

Book and media reviews

Realizing linguistic rights through multilingual education policy and programming

Benson, C., & Kosonen, K. (Eds.) (2021). *Language Issues in Comparative Education II. Policy and Practice in Multilingual Education Based on Non-Dominant Languages*. Leiden: Brill. 324 pp., US\$64 (Paperback) ISBN-9789004449657; US\$184.00 (Hardcover) ISBN: 9789004449664; US\$190 (Ebook) ISBN: 9789004449671.

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'When students' languages, cultures, and experiences are ignored or excluded in classroom interactions, students are immediately starting from a disadvantage. Everything they have learned about life and the world up to this point is dismissed as irrelevant to school learning' (Cummins, 1996).

Dr. Carol Benson, Professor at the Teachers' College, Columbia, is widely known for her work on the use of non-dominant languages in education systems. I interacted with her for the first time in 2019 while working on language education programs in India. In 2021 I decided to read her book soon after it was published, as it was an important contribution to this field of study. As a doctoral student studying the intersection of language and human rights, I am constantly in search of scholarly work that provides concrete examples of 'Linguistic Human Rights' (Skutnabb-Kangas et al., 1994). This book, *Language Issues in Comparative Education II*, is one of a kind in emphasizing the intersection of these areas. In this work, the second volume of *Language Issues in Comparative Education*, authors Carol Benson and Kimmo Kosonen

advocate for the inclusion of non-dominant languages within multilingual education systems. They demonstrate tested language-in-education policy reforms by highlighting examples from Ethiopia, Mozambique, Estonia, the Philippines, Kenya, Chad, Nepal, India, The Democratic Republic of Congo, and Uganda. These examples are organized chapter-wise to give readers an in-depth analysis of multilingual education programming from the policy level (from above) to the classrooms and communities (from below). Each chapter highlights the strategies adopted to ensure the use of non-dominant languages within official education systems.

The authors introduce the readers to a theoretical framework to analyse successful interventions in multilingual education. They argue that successful language-in-education reforms that utilize non-dominant languages within a context involve 'change from all directions' (Benson & Kosonen, 2021, p. 49). Examples from the Philippines, Ethiopia, Mozambique, and Estonia demonstrate the application of this theoretical framework and explain how actors from above, the side and below must interact to meet challenges. The subsequent chapters of the book are divided into three sections: language policy change, implementation of multilingual programs, and strategies to support them.

The narrative of linguistic dominance in all forms is a critical feature of the book. There is a focus on countries in Asia and Africa whose education models are not considered to be global standards in the international development narrative. The authors highlight the benefits of including non-dominant languages in learning systems for marginalized populations such as ethnolinguistic minorities, refugees, and internally displaced persons. The Global South has an important pioneering role in designing multilingual education policy and programming; in this area its priorities are different from those of the Global North. The book clearly highlights this shift in perspective.

One of the main advantages of this book is its relevance to a wide range of stakeholders. For example, the authors begin the book by explaining different terminologies and highlighting the most pressing issues in the field. This will be useful to practitioners who are new to this work, as well as to graduate students. Professionals such as policymakers, curriculum specialists, and local education groups charged with implementing language education programmes will also find this book helpful. The clear organization in the book makes it easy for the readers to grasp the nuances of the theoretical models and the examples.

It is challenging for a doctoral student to use an evolving theoretical model when conducting research. The authors acknowledge the variations that may arise within the framework in different contexts. I am curious to see how future versions of the book will account for these variations.

The message of the book is clear – multilingual education programs that emphasize the inclusion of non-dominant languages are key. Designing education models for the future also

means enabling the preservation of traditional languages and cultures. Linguistic diversity across the world can be preserved through quality language education. I would highly recommend this book to anyone who is studying, researching, practicing, or advocating for the linguistic rights of non-dominant communities worldwide.

References

Cummins, J. (1996). *Negotiating identities: Education for empowerment in a diverse society*. Ontario: CAFE.

Skutnabb-Kangas, T. & Phillipson, R. (Eds.), in collaboration with M. Rannut (1994). *Linguistic human rights: Overcoming Linguistic Discrimination*. Berlin, New York: De Gruyter Mouton. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110866391>