



**PAPUA NEW GUINEA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
WAIGANI**

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SECRETARY'S CIRCULAR NO. 38/99

SUBJECT: LANGUAGE POLICY IN ALL SCHOOLS

1. This Secretary's Circular is issued pursuant to Section 28 (a) of the Education Act (Ch. No.163) as amended in 1995.
2. The purpose of this circular is to advise authorities of all institutions within the National Education System regarding the use of languages in schools. This circular should be read in conjunction with Ministerial Policy Statements No. 1/91 and no. 38/99, and Secretary's Circular No. 1/91.
3. The Purpose And Future Direction For Language Use In School
 - 3.1 One of the aims of the Education Reforms is to allow the use of languages in the formal school system as stated in Secretary's Circular No. 1/91. The language of the community, together with its cultures, spiritual and work practices will form the basis for the activities of the school. It means that the local vernacular or a language spoken by both the students and teachers, will be used as a medium of learning in the formal school system. This will strengthen cultural bonding between children and the community and enable better academic achievements.
4. Research Findings
 - 4.1 The use of vernacular languages in schools is backed by research. The research shows that:-
 - there are academic achievement benefits for the student from being bilingual.
 - to stop students learning in their first language and forcing them to learn only in a new language can be harmful and obstructive to their development.
 - it usually takes an English language learner 5 or more years to develop the ability to use English for learning complex concepts; and
 - beginning schooling in the children's first language, and using this language for continued learning and development while the English language is being learned, is the best way for children to develop to their full potential in schooling.

5. New Language Policy

- 5.1 Based on research findings, the reform curriculum calls for a program of bilingual education in Primary Schools. Children who graduate from Elementary Schools will enter a bilingual program in Grade 3.
- 5.2 At the Elementary School level, (prep to Elementary 2), this means that the language of instruction is completely in the children's vernacular language, or the community lingua franca, with an introduction to oral English towards the end of Elementary 2. Children will leave Elementary School literate in their first language.

The community through their Parents and Citizens Association (P&C) and the Board of Management (BOM) will decide the language to be used at the Elementary level of education.

In practice, the community must be informed in order to make the decision on what language should be used at Elementary level. The language chosen should be the language that is shared in the community, and used for most communication in that community.

- 5.3 At the Lower Primary level (Grades 3- 5) the learning and teaching will be conducted in a bilingual situation, in which there is planned, gradual bridging from vernacular (or the lingua franca) to English. Oral and written vernacular language development will continue throughout Lower Primary. Oral and written English development will gradually be introduced and established as the major language of instruction by the end of Grade 5, using "Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages" (TESOL) methodology.

At this level, while English is being learned, the language mostly used for teaching and learning should be the same language that the children used in Elementary school.

Where a number of active languages exist in one community, the main language of interaction between the language groups and of commerce in the community should be the language selected, that is the local lingua franca.

Every effort must be made to appoint vernacular speaking teachers to the lower primary grades, particularly those who have received inservice in bilingual education strategies.

- 5.4 At the Upper Primary level (Grades 6-8), class activities will be conducted with English as the main language of instruction, but students should still be provided with opportunities to further develop their oral and written vernacular (or lingua franca) skills.
- 5.5 At the Secondary level (ie, Provincial High Schools, Secondary Schools, National High Schools, including Vocational Schools) lessons will be conducted in English. However, advantage should be taken where opportunities arise for students to further develop their oral and written vernacular (or lingua franca) skills, or if a concept can be better explained using the vernacular or lingua franca.

Whereas children must be encouraged to learn and use English, all schools at all levels should not discourage free communication in vernacular languages that the children speak in and out of school grounds. This will establish confidence in students to use vernacular in academic learning.

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