

Contemporary Educational Researches Journal

Volume 09, Issue 2, (2019) 012-020



www.cerj.eu

Influencing factors on further development of bilingual education in Macedonia

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Suggested Citation:

Hajrullai, H. (2019). Influencing factors on further development of bilingual education in Macedonia. *Contemporary Educational Researches Journal*. 9(2), 012-020.

Received from October 12, 2018; revised from December 25, 2018; accepted from March 21, 2019.

Selection and peer review under responsibility of Assoc.Prof.Dr. Deniz Ozcan, Ondokuz Mayıs University, Turkey.

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Abstract

Macedonia has implemented bilingualism in schools for more than a decade. However, this bilingualism has been realized in a step-by-step program in the Macedonian schools by introducing minorities to bilingual programs first starting from primary, then secondary and lately tertiary education in mother language of minorities. This approach was originally thought to help minority students learn the majority language and in that way find their way in the market economy. In practice, bilingual programs in Macedonian schools as well as teacher training programs in the state universities have limited view of what it means to have bilingual education, professional bilingual teachers, and how these teachers should teach bilingual students. This paper explores how political, social, and economic developments in one country influences by further developing or limiting bilingual education in all levels in Macedonia and how bilingualism in schools can be misused for the government to keep the minorities oppressed. This paper will overview the major political and educational events that took place in Macedonia that concern and seriously affected further development of bilingual education in the country.

Keywords: bilingual education, bilingualism; Macedonia, political events

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1. Introduction

The major influence and inspiration to pursue the further analysis of the possibilities and limitations of bilingual education is the following saying by the famous German philosopher Immanuel Kant.

“Action is right when it respects the fundamental dignity of other human beings as persons with their own purposes and lives to lead rather than as objects to be used solely for others.” (Bull, 1992).

The more general intention of this paper is to inquire the political and educational reality of the minority groups in one country by looking at how the present bilingual education is influenced by the political circumstances and how the same affect the further bilingual educational development.

Since the modern societies present a complex, legal, economic, social and educational realities which sometimes can be really hard to predict the developments of. In the same way, bilingual requires a multiple approach to analyze the causes, reason, and effects of such educational provisions. Therefore, bilingualism requires a more substantial approach which entangles multiple disciplines to come to a research which will eventually lead to understanding the needs for this type of education in one country.

2. Methods

To do this, an educational researcher would have to look at multiple sources such as motivation, need, and reform and come to a conclusion about meeting these needs of a certain minority group in one country. It would take a certain academic, political, and educational naivety to think that there could be a one-size, fit-for-all type of a pattern that could enable breaking down all the complexities in our modern societies in way that would explain all the social structure that goes into enabling and denying bilingualism. This is due to the fact that bilingualism as such cannot and should not be perceived merely as a tool which will partially meet the needs of a certain group in the society. One the contrary, it should grant all who suffer from the lack of it, in this case minorities, a full access and realization of the collective educational desire and development of their human potentials and enjoy the benefits of being equal citizens.

While analyzing the issues related to bilingualism in one society, the resistance toward it should be also taken in consideration. Namely, understanding the power struggle, the threat and the fear that the members of majority group will lose and “the others” will gain type of mind-set and culture ought to be tackled to fully understand the complexities of the communities which stand on the opposite side of bilingualism and equality. However, only if equal access to education is viewed as public good free and accessible to everyone, the traditional perception bilingualism will be overcome enabling citizens, the politics, the economy, and the education benefit from having equal contributing members of the society.

This eventually leads us to the field of education as a human right which regulates the issue about the access to education based on international law and regulations as well as different UN documents which protect and promote the concept of education. These documents can be found as a major point of reference: the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). These documents, in other words, have enabled establishing complex, viable legal mechanisms as guidelines for the nation states to assess, implement, and support effective application of these provisions to provide equal educational opportunities. As an example, let us consider, Article 13 of the ICESCR for this purpose.

“The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to education. They agree that education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. They further agree that education shall enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society, promote understanding, tolerance, and friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic, or religious groups, and further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.”

This legal provision in this Article 13 from the CRC emphasizes the need to acknowledge the fundamental principle of a right to education not only merely as a tool to realize the right to education but also as an essential precondition to the full development of human personality which, in turn, will intrinsically strengthen the fundamental freedoms.

In the context of realization of a right to education in all form or kinds to all citizens, the Article 13 from the ICESCR encourages states to provide education in all possible ways, which also include the access to education in mother tongue as an encouraging form of education for the non-majority speakers in one country. The article stipulates:

- The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize that with a view to achieving the full realization of this right:
 - Primary education shall be compulsory and available free to all;
 - Secondary education in its different forms, including technical and vocational secondary education, should be made generally available and accessible to all by every appropriate means and, in particular, by the progressive introduction of free education;
 - Higher education should be made equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity, by every appropriate means and, in particular, by the progressive introduction of free education;

According to major studies on bilingualism, there is an overarching fear among the minority citizens that the state treats its citizens as if they belong to the second degree citizenship. This level of citizenship means that there is a lack of opportunity, lack of development, and care due to not knowing or a limited knowledge of the majority language which ultimately leads to turning the minority languages even further away from its community and making it obsolete to be used in the society. It is difficult to speculate whether the fear is always rational, but there is one common denominator for issues related to access of education and that is that if this access is not limited to one language it certainly improves the social, economic, and educational status of the minorities . As stated in Thomas and Roberts (2011) and quoted by Lachlan and Couto (2017) .

“The ultimate use of minority language is mediated by the characteristics of the individual, the nature of the linguistic interchange and opportunities at school, and the availability of the language in the wider society.”

This inevitably makes one think of the question on how do then states’ ensure that all these national legal frameworks are translated into concrete policies that would protect and promote the social, political, and educational position of the minorities? This is done through various methods where each country provides information about the implementation on a country level. In addition, states establish solid national frameworks creating the legal foundation for sustainable quality education for all. There is also the UNESCO global observatory, in which countries submit their reports on the latest developments on the rights to education. According to latest UNESCO report on education content and quality,

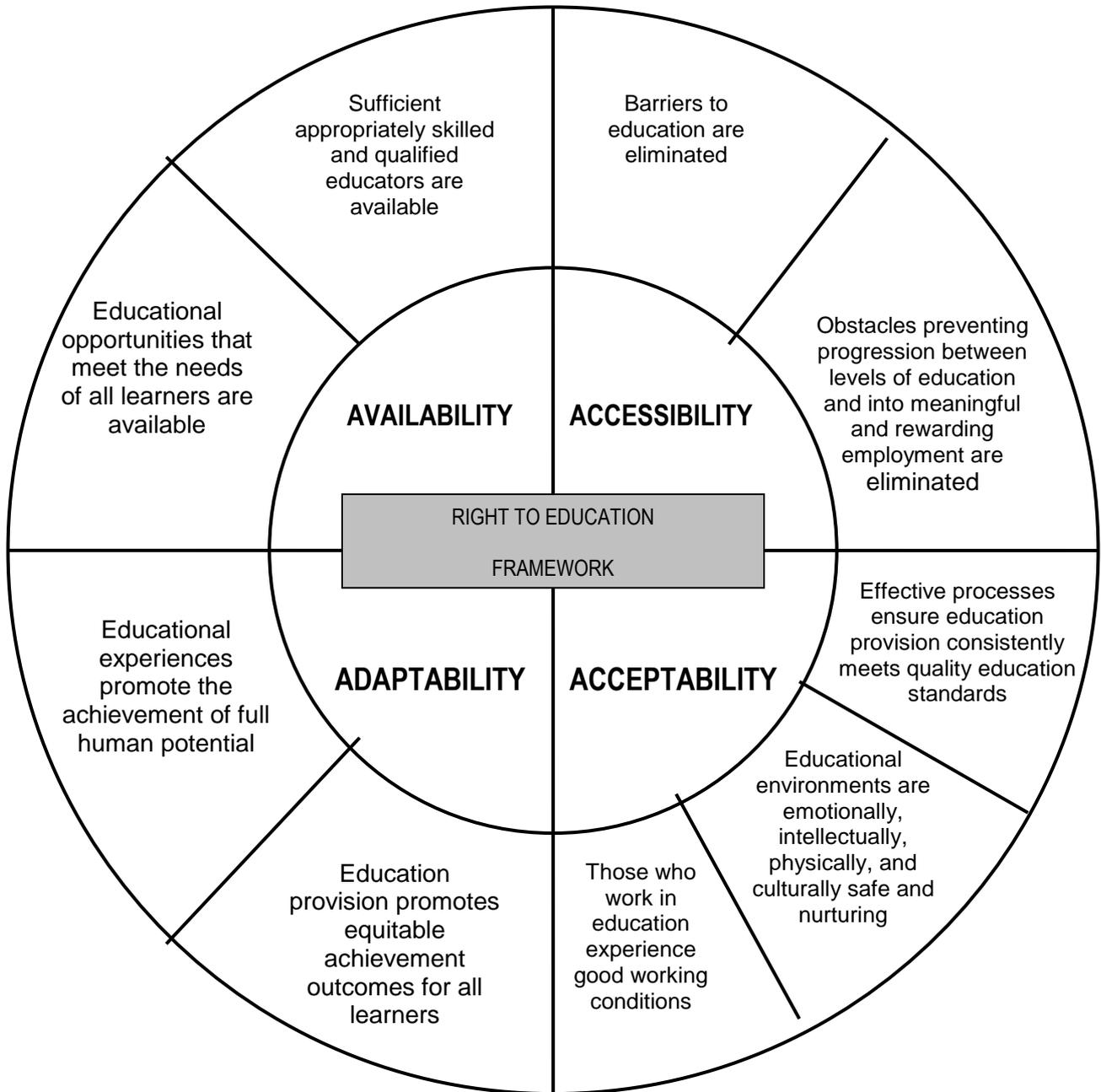
“The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia revised its education curriculum and materials in order to better integrate the concepts of tolerance, intercultural communication, and understanding, especially in the subjects of history, geography, and languages. Textbooks were also revised to integrate content related to the prevention of violence and discrimination, as well as respect for differences.”

The report above reflects the long-lasting issues with the curriculum and materials that were used by the schools and in cooperation with the ministry were used to promote the nationalistic politics of the government in schools through the books which contained false and derogatory contents in relations to minorities, their history, and their culture.

Moreover, The National Strategy for the Development of Education (2005–2015) focused on the improvement of multiethnic cooperation and more specifically, improving the representation and access to education of minorities in their mother language on all levels of education. As stated in the report:

“In terms of teaching languages in secondary education, according to the Article 4 of the Law on Secondary Education, students from ethnic groups (i.e., Albanians, Turks, and Serbs) are taught in their mother tongue and alphabet, while students who are Bosniaks, Vlachs, and Romas have the right to learn their mother tongue from the 3rd to the 9th grade, through elective subjects and courses on the language and culture of their ethnic group.”

Further analysis of the status of minorities is also possible through the lens of the human rights and fundamental rights of pupils which are derived from the same. Under a given constitution, this serves as a basis for the legal status of pupil rights. However, the status of access of pupils to effectively practice their right to education usually requires a political consensus for such a reform (De Groof and Penneman, 1998). For this purpose, I will analyze the political, social, and economic rationale of the Macedonian government toward bilingual education and how the same affects minorities further educational development. For this reason, I will use the following Table/Chart...(1)



Table/Chart 1. Right to education. Adapted from "children's rights: A global imperative for local change," by M. Morss, 2014, Slideplayer. Retrieved June 2018 <https://slideplayer.com/slide/1731261/>. Copyright, 2014

3. Results

The case of Macedonia

3.1. Political status of minorities

Albanian, Turks, and Roma are the largest minority groups in the country.

There are 509.083 Albanian, 77.959 Turk, and 53879 Roma in country (Lauchlan, 2017). There are also other smaller minority groups such as Bosnian, Jewish, and Egyptian minorities as well.

All these minorities speak different languages.

In this context, Macedonia has ratified several documents that are of interest to the minorities. The first one is the ratification of the minority protection agreement, which this country signed with the EU member states as part of the agenda of Macedonian accession to EU (De Groof & Penneman, 1998). Ratification of this agreement is of a high importance simply due to the fact that it obliges the country to respect the international convention on human and minority rights.

The second highly important document that Macedonian government signed and ratified is the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OHF). This highly important document was ratified in 2001. The reason why this document was of high importance to the minorities is due to several reasons. After this agreement, several amendments of the Macedonian constitution were changed regarding recognition of other minorities, their language, and their rights. The initial change was in the preamble of the constitution, where minorities were referred as "other nationalities," instead, it was removed and replaced with the other term, which is "communities." The other change this agreement implied is that it guarantees official recognition of any minorities over 20% (article no 7). Then, equitable representation of all communities is affirmed as a fundamental value of the constitutional order (article no 8). Furthermore, this document guaranteed increased protection for the freedom of religion (amending article 19). In terms of education, the amendment 48 is to be amended to remove the mention of nationalities as a separate quota used in schools for minority groups.

Also, improved democratic rights in terms of voting in the Assembly (1966) (amendment article 69), and improved judicial representation of minority groups in the Supreme Court of Macedonia (amending article 109) as well as, securing minority interests in future constitutional amendments (amending article 131). According to this document, the Albanian minority became immediately recognized with equal political status as the Macedonian majority in the country. After the ratification of this document, Macedonia became the first officially recognized bilingual country in the Balkan region.

However, even before ratification of this document, other minorities had a fairly good political and legal representation in the Parliament. Since its independence in 1992, Macedonian government had political representatives in the government from all minorities. The government usually consisted of position which had majority of fairly elected Macedonian political party, elected Albanian political party and eventually other minority representatives. The same case was with the opposition, they represented minor Macedonian, Albanian, Roma, and Bosnian political representatives; it all depends on the coalition of these parties. The number of political parties representing minorities in the past decade increased from 2 to 13. There is no doubt that this document not only provided a juridical protection of the minorities in the country but it also advanced Macedonia as a country to be taken as an example by other countries in the region.

3.2. Education of minorities through the 4 a-list lenses

The primary and secondary education of minorities is guaranteed by the law, as follows:

Language of Instruction.

1. Law.

Article 48 of the 1991 Constitution states that,

Members of the nationalities have the right to instruction in their language in primary and secondary education, as determined by law. In schools where education is carried out in the language of a nationality, the Macedonian language is also studied (http://www.unesco.org/education/edurights/media/resources/file/MACEDONIA_.pdf).

However, access to the primary and secondary education is not the only issue in education. Access to higher education was even bigger issue. Fortunately, due to ratification of the already existing university, "University of Tetovo," previously named as "illegal university" (because it was financially supported by the minorities), was legalized and recognized by the state. This university was proclaimed as the third state university financed by the government to provide education in language of the minorities.

Another multilingual higher education institution was provided for the minorities as well as the majority. This university was established to teach in Albanian, Macedonian, and English (http://www.unesco.org/education/edurights/media/resources/file/MACEDONIA_.pdf). For the purpose of teaching in English, native speakers as well as international professors were hired to meet this criterion.

However, the minority discrimination in the aspect consists in the fact that minority can have the right to access higher education in their language only if they are more than 20% of the population, whereas the other minority groups besides Albanian all together barely make 10% of the population.

In school context, bilingual education is going through several issues. One of the biggest issues presents the highly centralized education system in the country which makes curricular, methodological, and practical changes really difficult to apply because of long bureaucratic procedure and limited methods of application of different programs.

As Baker suggests, to achieve schools and students become bilingual, biliterate, and multicultural children, two languages of the schools should have equal status. In the context of Macedonian schools, two languages are not treated equally. This is because minority students are the only ones in the school who are supposed to learn the majority language, whereas majority students do not have any language classes on minority language, minority language is not even offered as free elective course for the majority students. This leaves space to connect this phenomenon to the position of the majority as greater power, prestige, and superiority over the minorities (Assembly, 1966).

In addition, teacher training programs in the state universities that prepare students to teach majority language (Macedonian to Albanians) in bilingual schools are taught only in one language, the language of the majority. During their education, this program does not offer any courses to students on cross-cultural understanding or even issues concerning bilingualism and multicultural education. Teacher training students are offered only two methodology classes in the 4th year and they are considered as very easy examinations to pass taking in consideration the linguistic and literary materials and complexities they are exposed to during their education. This might present an obstacle for successful bilingual education which mostly affects minorities and their further education, just as Baker states;

"Teachers in bilingual classrooms may sometimes find barriers to success in; large and overcrowded classes of undernourished students, inadequate teacher training, a lack of teaching resources, poor pay and promotion prospects, the stigma of working with lowly regarded bilinguals, and limited funding" (Vetterlein, 2006).

This analysis by Baker's does not concern only the teacher training program; it really summons some of the main reasons that lie behind the issues of bilingual education in Macedonia. Teacher

training programs, therefore, do not necessarily enable their future teachers to clearly understand the importance of the input of these teachers in minority student's lives in their further education, they do not "sensitize students' for the

Moreover, curricular issues in bilingual education do not stay far behind. Since majority language is offered as language course in Macedonian schools, students in most cases do not go through a placement test. This means that students are placed in classes randomly, with no particular order, this on the other side creates disparity from the very first experience of students' second language learning process privileging the ones that are fluent in this language and leaving the other less fluent group of students on their own.

The reason why this issue of levels is so relevant is because in language acquisition programs, it is really important to determine students' level of fluency so the same teachers know the level of fluency of their students so they can be upgraded and pushed forward in learning process. Since placement test are missing, Macedonian bilingual schools do not either have any strategies how to approach and address this issue .

In addition, in Macedonian schools, extracurricular activities almost do not exist and the term extracurricular activities are almost unknown to majority of students and teachers. Majority and minority students have almost no contacts with each other in schools, and extracurricular activities that are missing in the bilingual school curricula do not enable students to celebrate bi/multilingualism. The only time they meet in the school is after ones finish classes and the other ones start with classes.

Furthermore, poor language teaching methodology contributes to lack of interest in the second language learning. Centralized education system influences the classroom developments as well. Most of the lessons are highly centralized teacher-oriented classrooms. During these classes, students are listening to the lectures given by their teacher, there is almost no interaction at all only when students are asked a question. Group work and pair work are really rare because classrooms are not students centered.

In this aspect, the process of learning language in Macedonian schools is not necessarily divided into four basic skills. During the process of language learning, students are introduced and taught to reading and writing but not with clear objectives and goals, whereas speaking and listening do not exist as language goals.

3.3. Employment

Employment issue of the minorities in the country was resolved by ratification of the OHF agreement in 2001. According to this agreement, the minority participation in the public institution and especially administration was required. Dependent on the institution, minority participation in the public institutions was ought to be raised for at least 10% for each of the minority. During this affirmative action, the favored groups to be hired as employed in the public institutions were minority groups.

3.4. Other

Macedonian minorities enjoy equal right in all other aspects of social life as much as the majority. The government does not restrict freedom of speech in anyways. There are TV programs, newspapers, magazines, and radios in Albanian, Turkish, Roma, and Serbian all financially supported by the government.

4. Conclusions

This paper presents some of the main policies, laws, and state actions that limit or broaden the scope of bilingual education in one country. Without a doubt, there are several general conclusions that can be made in terms of how the state apparatus governs and potentially manipulates different educational rights to benefit or harm a certain group of citizens.

This paper shows which can be some of the major political and legal frameworks that can enable sufficient political and educational medium and set ground for the development of bilingualism in the future. Enabling stable political ground serves as precedent for further bilingual education.

In addition, this paper focuses on how there might be different goals once access to education in mother language is achieved. In this respect, we need to start thinking beyond only accessing bilingual education. We need to provide programs that have sustainable standards that would enable successful bilingual teaching and learning environment and full development of a human capital regardless of their national, religious, cultural, or other backgrounds.

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