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The significance of multilingual education in the context of integration of minorities into society

Abstract

In the densely inhabited regions of Georgia there are still issues to be solved regarding learning and teaching of the State language. Despite a number of positive changes made by the Government in recent years, the degree of the command of Georgian in local non-Georgian population is still very low. Sadly, the Georgian educational system has not yet been able to offer a model to the minorities which would ensure the learning of Georgian at a level suitable for a successful communication. Consequently, in order to improve the situation and achieve positive results, it is still urgent to elaborate a more radical and effective policy. Specifically, it is important to think about institutional changes about the model which would drastically change the attitude regarding the language education in schools.

A multilingual model of education can not only be a tool for encouraging civic integration but also, a crucial factor in the cognitive development of learners.

Key words: *Multilingual education; CLIL, Georgian Educational System.*

Introduction

Georgia is a multinational and multiethnic society. According to the census of 2014, ethnic Georgians make up 86.83% of the whole population whereas other nationalities - 13.17% (see Table 1). Out of the ethnic minorities, the Azerbaijani population is 6.3% whereas 4.5% is made up of Armenians. (Results of population census of 2014).

About 13 % of the population of Georgia does not indicate the State language as native and 74% of the Azerbaijani population and 51.3% of Armenians cannot speak Georgian

fluently or cannot speak it at all. (Patariaia, 2012:12; Gabunia, 2014).

These two most numerous ethnic groups (Azeris and Armenians) live compactly in the regions of Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemi Kartli in which the area of functioning of the State language is extremely limited which, beside being a hampering factor of their integration into society, prevents the development of the feeling of belonging to society as well as a general feeling of citizenship (Gabunia, Odzeli and Tabatadze, 2008: 11-12).

This situation has several reasons. The first and major reason is a difficult heritage from the period of the Soviet Union which is still alive today. As is known, in the Soviet period the language employed in Georgia for communication between the nations as well as for documentation was Russian. Due to this, ethnic minorities did not feel any need to learn Georgian. Today, we are reaping the results of that period – the majority of ethnic minorities is not able to communicate in the state language at the elementary level.

After declaring independence Georgian was declared as the state language of the country which, naturally, increased the area of its employment. First of all, Georgian became the only language for business and clerical correspondence. Consequently, it became the tool necessary for active integration into the country's society. Currently the situation has changed and motivation to learn the state language is extremely high. However, the educational system has not yet been able to offer the ethnic minorities the model which would ensure learning of Georgian at a level suitable for successful communication.

Georgian (the state language) is a second language for the ethnic minorities living in Georgia and learning a second language requires a different type of methodology and attitude. In this respect the situation in the regions densely populated with ethnic

minorities leaves much to be desired: the majority of teachers still rely on the Soviet methodology in teaching which leads to the input encouraging only static and passive knowledge. In addition, the level of proficiency in Georgian among the teachers of Georgian as a second language is also low. It is difficult to teach the Georgian language to school children without mastering its extremely complex structure. On the one hand, the complexity of the grammar system of the language and the lack of teaching it in a more comprehensible way still remain an insuperable obstacle for school teachers.

Another problem is learning resources (textbooks, visual aids, etc.). Due to complicated and unsuitably selected learning resources, which are uninteresting and incomprehensible for the ethnic minorities, hence a negative result - ethnic minorities are not able to learn the state language even if they were motivated to command it.

These main reasons lead to a sad result: ethnic minority school leavers finish school with much lower results and undeveloped language skills in Georgian compared to the children for whom Georgian is a native language. This has a negative impact on the possibilities they have regarding receiving higher education, finding jobs and participating in the political life of the country and what is more important, on the prospect of

their integration into Georgian society. (Tabatadze, 2011: 80 - 103).

Projects have been implemented by the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia as well as by various donor organisations aiming at improving the level of command of the Georgian language in different age groups (state sector employees, prospective students, school children). However, these initiatives are not yet sufficient.

My personal experience of participation in such projects enables me to argue that such measures yield temporary and less productive results and positively affect only specific target groups (for instance, the state sector employees who have finished school a long time ago and there is no other way of teaching the state language to such a population). Regarding the educational space (including tertiary education), it is urgent to elaborate more effective and radical politics, in order to achieve tangible positive results.

The goal of this article is not to discuss all the problems concerning the teaching of the second language. **I will refer to the most important and determining issue which needs to be addressed urgently.**

Currently the only model employed in the Georgian educational system is **monolingual**. This includes teaching a dominant (state) language as well as the model employed in schools in which the language of instruction is

a language of ethnic minorities. In Georgian schools the language of instruction is only one (Georgian) and a foreign language is taught as one of the subjects. Similarly, the language of instruction is a corresponding language in Russian, Armenian, Azerbaijani and Ossetian schools in which the state language is taught as one of the subjects, like any other foreign language.

Certainly it is possible for a student to learn a language to some extent due to several positive factors (language environment, the language spoken at home, teachers equipped by relevant methodology, etc.). However, currently such favourable conditions are not available in the regions densely populated with ethnic minorities. Therefore, it is advisable to think about institutional changes - about the model which will alter the approach practiced in the educational space regarding the language education.

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The model of multilingual education is becoming more and more popular in the educational systems of Europe and America. This type of education **includes several languages of instruction**: the first (native) language and non-native language (a second, third...language).

It should be mentioned that multilingual language does not envisage **assimilation** of minorities by the majority. A well-thought out

and planned approach envisages enhancing and better expressing the native cultural environment of the representative of the ethnic minority against comparing it to the second language, rather than subduing it. (Gabunia and Jajanidze, 2016: 47 -49).

The main difference between the multilingual and **monolingual models of education is that the language of instruction becomes not only a tool (instrument) but also, its goal as well.** Therefore, in order to achieve both goals (referred to as subject and linguistic), it is necessary to create a constant balance between a lesson focused on the subject content on the one hand and a specific language lesson on the other. In other words, bilingual education is a **resource instrument** and not a goal - this is the problem to solve (Tabatadze, 2014: 1 - 16).

One of the most significant determining factors of the effectiveness of multilingual education is the type of the program preferred.

Below there are several models of multilingual programs:

1. Developmental multilingual, educational- in the case of this program teaching of certain subjects and groups of subjects is provided equally (50% - 50%) on both languages (state and native) and high language competence in both languages is expected.

2. Transit multilingual educational program – in this case, although teaching starts on both languages, the number of subjects taught in a State language gradually increases and leads to the state language of instruction becoming the language of tuition.
3. Multilingual program fostering minority native language (partial immersion). In this case, teaching of certain subjects and groups of subjects are taught in a state language whereas the native language is taught as a subject based on the maximum number of hours per week.
4. Multilingual educational programs supporting the State language (partial immersion). In this case, subjects or groups or subjects are taught according to the National academic plan in the state language. As well as this, the state language is taught as a subject, which leads to the asymmetric correlation due to the intensified teaching of the state language.
5. Multilingual Programmed of double language immersion. In this case, subjects and groups of subjects are taught equally, in both state and non-state languages, according to the national academic plan. The cohort of

students (both Georgian and non-Georgian) is equally apportioned.

6. Mixed multilingual educational programs - in this case the academic process starts largely in a second language (for instance, in Russian). After reaching a beginner level of competences, the academic process is based on the following principle: a) subjects are taught only in the state language or b) in both native and state languages. The aim of this program is to develop language skills in both, the state and another language simultaneously (Tanayadze, 2011).

However, only the choice between “strong” or “weak” programs does not guarantee the success of the program. Even the weak multilingual program may be successful as there are other important factors for determining the effectiveness of multilingual education.

These factors are as follows:

- (1) qualification of teachers;
- (2) collaboration and shared vision between the administration and teachers;
- (3) readiness and support from the school administration;
- (4) degree of involvement of parents and the community.

(Tabatadze, 2011: 80-103).

1. Qualification of teachers

It is a fact that a qualified teacher is one of the main factors determining the effectiveness of bilingual educational programs. Consequently, the training and professional development of teachers plays a big role in this. A low qualified teacher presents a serious threat to the multilingual education. Teachers involved in bilingual education should be aware of teaching strategies, have learning resources and reveal positive attitude towards the students from an ethnic minority background. A teacher of a multilingual program should be actively involved in out-of-classroom activities of all kinds and be connected to the parents and the local community. It is advisable for the teacher to be a bilingual themselves to act as a role model for their students.

2. Collaboration and shared vision between the administration and teachers

For the effectiveness of multilingual educational programs it is important for the school to have formulated its mission regarding bilingual education and a strategic plan for its implementation. In order to run the program successfully, it is crucial for the school director, administration, teachers and staff to agree with the school mission and have positive attitudes towards multilingual educational programs.

3. For the effective management and successful results of the multilingual programs it is important for the school administration to reveal a high degree of **readiness**. Moreover, the school administration should know academic approaches, strategies and be better prepared than their teachers. In addition, school authorities should have all the characteristics of a leader and be able to determine precisely which program of bilingual education is relevant to their needs and choose the model accordingly. The school administration should formulate and elaborate a strategic plan for the implementation of the program together with school board. The school administration (the director) should have developed management and administrative skills. The authorities should be able to encourage and motivate their staff on the one hand, and raise funds, mobilize personnel, financial and material resources on the other.

4. Involvement of parents is an important component for the success of multilingual programs. On the one hand, parents have a big influence on establishing either a positive or a negative attitude to the program (for instance a negative approach revealed towards the so-called “bilingual textbooks” was the reason for stopping the multilingual program in 2010-

2013) and can ensure the readiness of pupils of ethnic minorities for the process of learning on multilingual programs. (Tabatadze, 2014). Therefore, parents present an important factor regarding the implementation of multilingual and bilingual educational programs. Parents’ involvement in the bilingual educational program is an important factor for guaranteeing the quality, as no mechanism of quality assurance can work more effectively than parents interested in the success of the bilingual program.

Bilingual educational programs with a high degree of parents’ involvement leads to successful resolution of the problem of attendance due to the insufficient command of the state language (Tabatadze, 2011: 80-103).

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Many approaches to multilingual education are employed in various countries (the format of this meeting does not allow discussion of all the models). However, I will discuss the model which has become especially popular recently: Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) which as I see it, is quite relevant for solving burning issues in the non-Georgian schools of Georgian regions.

CLIL enhances language competences based on the contents which exceed an ordinary language learning lesson: together

with enhancing the knowledge of a specific subject (math, history, biology) the teacher also helps students to enhance language skills. (Gabunia & Jajanidze, 2016:47-49)

CLIL is an educational approach with a double emphasis in which, while conducting learning and teaching the emphasis is neither on the contents nor entirely on the language, these two factors are intermingled. Use of both languages in the process requires serious preparation on part of the teacher. In order to facilitate achievement of high competences in both languages, it is also crucial to introduce a strategic, two-component (subject and language) plan. There is a risk that pupils may not be able to learn a subject due to their insufficient competence in the language which may also lead to their academic backwardness. In addition to that, the teachers of subjects are apprehensive of the fact that allotting a certain amount of time will harm the national academic plan in a specific subject (math, physics, geography, etc.) which has to be achieved.

Use of the attitude towards CLIL is not only necessary, but crucial: at monolingual, non-Georgian schools the state language is studied only at the lessons of Georgian. The academic environment, as well as the environment beyond it, is totally non-Georgian. Consequently, increasing the area of functioning of the state language is crucially

important for the country as it implies introducing Georgian not only as one of the subjects but also, as the **language of instruction**.

It is most important to implement CLIL methodology in the higher educational institutions of Georgia. Acquisition of only communicative skills in a language is not sufficient for the inclusion into academic space. It is equally important to develop **cognitive-academic** skills which are absolutely crucial for comprehending academic lectures, fulfilling assignments, presenting them (orally and in a written format). Without a certain amount of training in this respect a student finds themselves in shock, which may lead to serious negative results regarding academic success.

Successfully finishing a year preparatory program in Georgian the students are free to select the Faculty at the University according to their preferences at BA level. The range of specialties is quite impressive: business and economics, law, humanities, medicine, etc. When discussing academic programs, one should bear in mind that all of these professions have their own metalanguage: specific syntax, lexis, terminology. Consequently, without a certain preparation before moving into this sphere (even if a student may have a good command of communicative Georgian) is still difficult and

presents a risk of frustration, which later may lead to demotivation and result in a loss of interest towards learning.

Implementation of CLIL within the frames of the preparatory program is indeed, not sufficient. Within the frames of the project supported by OSCE and Tempus (EU) a BA program in Multilingual Education has been created for Georgia and Ukraine and has been popular for three years already at TSU. This program is especially popular among the school leavers finishing the preparatory program in Georgian. In addition, the popularity of this program is rising and the competition is also becoming keener.

Within the “Tempus” program there is a 300 credit program being prepared which will confer a master’s degree and involves all three stages of school education. This program will also include modules (1 subject content and 2 language modules) which will enable a student

to make a choice between a subject of choice on the one hand and methodology of CLIL on the other.

The discussed programs will not wipe out all the issues soon but they can be considered as a serious basis for the start of multilingual reform. In 2019 BA graduates will be able to teach at a primary school level and in a few years CLIL will be implemented in 200 non-Georgian schools. This will bring about drastic changes regarding the language situation.

At the same time, we should manage to use existing personnel resources (up to 6 thousand subject teachers at schools who either speak the state language at the beginner level or do not speak it at all). It is necessary to organize their qualification courses in two directions:

- 1 organizing language courses;
- 2 organizing CLIL methodology courses.

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