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Multilingual strategies for integration of ethnic minorities into society (Using the example of Georgia)

ABSTRACT

Like any other country with a multilingual environment, the representatives of ethnic minorities in Georgia still face problems of integration into society unless they have a good command of the state language. As is known, in order to command a language (whether it is a state, regional, foreign or a minority language), the policy employed must be based on certain principles in accordance with the state policy regarding the issue.

Based on the above, the research subjects of this article are to discuss (1) measures taken by the Georgian state to solve the issues regarding multilingual education and (2) outline challenges and future prospects in this respect.

Key words: *Multilingual Education, Georgia, ethnic and language minorities.*

As is known, in order to command a language (whether it is a state, regional, foreign or a minority language), the policy employed must be based on certain principles in accordance with the state policy regarding the issue.

Georgia, as a multi-ethnic and multilingual country, also faces such a problem and therefore is interested in the integration of ethnic and language minorities in the society. Tbilisi State University interdisciplinary project aims at exploring the issues of multilingual

education regarding minorities on the basis of empirical data from the participants of the pilot multilingual education programme. More specifically, the project aims at studying the range of problems the ethnic minorities face in Georgian reality regarding multilingual education with a view to specifying these issues to be solved in order to encourage the process of their successful integration into Georgian society.

Despite the fact that the data of local and international studies mostly yield positive results about the effects of the multilingual education regarding the linguistic or cognitive development of a schoolchild (Baker, 2010), it is obvious that multilingual education still faces challenges which need to be solved.

Clearly, like any other country with a multilingual environment, the representatives of ethnic minorities in Georgia still face problems of integration into society unless they have a good command of the state language.

Based on the above, the research subjects of this article are to discuss (1)

measures taken by the Georgian state to solve the issues regarding multilingual education and (2) outline challenges and future prospects in this respect.

1) Measures taken by the Georgian state to solve the issues regarding multilingual education.

It can be claimed that the issues regarding multilingual education have already been recognised and the first steps have already been made to identify and deal with them. However, it is clear that the issue has not been finally resolved. It is noteworthy that the significant factors involved in determining effectiveness of multilingual programmes in Georgia have already been explored; specifically, these include:

a) Types of multilingual education programmes;

b) Resources available for the schools involved in such programmes; to what extent the values embedded in such programmes are shared by all those active in taking part in the project and how high is the involvement of parents and the

community in the process of planning and implementation of the programme.

c) Multilingual Education Programmes carried out in 26 schools from the regions of Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti, participating in the piloting project in 2010 - 2012 (Tabatadze, 2008; 2010¹).

The results of the research revealed that the multilingual programmes carried out in schools generally did not have either sufficient personnel resources or established aims and vision to successfully establish the programmes. In addition, neither the involvement of parents and community were ensured nor were the programmes fully orientated on the factors determining effectiveness. Consequently, the presented multilingual programmes did not prove to be well-equipped enough to achieve the results set for these programmes.

Interestingly, the multilingual programmes focussed on the then current situation and personnel resources available and thus the programmes did not project on the ultimate goals and measures to be taken to achieve them (Tabatadze, 2010²).

Recently, different types of testing and piloting of multilingual education were carried out and attempts have been made to adjust them to the Georgian context. A two-year long Multilingual Education Programme (2006 - 2008) was carried out by the Swiss NGO "Cimera" under the financial support of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities in 12 schools of Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe Javakheti. In addition, in 2008 under EU support the Ministry of Education elaborated a policy document and an action plan (2009 – 2014 - "Integration of the national minorities through multilingual education". According to the action plan, on March 31, 2009 "The Programme of encouraging multilingual education" was signed by the Minister of Education and Sciences (Regulations for the Multilingual education programmes: 2010; Multilingual education strategies and action plans, 2009 - 2014; Grigule, 2010).

The complex of the above-mentioned activities laid the foundation for the implementation of multilingual education programmes in non-Georgian schools.

Therefore the Ministry of Education and Sciences offered such schools several programmes to choose from. As well as this, according to the regulations of 2010, the schools were presented with an opportunity to elaborate their own preferred multilingual programmes to be endorsed by the Ministry.

In addition, according to the changes made to the Law, the development and encouragement of multilingual education became the part of the functions of the Centre for National Curriculum and Assessment (the policy of 2005 regarding the decision to be implemented from 2011) that in non-Georgian schools the state language and social sciences were to be taught only in the state language. The programme "The Georgian language for future success" was established, aiming at encouraging ethnic minorities to improve their knowledge of the state language. It is also worth noting that this is a large-scale programme of which multilingual education is only one of the components (Assessment of Civic Integration of National Minorities in Georgia, 2010).

In 2012 a standard of a bilingual teacher was elaborated and methodological resources for the teachers involved in multilingual education (within the framework of the multilingual education encouragement) were translated and published under the financial support of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (Grigule, 2012). In addition, each of the endorsed textbooks from the first to the sixth form was translated into Armenian, Russian or Azeri languages. In these textbooks 30% of the material is provided in Georgian and 70% in one of the other three above mentioned languages. The so-called **multilingual textbooks** were employed in piloting schools as recommended academic material (Results of the monitoring for fulfilling the action plan and national conception of civil integration and tolerance in 2012 - 2103, Tbilisi, 2014). The current law for general education provides direct instructions about bilingual education programmes. However, learning and teaching social sciences in the state language proved to be

impossible for Kvemo Kartli and Samtkhe-Javakheti which was frequently mentioned at the meetings of the monitoring group with the teachers, parents and school administration. The afore-mentioned norm is considered to be unacceptable in the context of bilingual education: learning and teaching history and geography as well as other subjects of social sciences requires highly developed linguistic skills which may be a target and not a means of achieving linguistic competence (Results of the monitoring for fulfilling the action plan and national conception of civil integration and tolerance in 2012 - 2103, 2014).

As mentioned above, the translation of only 70 % of the academic material into ethnic minority languages poses a serious problem for non-Georgian schools both in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli. Obviously, the material in the Georgian language cannot be acquired effectively by the students. In addition, the creation of bilingual textbooks (70% of the material in their native language and 30% in Georgian) was considered to be **the major direction of the bilingual**

(multilingual) education reform which is an utterly unacceptable and undemocratic decision. It is worth noting that such a project has not yet been supported by any country interested in this issue. What is more, this "experiment" did considerable harm to the prospect of multilingual education in Georgia; most saddening is the fact that the ultimate principle of the multilingual education was impaired - enhancement of linguistic competence should not be carried out at the expense of limiting and decreasing the subject components. (Results of the monitoring for fulfilling the action plan and national conception of civil integration and tolerance in 2012 - 2103, 2014).

2) Outline challenges and future prospects of multilingual education in Georgia

The fact that monolingual non-Georgian schools are not effective is well-recognised. It is also an established fact that such schools do not provide conditions for their pupils to become integral parts of Georgia's political,

economic, social and cultural life (International Crises Group, 2006; Centre for European minorities, 2003 - 2010; OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities 2002 - 2010). Therefore, the necessity for school reforms brought about the issue of the multilingual education programmes in order to enhance the degree of education in such schools and the degree of integration of such students into society.

It is worth noting that there is one more multilingual education model practised in Georgia. There are 14 Russian schools and 135 Russian sectors at the moment in Georgia which makes it obvious that for the majority of the students of the Russian schools and sectors Russian is not a native language.

In these schools the language of tuition for the majority of pupils is neither a mother tongue nor a dominant language. This model is referred to as a "prestigious emigration model" by Tabatadze (Tabatadze, 2010¹) who argues that it needs modifying and revising (Tabatadze, ¹).

In the Georgian context it is interesting to analyse the "transit" multilingual programme which ensures full tuition in the minority language at the primary stage (to ensure academic progress) and smooth and gradual transition towards the State language. In the USA and Britain these programmes are referred to as "weak" and less effective. However the situation is different in Georgia for three reasons: a) the status and prestige of minority languages in Kvemo Kartli is quite high. Therefore the students will neither develop a negative attitude to their native languages nor lose confidence.

b) the majority of the school teachers are monolingual regarding their native language (and not the state language)

c) the environment beyond the school space in Kvemo-Kartli and Samtskhe - Javakheti is largely monolingual (Georgian is not used in communication) (Tabatadze, 2010²).

However, due to the above mentioned three factors, if the multilingual education programme is well-planned, it will work

effectively. It is particularly important to implement "late" transition multilingual programmes in Georgia at the primary level of education. As well as this, we believe that multilingual programmes must also be implemented at a later stage of school education with a gradual increase in the percentage of the employment of the state language.

Doubtless, a "strong" multilingual programme is most effective although out of 26 schools it was selected by only 7 schools (the "weak" model was selected only by 3 schools). It is also obvious that this type of programme alone cannot guarantee an effective result. In this respect, the following two issues should be considered regarding the lack of qualified resources in the region:

- a) The lack of qualified teachers;
- b) The lack of qualified administrators;

About 60% of the teachers of the Georgian language do not possess sufficient knowledge of this subject themselves (Melikidze, 2010). In this respect, the situation is especially acute in the districts (Marneuli, Akhalkalaki,

Ninotsminda, Tsalka) with compactly inhabited ethnic minorities. In these regions 70 - 80% of the Georgian teachers are on A1 or A2 level of CEFR (Results of testing provided by CCIIR, 2011). Interestingly, 94% of teachers of other subjects of the region indicated that they would not be able to teach multilingual programmes due to their lack of competence in Georgian.

In addition, it is also noteworthy that the teachers of the region under study also revealed that they are not involved in professional development programmes. For instance, only the teachers of the Georgian language and literature and native (minority) language and literature for primary schools answered the question positively.

Another problem which emerges in this respect is the lack of younger personnel. According to the data provided by the Ministry of Education and Sciences, about 46.7% of teachers working in non-Georgian schools are above 45. It is not possible to prepare the next generation of teachers for non-Georgian schools in Georgia due to the

lack of interest towards the profession and qualified teachers of the speciality. As well as this, the number of the ethnic minorities at educational programmes is quite low (UN Association, 2010). Until 2015 future teachers for multilingual programmes were not prepared at any University of Georgia. In 2015 a BA programme in multilingual education for primary school level teaching started at TSU which is, without doubt, a significant step forward in respect of preparation of personnel for minority schools.

The lack of administrative resources is also an acute issue. Specifically, 98.6% of school directors participating in the project expressed a lack of information regarding the Multilingual Programmes and did not intend or plan to be involved

in them. (Tabatadze, 2010¹) This indicates that the school administrations currently are not ready to cope with the issue.

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It is clear that despite positive developments, the ineffectiveness of multilingual education in Georgia is still persistent and acute and is once again confirmed by the low degree of competence in Georgian of the Azeri and Armenian students enrolled at TSU (and in other universities) after finishing the State Multilingual Programme in Georgian. The problem is even more serious when such students select to major in English philology.

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