Local school-based language policy: a case study of English medium of instruction in three schools in Denmark

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Abstract:

Language Education Policies (LEP) are often dictated by central educational authorities and are hence referred to as ‘top-down’ policies. However, there are cases in which the LEP decisions come from the educators in the field in contradiction with the official policy, thus creating a ‘bottom-up’ policy.

This study set out to examine the philosophies, rationale, and motivations behind ‘bottom-up’ policies in language education in Folkeskolen (K-10), Denmark. It focused on three case studies in three public schools, which have chosen to employ an English-medium of instruction (EMI) policy against the official Danish-only LEP. The study documented the policy of those schools, their educational ideologies, pedagogical methods and the factors that facilitated their EMI policy implementation. The study strove to gain in depth understanding of the growing trends of LEP ‘from below’ via the interpretation of different participants involved in the process. Data were collected via observations and interviews, analysis of official documents. The findings showed that the LEP of the three schools served educational goals but also municipal ones. They also indicated that the geographical position of the schools combined with the fact that the medium of instruction chosen was English, a language symbolizing prestige and power, was what (were factors that) eventually made the Ministry of Education ”turn a blind eye”. The findings pointed to arbitrary choices based on availability, practical considerations and geography and not in depth professional, linguistic or educational-based research. The findings support ecological approaches to LEP whereby language teaching is viewed as a complex entity formulated by a variety of components reaching beyond educational and language learning approaches.

Keywords: agendas, medium of instruction, education language policy.