

Abstract

The chapter is a critical appraisal of bilingual education policy scholarship and practice against a backdrop of contestations that characterize determination and execution of bilingual education goals and the spread of the idea of linguistic human rights in education – and discourses attendant and consequent to these processes. A dominant and recurrent motif in bilingual education policy discourses is the assumed analogous relationship between language and the nation-state and the sometimes integrative, sometimes disruptive role of education in this relationship. Resultant bilingual education types have, in practice, manifested themselves in a range of programs. Invariably, these programs fall within a dyad of language policy orientations, these being promotion/tolerance and repressive/restrictive. These orientations influence types of educational programs and their outcomes. Nowhere are these dynamics more pronounced than in postcolonial contexts – which, from the critical perspective adopted in the chapter, include, apart from the “usual” contexts in the global south, western democracies with a colonial past. In these contexts, presumed “mother tongue,” local language, or minority language becomes both important and problematic in the conceptualization and implementation of bilingual education policies. In other instances, even when language-in-education policies are allegedly intended to increase opportunities for educational access and equity, in practice, they (re)produce, perpetuate, and entrench unintended outcomes largely inimical to the progressive goals of bilingual education policies. However, when effectively implemented, bilingual education policies remain potent tools for social, political, and economic inclusion of marginalized groups in postcolonial contexts, irrespective of whether these are in the global north or global south.