

PRINCIPLES-BASED APPROACH TO ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND PLANNING

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Introduction. Principles-based approach (PBA) identifies six principles aimed at helping policymakers, researchers, and practitioners build effective and successful practices within varied contexts while identifying and engaging with the challenges that the implementation of these practices will encounter. PBA builds on the current work on language policy and practice, but instead of providing a set of standards, it identifies a set of principles that can help policymakers in diverse contexts develop locally appropriate language policies and practices. The application of a set of standards has to be based on assumptions related to the distribution of resources, access to knowledge, and appropriate infrastructure. In addition, the types of methodologies and assumptions about learning and teaching that underlie standards are also based on notions of language teaching approaches which espouse “a particular view of the world and [can be] articulated in the interests of unequal power relationships” [13, 589-590]. Understanding the limitations that such an imposition might pose in different contexts, with varying capacity for achieving these standards, professional organizations such as the TESOL International Association have attempted to collaborate with local ministries of education to develop contextually relevant standards.

The collaborative development of context-appropriate standards is an important step in developing higher quality language programs in a range of contexts where there is an ever increasing

demand for ELT. However, the involvement of TESOL (or other such entities) in developing these standards in such contexts is limited. Ultimately, a set of standards developed to enhance ELT in one context cannot be applied to other contexts. The unique sociocultural, political, economic, and historical aspects of each individual country or setting need to be taken into account when developing language policies and ELT programs and standards appropriate to these contexts.

Goals. The aim of the article is to analyze how principles-based approach has emerged as a result of the demands of globalization and the interests of the local populations of countries in which the teaching and learning of English is having a major impact.

A principles-based approach (PBA) provides a set of six principles that emerge from a consideration of a range of local and global issues that relate to, impact, and influence the ELT policies, practices, and outcomes in diverse contexts. These principles are collaboration, relevance, evidence, alignment, transparency, and empowerment (CREATE). By considering these principles, various stakeholders will be able mold their own ELT practices and policies in ways that suit their needs and reflect local conditions and practices. As such, PBA moves away from a prescriptive approach to language practice and policy and refrains from setting any standards or universal measures across diverse contexts.

We can assume that the ultimate goal of any government, organization, or institution involved in

developing or using language in education policy (in the context of ELT) is to ensure that students can use the language with the proficiency required to enhance their prospects in accessing better opportunities in education, community membership, and employment within their own contexts and/or globally. Identifying the impact of social, economic, and political forces on policymaking decisions on a macrolevel and the needs of students, teachers, and community members within particular contexts on a microlevel, can enable policymakers, practitioners, and researchers to identify and engage with a range of issues that affect policymaking decisions. In addition, it can enable policymakers to predict any possible challenges in relation to implementation and to ensure that the process of policymaking takes into account these issues when developing ELT initiatives and interventions.

Some of the issues identified in this article include the impact and influence of extralinguistic factors on language policy and planning (LPP), such as the sociopolitical context in which policy is formulated. This issue is related to the political and ideological orientations of LPP and the use of language policy, especially in relation to more dominant and powerful languages, to serve the interests of particular political parties and social hierarchies. As Tollefson states, "language policies are essentially political documents" [15, 87], suggesting that policies serve the interests of dominant groups in maintaining their power and prestige while marginalizing, excluding, and even exploiting minority groups and speakers of other languages. The PBA principles aim to identify potential negative effects of policy by highlighting issues that, if not considered, may further disempower local and minority communities. In the case of English, which has been hailed a global lingua franca and the language of globalization, it is increasingly important to identify and acknowledge the power imbalances that emerge as English is given a privileged position. In deciding to focus on English over other majority and minority languages within these contexts, policymakers are further enhancing the economic and sociopolitical value of English, and disempowering local languages and communities.

While understanding that LPP is motivated by primarily sociopolitical and economic forces, the LPP research focus on the politics of the English language has shifted the gaze of LPP away from understandings about language itself. Therefore, though LPP uses linguistic theory and knowledge about language for designing and delivering ELT programs, the focus on language itself has often been marginalized without clear acknowledgement of the fact that certain forms or varieties of a language, for example, can have more social, economic, and political privilege and currency than others. In addition, access to and proficiency in

privileged forms of language can result in better prospects for students and communities [12]. A further issue, which relates to the translation of policy into practice, is the limited communication between practitioners and policymakers resulting in a conflict in perceptions between the two [8].

Classical LPP research focused on descriptions of policy and planning and goals within varied contexts through the use of frameworks such as E. Haugen's [5] ecology of languages, R. Cooper's [3] accounting scheme and other frameworks based on understanding the delicacies of LPP from the macro to micro level of implementation. These models are summarised and subsumed in N. Hornberger's [6] six-dimensional framework, which divides LPP into three types: status (about the uses of language), acquisition (about the users of language), and corpus (about language). Each of these types of LPP can take a formal focus (policy planning) or a functional focus (cultivation planning), giving us six dimensions of LPP. The six-dimensional framework provides a useful point of departure for the analysis of LPP from the macroscopic to microscopic level; however, classical LPP frameworks such as N. Hornberger's have traditionally been questioned for their lack of critical approaches focusing on power relations. In addition, the frameworks are primarily descriptive in that they do not account for the actual "process of language planning" [9, 87]. PBA incorporates the notion of "language ecology" in an education setting by taking into account the diverse sociopolitical settings "where the processes of language use create, reflect and challenge particular hierarchies and hegemonies" [4, 13]. A principles-based approach also acknowledges that "schools and classrooms and their interactive practices [are] . . . part of a bigger and more powerful political state in which ideologies function to reproduce particular balances of power" [4, 13]. Because English plays a particularly hegemonic role in most postcolonial communities and endangers other languages through its link with globalization, it is especially important to keep these factors in mind when considering the sociopolitical influences that language policy and practice have in maintaining, developing, and promoting local languages (including minority languages) [1].

To further our understanding about how a PBA can contribute to the successful implementation of ELT, it is necessary first to look at some of the major factors that inform LPP. As stated earlier, all language learning, teaching, and other education practices take place within a broad sociopolitical and economic context. These factors influence the development of ideas, theories, and policies that influence what happens in a classroom, with what resources, and how.

Linguistic theories are abstract ideas about what language is and how it works; this knowledge

is understood in terms of the study of language (through a creation of metalanguage – grammar – and language descriptions). These linguistic descriptions are taken into account in developing texts and other material that students are exposed to in their learning environment. In short, different linguistic theories explain language in different ways, which result in different types of language descriptions and influence the choices of texts and grammatical components used in the pedagogical material that students learn and are taught through. Similarly, various theories of learning and teaching explain how language learning takes place and how this understanding can be used for teaching purposes. These theories are taught to the teachers during their training programs, and the teachers use them in developing their pedagogical practices. Frameworks of language in education policy also influence the curriculum, which in turn, shapes the syllabi, textbooks, and other teaching and learning resources that the students use in their classes.

The three broad theoretical areas are operationalized in different ways to shape the learning – teaching behavior and material that students experience. These different theories and areas are not necessarily independent of each other and may overlap and/or influence the other areas. Traditional approaches to LPP tend to focus on the policy and planning factors just described; however, PBA builds its framework by integrating not only work on LPP, but also in the areas of linguistic theory and theories of learning and teaching.

As R. Kaplan, R. Baldauf, and N. Kamwangamalu [10] point out, language in education policy is a complex process and includes a number of issues that must be considered for it to succeed. Policymakers face the difficult task of planning goals and strategies that are ultimately linked to and informed by larger issues of political, social, and ideological frameworks that function in the context in which the LPP takes place.

The impact of globalization on LPP has propelled the teaching of English with greater urgency and has major implications for the language teaching contexts in which English is prioritised above other immediate educational concerns and over the promotion of bi/multilingualism. Additionally, a lack of communication between policymakers and implementers means that successful practices occurring within the classrooms rarely inform policymaking, and that practitioners have access to policy only as it is filtered down through the curriculum and textbooks to the classrooms. Policymaking decisions should be bidirectional and that within each context teachers (and other stakeholders, such as syllabus designers, textbook writers, etc.) should be able to reflect on effective pedagogical practices and should be able to communicate these practices to policymakers.

The three major challenges that policymakers face when designing LPP interventions include: a deficit in understanding of planning goals; a lack of collaboration between policymakers and implementers; the problem of negotiating between local needs and the demands of globalization.

English has been referred to as the language of globalization with a strong emphasis on the fact that English is linked to technology and hence to notions of development and modernization [2]. Although this concept is not unproblematic, it informs a great deal of LPP, which often requires policymakers to ensure that English takes a primary position in the education system at the risk of marginalizing local languages and other school subjects. The complexity of language planning in relation to English is also linked to the fact that the demand for ELT comes from several different sources such as aid agencies, which provide funding for educational programs. Policymakers are in the difficult position of taking all these factors into account while acting in the interest of the general public and representing local needs and global requirements.

One of the key issues in the conflict between the global and the local arises in relation to the notion of World Englishes, which enabled varieties of English to be recognised as “cross cultural and global contextualizations of the English language in multiple voices” [7, 1]. Although the World Englishes movement has helped politically empower and legitimize localized varieties of language in the past 30 years, the inner circle varieties of Standard English nonetheless still claim prominence over localized varieties in many different contexts. The reason for the continued hegemony of inner circle varieties of English becomes clear when the uses of language are considered in relation to the users of language. On the one hand, language is shaped by its uses; on the other hand, it carries markers that identify the users or speakers of that language. The World Englishes movement focuses on users, but, as increasing evidence is showing, the uses of English are determined by academic, educational, and professional communities of practice, which still rely on Standard Englishes [11].

Thus, if ELT is to empower local communities by engaging with globalization and providing them access to global resources, then it must answer questions about the relevance of teaching English, and in particular about what variety of English is taught and for what purpose. Initially policymakers should determine the purpose of English LPP, whether it is to enable proficiency for global or local purposes, and whether it is for predominantly written or oral communication. In determining the purpose of English LPP, they should collaborate with local communities, practitioners, industry, and other stakeholders. Policymakers should also ensure

that ELT teaching practices are suited to the needs of the particular context in which they occur. Again, consultation with local experts is key to ensuring that ELT practices are locally and contextually relevant. Consulting with local experts and practitioners will enable policymakers to assess and respond to issues that may arise when experts promote a particular teaching practice that might be at odds with local sociocultural practices. As K. Rajgopalan states, “global, specialist knowledge” needs to be readjusted “to suit local circumstances” [14, 119], which will ensure that language programs are suitable to a particular context. When programs are suited to local contexts, they will be well received by the public and implemented successfully by practitioners and other stakeholders. In addition, evidence of program outcomes should be monitored to ensure that they achieve the goals determined at the outset of the policymaking process.

Summary. Language policy and planning is a complex task with a long list of stakeholders and factors that shape it and an even longer one of things that it influences in turn. In recognizing these complexities and realizing that it may not be possible to take all these variables into account in developing a language-in-education policy, a PBA recommends that policymakers instead consider a set of guiding principles that can inform the process and give a principled orientation and structure to the resulting policy. PBA also draws attention to the importance of working across disciplines and interest groups, and suggests that policymakers need input from economists, educationists, linguists, and sociologists, among others, to identify and work out the issues that need to be addressed through a language-in-education policy and the best ways of achieving these. PBA outlines six broad principles that can help guide this process of consultation and policy development: collaboration, relevance, evidence, alignment, transparency, and empowerment. These principles raise questions that can guide the policy development process and result in a language policy that is robust, responsible, implementable, and sustainable.

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