project has made very good progress. The project is now in its second year, which sees teacher educators benefiting from the Foundation in Teaching course developed specifically for the project.

### **The English Language Teacher Development Project (ELTDP) in East Malaysia**

We know that it is the teacher who can make the most difference to students' learning and therefore to quality education in the classroom. We also know that communication is one of the most important strategies and language one of the most important tools a teacher has in a classroom.

'It's critical that we build in support to teachers in the strategic use of code-switching between English and the first language for efficient teaching and achievement of learning goals.' Westbrook, J et al. (2013) *Pedagogy, Curriculum, Teaching Practices and Teacher Education in Developing Countries*. Final Report. Education Rigorous Literature Review. Department for International Development.

Working in partnership with the Malaysian Ministry of Education, ELTDP on the island of Borneo has sought to raise the quality of English language teaching in primary schools in East Malaysia as part of the Malaysian Ministry of Education's Uphold Bahasa Malaysia and Strengthen the English Language programme. Over five years, this capacity-building, teacher mentoring project has worked with over 4,000 teachers in 600 schools to bring about significant change in their approach to the teaching of English to make learning outcomes for pupils more relevant and effective. The project has also helped teachers and schools implement the new school curriculum, introduced as part of the Malaysian government's Education Blueprint, a ten-year plan to transform the Malaysian education system.

# Appendix H – Language-supportive education in low-income English-medium contexts

IATEFL 2015 Manchester Conference Selections, 160–162

*John Simpson, British Council, Sub-Saharan Africa*

## Introduction

In many Sub-Saharan African contexts where English is the medium of education, primary school pupils have only a short time to master the language before engaging all subjects in it. Pupils' low levels of English are exacerbated by having little exposure or opportunity to practise it outside the classroom. A typical 'solution' is to provide language support to pupils; but how adequate a response is this, considering that language and learning goes beyond pupils' proficiency in English, involving other core aspects of the education system, such as language policy, the curriculum, textbooks and assessment?

## Language policy

Research into the effect of language and learning on scholastic achievement has established basic principles such as: children learn best in the language they know best; teachers teach most effectively in the language they're most familiar with; and the longer teaching and learning occurs in the first language, the better, generally, the education outcomes.

Yet governments don't always seem aware of such principles when setting LiE policy; or may pursue populist agendas in 'going straight for English', imagining that the surest way to fluency in English is to adopt it early as medium of education. However, this 'early exit' strategy allows insufficient time to develop skills, including reading, required to support learning of all subjects in English.

## Textbooks and readability

Results of EGRA in 36 languages in 23 African countries show most students not acquiring a basic level of reading by Primary 3 to support transition from *learning to read to reading to learn*, particularly in English as an additional language (USAID, no date).

As in Sub-Saharan Africa generally, many Primary 4 learners in Rwanda – year one of English-medium education – have little English and struggle to read textbooks written in language beyond their level. Aware that textbook language use is an enabler or barrier to learning, the University of Bristol and the British Council have trained writers to design materials that can be understood by these learners, using short, simple texts, a range of visuals and support for talk, reading and writing on the subject (Clegg, 2015).

## Pedagogy and language

There is much teacher and teacher educator learning needed for a language-supportive pedagogy that complements the use of language-supportive textbooks. This includes: learning the different pedagogies for teaching the first language and teaching English as a second or foreign language; subject teacher development in language-supportive ways of teaching content to learners with low levels of English to help them become more competent in the language of the subject; and supporting teachers in the strategic use of scaffolding techniques and code-switching between English and the first language for efficient teaching and achievement of learning goals.

One of the implications of this is that teachers, head teachers, trainers and inspectors need training in a language-supportive approach to education.

## The curriculum and language

Adopting a systems-wide approach to language support for English-medium education in low-income countries means recognising lack of alignment between the high-level language of the curriculum and learners' limited English. It also means seeking to integrate language and content in subject syllabuses in ways that are accessible and promote learning, i.e. making explicit the connections between language and content to jointly progress understanding and develop ability in both areas.

Important processes for integrating language and content in the curriculum include outlining the main language features of topics, identifying key vocabulary and helping pupils learn and use the necessary (academic) forms of English across a range of subjects. Such curriculum design suggests language experts working closely with teams elaborating subject syllabuses to help achieve content and language integration.

### **Assessment of learning in English**

Available evidence (Rea-Dickins et al., 2009) suggests that assessing learning in English in low-income countries with pupils having limited English depresses performance in high-stakes examinations.

One way of working towards accessible and equitable assessment is to consider the range of accommodation options available at different grade levels. Another is to support the quality assurance processes involved in setting and marking high-stakes examinations in English.

Teachers, trainers and inspectors should understand the impact of English as an additional language on assessment, and the range of available accommodations; and language experts could work with examinations staff to develop understanding and capabilities for addressing technical issues arising in the setting and marking of high-stakes examinations in English.

### **Conclusion**

The issues discussed above, which affect core aspects of education and learning outcomes, suggest a systems-wide, language-supportive approach to English-medium education in low-income contexts may be more impactful than a narrower focus on language training for learners. That stated, it is recognised that we are also likely to continue with language training for teachers in our projects, as this is what education authorities want from us at a practical level.

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The British Council's aim in writing this organisational position paper, *English language and medium of instruction in basic education in low- and middle-income countries: a British Council perspective*, is to use the ideas presented in our conversations with education ministries and to support those who teach English around the world. Our hope is that this paper will open up discussions on the role of English in multilingual education and be of practical help to policy makers and advisers, to project managers and implementers, and to English language teachers.

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