Multilingualism in Education: Equity and Social Cohesion:
Considerations for TESOL

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Global Crisis in Learning
The two United Nations organizations most closely linked to education, UNICEF and UNESCO, have recently issued alarming declarations about the state of learning for disadvantaged linguistic minorities. I consider the situation to be a global crisis in learning. Let me chronicle its history here.

In January 2014 UNESCO issued its Global Monitoring Report for the Education for All (EFA) Program, addressing progress towards achieving EFA goals in the preceding years. The main of EFA was to "*provide quality basic education for all children, youth and adults*".

 This target was adopted at the Dakar World Education Forum of 2000, which was signed by 164 countries all of which pledged to achieve six goals by 2015 (see appendix 1). The extensive media coverage which followed was highly differentiated (UNESCO, 2014). While this looks like a unified global approach, in fact there are major differences of perception between developed and developing countries. We can see this in how the EFA statistics and problems are discussed and how they make the front pages of news outlets, whereas in most developed countries the problems facing global education barely rate a mention. In developing countries there was widespread reporting of the statistics and ramifications of the EFA, for example, in Brazil UNESCO noted that "*there was blanket coverage of the country's ranking in literacy tables, but also headlines on the huge cost of poor quality education*".

This was also true in Ethiopia, as we can see in the following image. This is a reproduction of the front page of the Ethiopian Daily Monitor, a private Addis Ababa based English language national daily, which, while faithfully reporting the main EFA findings shouts: "*WHY GETTING CHILDREN INTO SCHOOL IS <u>NOT ENOUGH</u>*", like a personal admonition. By contrast coverage in developed countries, by contrast, was sporadic, sensationalist, and mostly about self-critique. This tells us that international education is viewed very differently according to the perspective of different countries, if they rely on international assistance, they tend to be more interested, more

concerned and more aware of these deep challenges. It tells us that despite universal support for goals of global education we do not have a unified national conversation about the problems that beset world education systems.

Yet, moves towards a consolidated global education agenda continue, always aiming to extend the conversation to include the interests of developed and developing countries alike, and through better systems of data collection and monitoring of progress. Documenting and tracking progress towards achievement of the EFA has been through complex intergovernmental processes as reported in the 2015 EFA Global Monitoring Report *"Education for All 2000-2015: Achievements and Challenges"* (UNESCO, 2015). It concludes that progress has been steady but often too slow. Many countries achieved significant improvement in enrolment of girls, ethnic minorities "*and marginalized children*" in schooling. But "*some 250 million children of primary school age were not reaching minimum learning standards in reading and mathematics*" (p. 18). And 100 million were not completing primary schooling at all in 2015, and that this problem is especially pronounced in conflict affected zones (p. 8).   Literacy statistics also reveal steady but often slow progress, so that the percentage of illiterate adults, shows a decline from 18% to 14% in basic literacy between 2000 and 2015.

In May 2015 at Incheon, South Korea, UNESCO's World Education Forum convened another conference and noted these problems of uneven progress towards achieving several EFA

objectives. It stated that only "*a third of countries reached global education goals".* As a result the Incheon Forum adopted a further set of principles to replace the EFA, effectively producing a new global education agenda, also led by UNESCO, entitled *Education 2030*. One departure from the EFA is the direct link to a broad socio-economic aim of sustainable development.

This new approach was eventually adopted in September 2015 as Goal 4 (Quality Education) of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) across the entire UN System, specifically to "*ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*" which UNESCO describes as "*an ambitious, aspirational and universal agenda to wipe out poverty through sustainable development by 2030*".   Finally, in November 2015, UNESCO issued its "roadmap" for the achievement of the Education 2030, through a Framework of Action. The diagram below depicts the SDGs, also known as simply Global Goals.

A key difference between EFA and *Education 2030* is the scope and extended ambition of the program, moving beyond education to include work skills, citizenship education, and lifelong learning, while maintaining focus on early childhood, elementary and participation and access objectives. Through EFA, but often under their own steam, many countries made considerable progress in improving education during the first two decades of the 21st century, but "*only half of all countries have achieved the most watched goal of universal primary enrolment*" (UNESCO nd-ii).

This discussion of the global agenda for education, and its various phases and the relationship of developed compared to developing countries to the agenda, is an important backdrop to the urgent task of meeting the education needs of multilingual children.

The link between educational failure and failure to support children's bilingualism

As we can see from the EFA and its implementation since 2000, many important achievements have been achieved through coordinated international action. Yet there are four persistent areas of underachievement, and these remain troubling legacies of policy failure at the end of 2015 (UNESCO, 2015):

- 250m children cannot read *one single word*;
- Most of these children have attended school;
- Some have been to school for four years;
- Most are learning in multilingual settings.

More recently the other major UN agency concerned with education and children, UNICEF, issued another report synthesizing studies focused on returns from an additional year of education and examining education finance and its critical role in determining outcomes. One of the noted fact is that "*130 million of the children who reach Grade 4 do not learn to read*" (Wils, Bonnet and Brossard, 2016: p. 61).

Like the UNESCO reporting, the UNICEF data shows that increases in school participation do not necessarily achieve commensurate increases in learning. This disparity between school participation and low rates of academic success is baffling. Importantly, the data also shows the most disadvantaged ethnic minority and indigenous students learn and gain least from increased rates of participation. The critical factor here is the choice of language of instruction in schools and general attitudes towards the children's mother tongue. The UN data essentially supports what a vast body of academic research has long shown about the critical role of mother tongue education: The best educational results for multilingual children are seen when the language of instruction is the mother tongue and when teachers, schools, and communities harbor positive attitudes towards the children's mother tongue (Benson, and Kosonen, 2013; Bialystok, 2001; Hovens, 2002; King and Mackey, 2007; and overviews in UNESCO, 2003 and 2008).

It is worth repeating that the very large data sets across the globe on education outcomes from coordinated intergovernmental action show that general education reform often fails unless there are language policies that promote the first or home languages of young learners.

The superiority of mother tongue instruction for supporting general academic attainment of disadvantaged children is undeniable. Children's literacy development, too, is particularly central to educational achievement and particularly sensitive to the provision or denial of mother tongue education: Children learn to read best in a new language if they have a strong literacy foundation in their first language. Therefore, key questions arising in the disparity between school participation and low rates of academic success, which is most pronounced for the most disadvantaged ethnic minority and indigenous students, include: What are the literacy acquisition processes in multilingual environments? How do literacy teaching processes and methods relate to the languages and the literacies of the communities in which children live?

How could literacy acquisition programs be designed to recognize sociolinguistic and community realities rather than ignore or actively stigmatize them?

To address such important issues we require locally relevant evidence, sensitive to sociolinguistic circumstances of individual schools, communities, and countries, rather than generalized research imported from developed or other extraneous settings.

Reading for the Poorest
Recent research in South India provides an additional dimension on bilingual learning because it focuses on script differences and links these to poverty and marginalization, in contexts where pressure for early English instruction is insistent.

The Facilitating Reading Acquisition in Multilingual Environments in India (FRAME) tested reading scores among primary school children in urban slums and rural communities in South India, conducted between 2012 and 2014, under the auspices of the American Institutes for Research. The researchers designed reading tests appropriate for mixed language and script forms for South and Southeast Asian languages, environments with relatively high enrolment rates but with relatively low rates of learning.

The results of the FRAME studies (Nakamura, 2015) are essentially that:

1. *The skills required to read alphasyllabic languages (used across South Asia, Southeast Asia, and parts of Africa) are different from alphabetic languages.*
2. *There is a threshold point at which a child can most successfully "transfer" their skills from their first literacy to effectively learn to read both the local language and English.*

This research corroborates a large body of evidence accumulating over decades about the superiority of mother tongue instruction for supporting general academic attainment of disadvantaged children, but it has the additional benefit of specifying a threshold proficiency between alphasyllabic and alphabetic language functioning. This bolsters policy arguments for mother tongue education in some settings where complex sociolinguistics are used by policymakers against mother tongue provision, as well as supporting school based pedagogical innovation. More research is required on different orthographic systems rather than alphasyllabic/alphabetic groupings, however, because English uses the Latin alphabet and is the common second/additional/foreign language in most parts of the world, cross-script literacy research such as FRAME is a particularly useful reference point.

The "tipping point" or threshold from the FRAME research is that attainment of a score at least equal to or above 60% in local language reading can lead to exponential gains in English reading, whereas a score of less than this 60% threshold produces almost no gains in English. The upshot is that if English is introduced as the language of literacy instruction too early there is a risk of failure to read *both* the local language *and* English, and, conversely, if English reading is taught after students have achieved the threshold there are improved prospects for success in *both* languages.

Multilingual environments
The dilemma facing macro level policy monitoring of the kind UNICEF and UNESCO conduct is that many millions of children live in multilingual environments and only highly focused and sociolinguistically sensitive research can illuminate why increased school participation does not necessarily produce commensurate learning gains. In general, education systems tend to be monolingual and focus on teaching prestige languages and their affiliated literacy systems, whereas the most disadvantaged learners speak and their families identify with different languages. Decades of research across the world indicates that policy should aim to educate children in a familiar language, especially children living in environments where literacy is mostly a school based activity, and where there is a significant gap between home and school literacies.

Because each sociolinguistic environment is unique, localized research is important, as the FRAME study in South India shows. But we can still draw some general tendencies from studies of related problems:

1. *Education systems typically are centralized and impose standard forms of national curriculum and language education choices on learners;*

2. *There is a high correlation between poverty, remoteness, indigeneity, and indigenous/ethnic languages;*

3. *Minority languages are often stigmatized by majority community speakers, and speakers of these languages sometimes internalize external prejudices against their languages;*

4. *Some of these languages lack standardized literate forms that would make them suitable for upper schooling, or lack appropriate curriculum materials and suitable academic literature for widespread curriculum application.*

These are not small challenges. But probably the biggest related challenge is that, for minority populations, schooling involves many hurdles and difficult transitions, far greater than majority language learners are required to negotiate. These include a requirement to master, gain literacy in, and acquire academic content typically not in their mother tongues or home languages, as majority language learners do, but through official national languages, and to then acquire a prestige international language, which in many parts of the world is English. This tri-lingual educational experience is hierarchical. That is, the mother tongue is often neglected or treated superficially in education, and stigmatized in the community; the 'national' language is official, required and given dominant status; and a foreign language is imposed as a formal requirement and benefits from prestige associations of various kinds, usually its links to economic mobility and higher education.

The well-established principle essentially holds that children learn to read best in a new language if they have a strong literacy foundation in their first language. The key basis of this is essentially that of conceptual transfer, meaning the non-linguistic transfer of skills and knowledge acquired in one language to another. In practice, this general principle needs to be applied to individual

situations in a flexible way that takes account of the specifics of the communication, literacy and economic environment of different settings.   This principle should guide education planning for the one billion children and adolescents of primary and secondary age globally (1.4 billion including pre-primary age children).   Many education systems fail this test, and as a result thousands of the neediest children are in effect 'pushed out' of schooling because of inappropriate language of instruction practices.   For hundreds of thousands of children the three or more languages of their social worlds are stratified and hierarchically organized: a neglected and often stigmatized mother tongue, an official and obligatory national language, and an international language, usually English, which the national middle classes demand be provided early in schooling.   These communities are often speakers of the national language and demand the bridge to English proficiency be offered early in schooling, yet for indigenous and other minority language children this press for early English can have a deeply negative effect of restricting the curriculum space allocated to mother tongue development.   These wider sociolinguistic realities are why UNESCO and UNICEF documentation finds that many millions of children around the world attend schools where their home/community language is never taught, with deleterious consequences for their persistence in schooling, their attainment of literacy ability and for their general academic achievements, provoking educational failure and social conflict.

Social conflict and cohesion
Educational underperformance is one important link to social conflict. All language education efforts must therefore be concerned about much more than educational attainment. Let me offer a telling illustration here.

In 2016 a small but innovative bilingual education program in the South of Thailand, site of a long running civil conflict which has cost thousands of lives, including those of many teachers, was awarded a significant UNESCO prize. Collecting the King Sejong 2016 Literacy Prize Professor Suwilai Premsrirat director of the Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia, at Mahidol University in Thailand, commented: "*This is a Muslim community in a mainly Buddhist country and they speak their own Malay dialect. The fact that most don't speak Thai means they have done poorly in the Thai monolingual school system and have not always gone on to higher education. As a result, they face problems finding work which makes it easier for youth to be drawn into conflict.*" (Lo Bianco, 2016a).

The bilingual program teaches in the Patani Malay language and in standard (Central) Thai and negotiates between the Thai script and the Latin alphabet.   This bi/multilingual education program is therefore concerned about much more than educational attainment, because educational failure is a factor in stoking social conflict.   Peace and conflict research is beginning to take seriously the documented evidence from the benefits and outcomes of minority language education. Another source of new concern with language rights is the bitter personal experience of heroic individuals, such as Malala Yousafzai, 2014 Nobel Peace Prize laureate.   As a 15 year old, she displayed remarkable courage in demanding that girls be allowed to go to school against an edict that they should be excluded, and was shot in the head by Taliban extremists on a school bus in 2012.   When the UN adopted the Sustainable Development Goals it made Malala

ambassador for SDG 4, Quality Education; in her written reflections she makes many links to education opportunity for girls and ethnic/indigenous minorities and recognition of home languages (Yousafzai, 2015).

In my own work I have isolated various ways in which language education and social cohesion are linked. Education can stoke conflict in various ways. One is when access to schooling is used as a weapon in cultural repression of minorities, such as through the manipulation of history and textbook content for political purposes, or when access to schooling is denied, for example through unequal funding or direct exclusion, or when governance and decision-making are not transparent, inclusive, and accountable leading some population groups to experience discrimination and exclusion. These kinds of measures often fuel grievances that may lead to conflict. Language and literacy, multilingualism and even English, can also be connected to conflict as well as academic underachievement. In research in Southeast Asia I have distinguished between slow acting effects and fast acting effects of language education policy and practices that stokes conflict. One slow acting effect is the intergenerational poverty and inequality produced through poor literacy programming or inappropriate language of instruction policies, often compounded through unequal access to dominant languages and unequal access to English. Another slow acting effect is through stigmatization of non-standard Englishes. In addition to these slow acting effects there are also fast acting effects of language on conflict, such as through verbal abuse, vilification, and various forms of direct 'hate speech' (Lo Bianco, 2016a; 2016b; 2016c).

TESOL teachers and associations
There is increasing appreciation of the links between multilingualism and educational performance, and of the damaging links between educational failure, and poor language policies, for social tension and conflict. The global crisis in learning, documented for large numbers of people worldwide at a macro level, is reinforced and enacted in individual schools, institutions of learning other than schools, at community level and other sites where individual teachers are active.

In my work I have emphasized how teachers enact and do language planning in the course of teaching. Teachers are not merely builders of linguistic proficiency. Teachers are language planners, and their schools are agents of social production of language use and language outcomes. They need to educate other education personnel, of children and of adults, to the need to develop English in conjunction with other languages, in individual schools, institutions of learning other than schools, at community level, and other sites where individual teachers are active.

Traditionally, the case for a general policy of multilingual education does not rely on overcoming inequality or promoting social cohesion. Multilingual education is amply justified in terms of the cultural enrichment and intellectual benefits that accrue from bilingualism. However, the growing global appreciation that language settings are hierarchical, unequal, and damaging to large numbers of people means that we must also promote multilingualism on the basis of alleviating conflict and promoting social participation and equality, in addition to recognising

benefits of cultural diversity. What is required is integrated approaches to language and education that take account of all aspects of the complex relationship between linguistic diversity and formal education, where overcoming inequality and promoting social cohesion are also at stake.

Because of the important impact that English as an international language has on education systems across the globe, it is incumbent on TESOL practitioners and associations to support integrated language planning that fosters multilingual development at local, national, and international levels. This means support for language maintenance and preservation, documentation efforts for highly endangered languages, and in schools and education systems generally, to institute explicit and seamless communication practices for multilingual support. There is a need to foster research into the relationships between dominant and non-dominant languages and to adapt these, as the FRAME studies have done, to the particular sociolinguistic realities that pertain in different settings.

Schools are sites of language planning, imparting both linguistic ability and language attitudes to students. Individual teachers should support school and institution level policy on language of instruction, language as subject, and language appreciation. They should also cultivate links to community resources that encourage, reward, and acknowledge multilingualism as a right, and help develop resources for academic language, literacy and community identity.

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Education for All Goals

Six internationally agreed education goals aim to meet the learning needs of all children, youth and adults by 2015.

Goal 1
Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

Goal 2
Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to, and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality.

Goal 3
Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programmes.

Goal 4
Achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.

Goal 5
Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality.

Goal 6
Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/education-for-all/efa-goals/