# LANGUAGE POLICY IN GLOBALIZED CONTEXTS
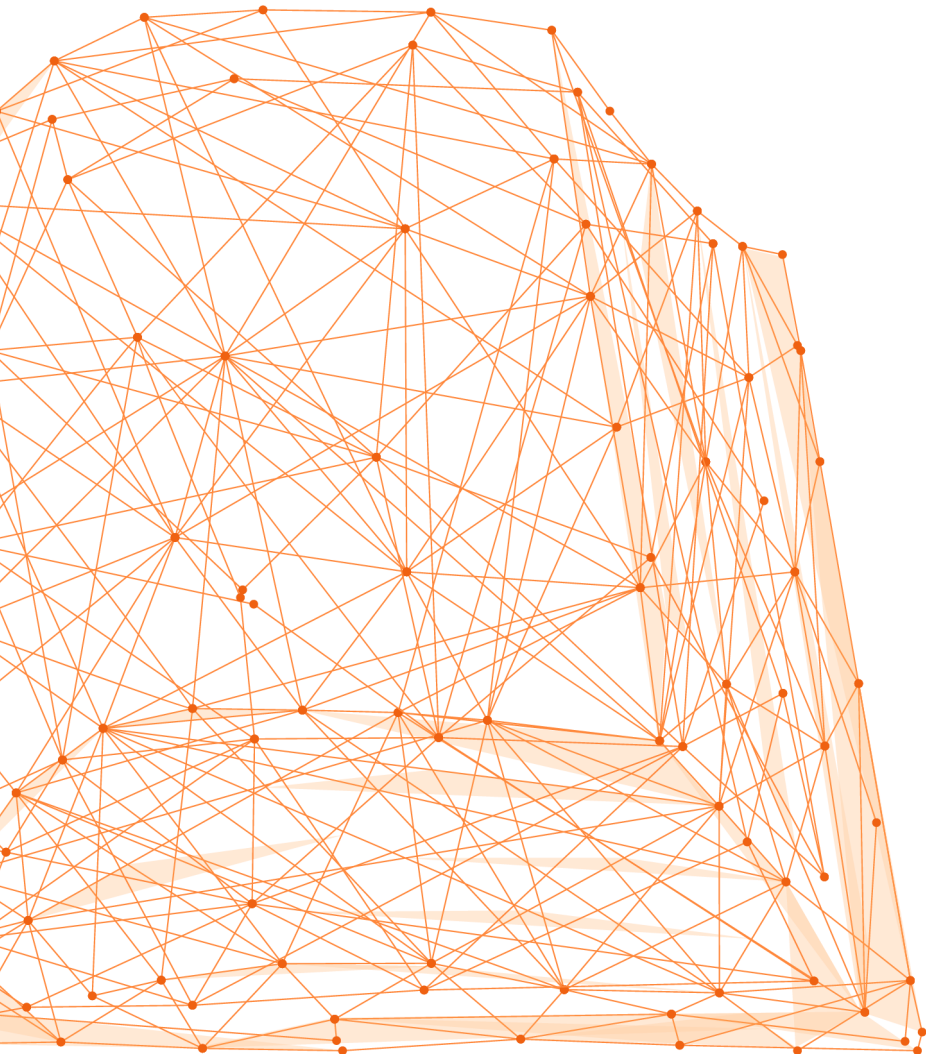
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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Decisions about languages to teach and use as part of formal schooling directly impact educational outcomes globally. They influence the accessibility of content and create implicit messages about whether students' heritages and identities are welcome and capable of succeeding at school.

Current language policies in many contexts are negatively impacting educational opportunities for indigenous and migrant speakers of minoritized languages as well as majority language speakers who are not motivated to learn additional languages. Statistics suggest that as many as 40 percent of the world's children are studying in languages they do not fully understand, while in the United Kingdom and the United States, study of languages other than English is dropping dramatically.

Current policies often derive from concerns that multilingualism is a threat to national identity or too difficult to promote in schools with limited resources. These fears are based on what the report terms an Ideology of Competition. This flawed ideology views languages as a bounded phenomenon with respect to both geographic and cognitive spaces. Adding additional languages to a space, whether the space is a mind or a country, creates competition and poses a threat.

The report argues that language policies should be based instead on three Principles for Collaboration (Figure 1):

- Accommodate dynamic needs of individuals and societies for language resources

- View multilingualism holistically

- Foster respect for difference

The principles derive from a recognition that multilingualism increasingly characterizes both places and people, in part because of the virtual and physical mobility associated with globalization. Communities in the Global North and South are populated by people for whom languages provide connections to identity and heritage, national cohesion,

and opportunities for wider communication outside of the local space (Table 1). The languages and needs for language in any given place are dynamic and emerging, however.

With respect to the human mind, multilingualism does not mean knowledge of multiple, independent languages. The report argues for what researchers refer to as a multi-competence perspective, which recognizes some linguistic knowledge as specific to particular languages and other knowledge as common to multiple languages.

Educational systems that promote multilingualism should not be seen as adding new threats to social cohesion or cognitive load; instead, they build resources for communities and people. Unfortunately, the message for indigenous and migrant speakers of minoritized languages, however, is that they should forget the resources they already have and adopt the language practices of majority groups. Ironically, majority language speakers are often encouraged to learn new languages so that they can engage with speakers of other languages—in other places. The Principles for Collaboration challenge educational systems to counter these tendencies (Figure 2).

System-level responses in globalized contexts like Ottawa, Canada show that it is possible to orient towards building the resources of a community rather than fixing language "problems." Schools there promote the two national languages, English and French, while at the same time creating a range of options that respond both to home language use and desires for additional languages beyond English and French.

Designing a system to promote multilingualism requires attention to traditional language planning questions related to status, acquisition, and corpus (Figure 3). Status questions deal with which languages to use for which needs. Acquisition questions address how to accommodate different populations equitably. Corpus questions ask how to create resource-rich learning environments where students see what they are learning as valuable.

An additional consideration for system design is whether to answer these questions in a top-down manner, through policies that apply for large groups of students, or create elective options that promote multilingualism through example. Case studies from Europe, Singapore, New Zealand, and the U.S. state of Georgia illustrate system-level responses to these issues.

At the classroom level, the increasing heterogeneity of students makes models that prescribe instructional approaches based on student characteristics obsolete and creates a need for resources that support localized policy-making. Translanguaging, a pedagogical approach that accepts the dynamic use of resources from multiple languages as a normal form of communication for multilinguals has emerged as a way of building new resources from the resources brought to the classroom by diverse students.

Researchers argue that restricting language use in the classroom to one language or another stigmatizes minoritized languages and limits speakers' ability to make meaning. Students need to be able to suppress what they know how to do in one language in contexts where others will not understand them, but they also should be able to demonstrate freely linguistic abilities not tied to a single language, such as locating information, structuring an argument, and creating multilingual texts.

To formulate localized policies, teachers need goals for the use of translanguaging, heuristics for analyzing their classroom ecology, and examples of teaching and learning through translanguaging.

Drawing on educational and ethnographic research, the report discusses how to craft goals that respond to the individual and social uses of languages in the community, general understandings of the linguistic competency of multilinguals, and values for what the classroom should promote. Complementing the external focus of goal setting, teachers also need to analyze the language uses, users, and resources that exist within their classroom.
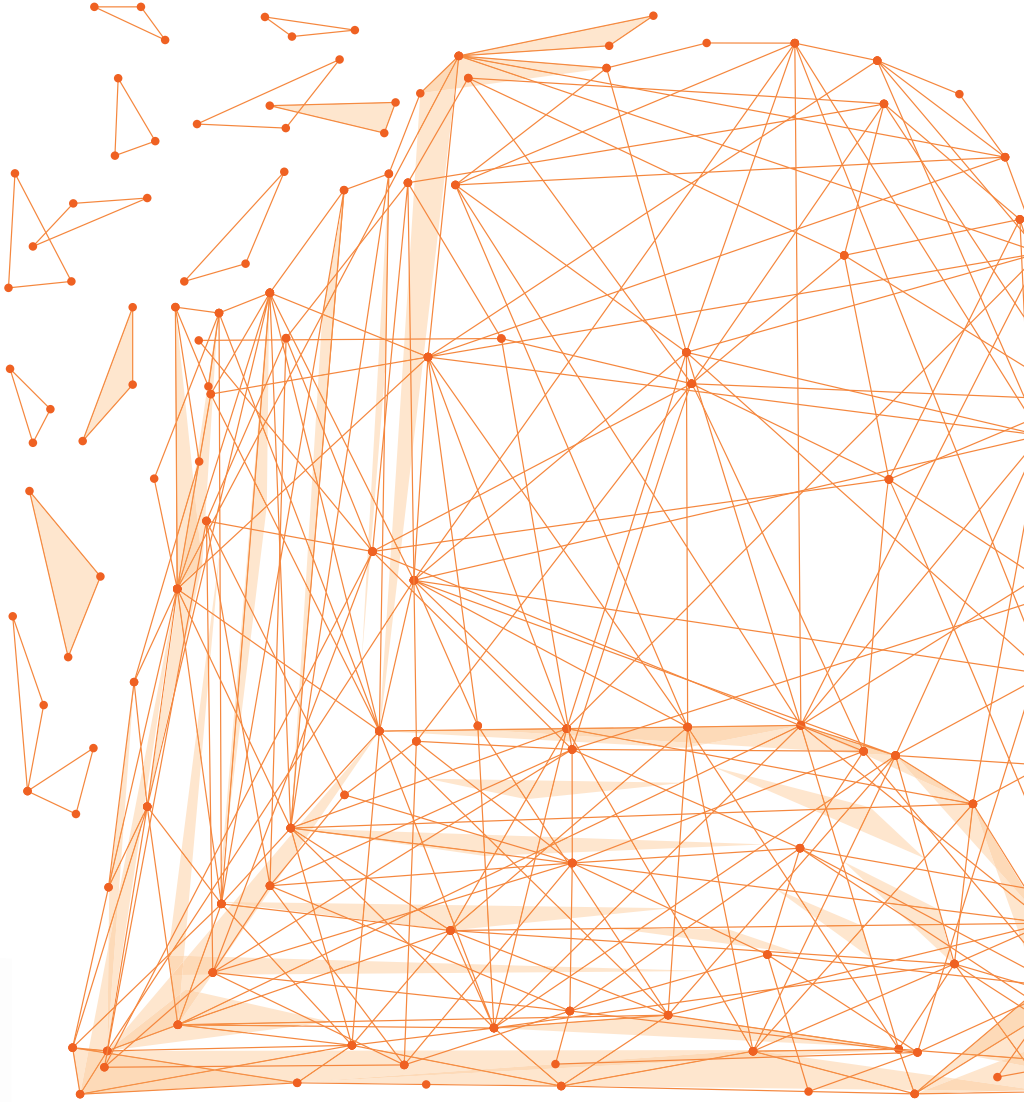
As support for imagining the activity of teaching, the report provides examples from the research literature on *stances* toward multilingualism, *modeling* the practices of multilinguals, and *designing* activities where languages are in contact (Table 3). As support for learning in the context of translanguaging, the report provides examples of making *connections* between languages, *differentiation* of one language from another, *accommodation* of inevitable challenges, and *identity* making through the use of resources from multiple languages (Table 4).

Policy changes always present implementation challenges. The report concludes with suggestions and examples for overcoming challenges from the author's experiences in the globalized context of Qatar.

Three major challenges are addressed: supporting teachers as they transition to more multilingual instruction, assessing multilingual uses of language, and laying the groundwork for public support of multilingual education.

Multilingual education based in the Principles for Collaboration has the potential to transform educational outcomes for large numbers of students around the world and contribute to the attainment of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 for quality education. The vision for this report therefore is for an Ideology of Collaboration, where:

- Education contributes to cohesive societies where all people feel empowered by their language resources and negotiation skills

- Multilingualism is synonymous with cognitive and social development

- Minoritized languages and their speakers are valued as sources for invention and renewal.