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ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE USE OF TOK PISIN &  
VERNACULAR LANGUAGES IN BILINGUAL  
EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN PNG

Name of presenter

DR.KILALA DEVETTE-CHEE

# OVERVIEW

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- Introduction
- Background
- Research Questions
- Methodology
- Results/Key Findings
- Recommendations for Policy
- Implications for Research and Future Direction
- Conclusion

# Background - Situational Analysis

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In **2011**, just after coming into power, the **O'Neill-Namah Government** made a decision to scrape out the controversial **Outcome Based Education (OBE) System** in which **bilingual education programs** were embedded in **Papua New Guinea**.

The Department of Education (DoE) was then directed to review the curriculum to address the concerns.

When the review process was completed, the DoE created awareness in three phases on the **adopted and approved Standard Based Education System (SBE)** or **Standard Based Curriculum** – to be implemented starting in **2015** with English to be the language of instruction **starting from Elementary Schools**.

# The New change

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English will now be taught as a subject in the elementary classes (EP, EP1 and EP2) in schools – this started in 2015. This is a government directive through the task force report and the intention is to raise standards in literacy and the level of English.

# Background to the Study

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- ▶ The genesis of this study emerged out of the concerns and interests of the researcher relating to the dilemma that parents, teachers and the general public in Papua New Guinea (PNG) are facing with regards to what language(s) best suit children in the formal school system in the country.
- ▶ The researcher, well versed with the language situation from her experiences in the learning institutions where she worked, embarked on this mission as a result of her observations on: a) the decline in standards of English over a 18 year period since the inception of the bilingual education program commonly known as “the education reform” (Matane, 1986); and b) the reasons why this education reformed program had become an issue of national debate.

# Background Cont'

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The concept of bilingual education in PNG was introduced to combat the English-medium education which was propagated by the Australian administration during the pre-independence era. (NDOE, 1991, p. 13). The researcher's involvement in the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) in PNG and Australia as an examiner during the last fifteen years was used as a 'personal' bench mark to compare the level of English of students who are products of the current bilingual program, and was the main motivating factor which contributed to her growing interest in the topic of this study.

# BACKGROUND: BALL'S EIGHT APPROACHES TO BILINGUAL EDUCATION

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**1) Mother tongue-based instruction** where the language is delivered entirely in the children's L1-**Strong model**

**2) Bilingual education** (a.k.a. 'two-way-bilingual education') also known as 'dual language instruction' in which minority and majority language children are taught in both minority and majority languages- **Strong model**

**3) Mother tongue-based bilingual education** (a.k.a. 'developmental bilingualism') in which L1 is used as the primary medium of instruction for the years of primary school while L2 is introduced as a subject of study in itself and in preparation for its eventual use as the means of instruction for academic subjects **Strong model**

## BACKGROUND: BALL'S EIGHT APPROACHES TO BILINGUAL EDUCATION Cont'

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4) **Multilingual education** which involves the formal use of more than two languages in the curriculum- **Strong model**

5) **Transitional bi/multilingual education** (also called 'bridging') in which the objective is a planned transition from one language of instruction to another. 'Short cut' or 'early-exit' is a term given to programs that involve an abrupt transition to L2 instruction after only two or three years in school. 'Late transition' or 'late exit' refers to a switch to L2 instruction after a child has become fully fluent academically in L1- **Weak model**

6) **Maintenance bi/multilingual education** (also called 'additive or heritage bilingual education'). After the L2 has been introduced, both (or all) chosen languages are media of instruction. L1 instruction continues, often as a subject of study, to ensure children become academically proficient in L1. Even though one or two more languages are added, they do not displace L1- **Strong model**

## BACKGROUND: BALL'S EIGHT APPROACHES TO BILINGUAL EDUCATION Cont'

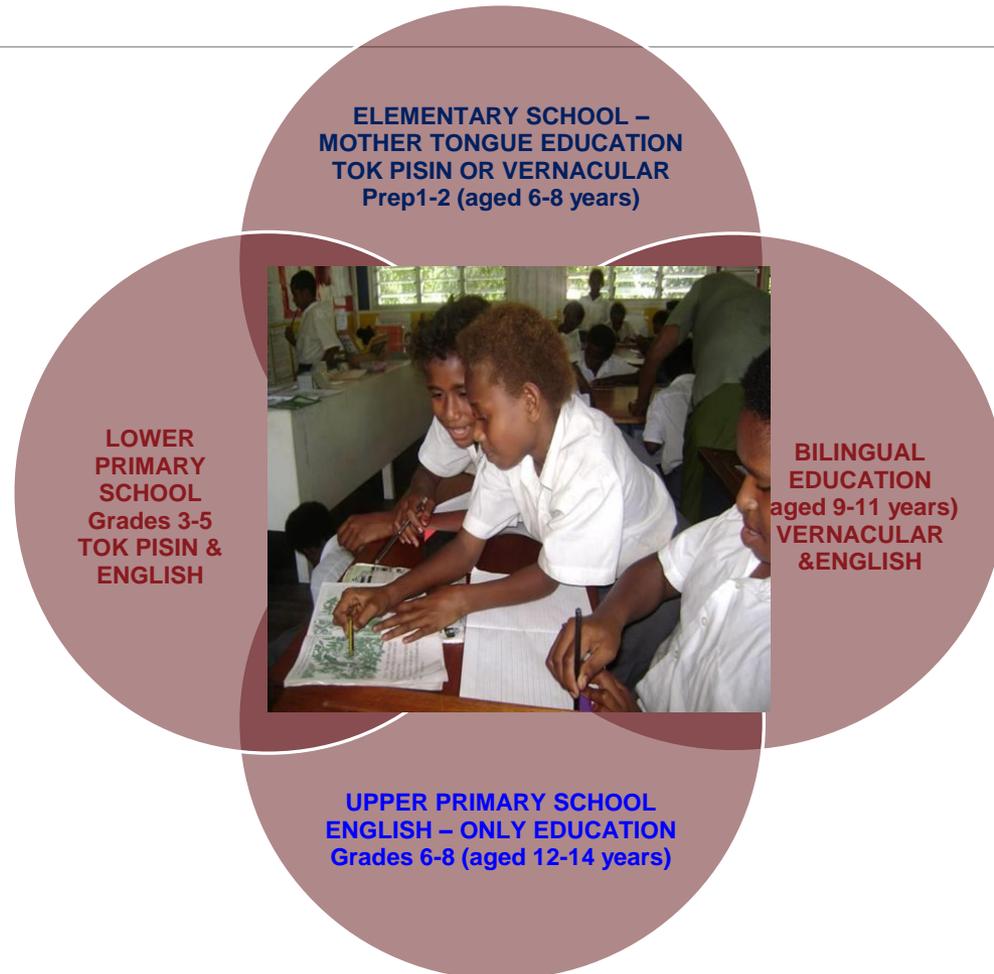
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7) **Immersion or foreign language instruction** involves the entire education program being provided in a language that is new to the child -**Strong model**

8) **Submersion** (a.k.a. 'Sink or Swim') occurs when speakers of non-dominant languages have no choice but to receive education in languages they do not understand. This approach promotes subtractive bilingualism: that is L2 learning at the expense of L1-**Weak model**

(Ball, 2010)

## BILINGUAL EDUCATION MODEL IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA: The Transitional Approach (Ball's 5th Approach) with a gradual transition to English



# LOCATION OF STUDY: KOKOPO, EAST NEW BRITAIN PROVINCE



# RESEARCH QUESTIONS

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## ▶ Research Question One:

What are the attitudes of curriculum officers, teachers, parents and students towards the use of Tok Pisin and vernacular languages for instruction in the lower primary classroom?

## ▶ Research Question Two:

Is the current policy on bilingual education being implemented in schools based on the participants' views?

# METHODOLOGY

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**A Mixed Methods Approach** - a combination of both Quantitative and Qualitative paradigms (Creswell 2003) was used in this study.

- Questionnaires:** Total n = 413 (SPSS: Descriptive & Inferential Statistics-Mann Whitney U Test)
- In-depth interviews:** Total n = 47 (Grounded Theory Analysis)

# DETAILS OF THE DATA SAMPLE

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- ▶ Participants in the questionnaire survey: From 6 schools in Kokopo, East New Britain Province.

Primary teachers (N=85)

Parents (N=86)

Grade 3 students (N=242)

- ▶ The interviews consisted of curriculum officers based in the Curriculum Development Division (CDD) in Port Moresby (N=8), Teachers (N=18), Parents (N=15), and Students (N=6) from the six participating schools.

# RESULTS/KEY FINDINGS

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- The data gathered from participants indicates that there were many deficiencies in the transitional bilingual program in PNG. The vast majority of participants, regardless of their stated level of support for the current system, mentioned the lack of support in terms of funding, resources, and training.

# RESULTS/KEY FINDINGS

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- Responses from the teachers, parents and students also indicated that policy makers and officers at the national and provincial level did not know enough about what is actually happening in classrooms, particularly in schools outside major towns and cities. Such information is vital to ensure the policies being followed are the most suitable and that they are being implemented as fully as possible.

# RESULTS/KEY FINDINGS

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- The findings demonstrated the importance of taking into account the attitudes of all stakeholders since these have a powerful effect on how bilingual programs are viewed and implemented in practice. The value of including the views of children was also shown. It was interesting to see how they said they valued the use of their mother tongues in the classroom and how this helped them learn, echoing the views of supporters of the bilingual policy among curriculum officers and some teachers and parents. The attitudes of children themselves to bilingual education are seldom heard in debates about its success and failures.

# RESULTS/KEY FINDINGS

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- Participant responses indicated that one of the major reasons for the lack of acceptance of the appropriateness of the use of Tok Pisin and vernacular languages in education is the perceived failures of the current educational system. Participants cited increased school dropouts, poor academic results, and low levels of English language proficiency as evidence of these failures. Many teachers and parents attributed this situation to the whole idea of bilingual education and indicated support for a return to an English-only system. Others, including curriculum officers, teachers who had been bilingually trained and children learning under the then bilingual system, saw such problems as the result of the deficiencies in the system noted above.

# RESULTS/KEY FINDINGS

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- ▶ The findings have also highlighted the increasing role of Tok Pisin in PNG's social life in the realm of work and education in PNG. Participants' responses showed that they acknowledged this, though there were differing views about if this was a threat to vernacular languages or not. It was clear from the questionnaire responses that participants saw Tok Pisin as a more useful language for education than a vernacular language like Tolai. As regards Tok Pisin being a bridge to English, some respondents considered its similarity to English as an advantage, others as a disadvantage. Such findings add to the literature on the use of pidgins and creoles in education and need further investigation.

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY

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- ▶ Findings suggested that the bilingual language policy in PNG which used Ball's (2010) approach No. 5 needed to be reviewed. According to Skutnabb-Kangas (1999), it is one of the weak models of bilingual education and it seems to be encouraging bilingual education only as a bridge to learning English which does not help the development of Tok Pisin and vernacular languages and their cultures. Therefore the study recommends that if in future the GoPNG wishes to re-introduce bilingual education programs:

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY cont'

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- ▶ The Government maintains the then bilingual language policy which is based on Ball's (2010) Bilingual Approach No. 5 (modified 'early-exit' and 'late-exit' approaches)) with major improvements on the areas discussed in this study OR
- ▶ Ball's (2010) Approach No. 6, Maintenance bi/multilingual education (or the 'additive approach') which is a stronger model of bilingual education. In the PNG case the role of Tok Pisin in vernacular bilingual program need to be taken into account. In this approach, although one or two more languages are added, they do not displace the mother tongue whether this be a vernacular or Tok Pisin.

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY

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As a result of the pitfalls in the transitional bilingual education programs, the study found that majority of the participants were more inclined to seeing a re-introduction of the previous English-only curriculum to compensate for the deteriorating English standards they witnessed in their children/students in the last 18 - 20 years in when bilingual education (using Tok Pisin and vernaculars) was implemented. Therefore the study recommends that:

- ▶ The NDOE re-introduces the English-only curriculum only as a last resort if the recommendations discussed above, are deemed un-operational or un-realistic.

# IMPLICATIONS for RESEARCH and FUTURE DIRECTION

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- ▶ This study sets a platform for future research in the success and failures of bilingual education programs. The PNG experience demonstrates that more commitment on the part of the NDOE to implement the bilingual education policy in schools is needed and is of a paramount importance to uphold the Matane (1986) doctrine on instilling Papua New Guineans with an education relevant to their needs and participation in society. The NDOE has a duty to develop and implement uniform bilingual schooling systems nationwide that will serve the entire school-aged populations and guarantee them relevant basic education thus taking into consideration the language and culture of the students. Therefore, this study recommends that:

# IMPLICATIONS for RESEARCH and FUTURE DIRECTION

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- ❑ Future research within the same context but with a larger population sample from all regions; Momase, Highlands, Southern and New Guinea Islands is needed to confirm or extend the findings of this study for the benefit of Papua New Guinean children.
- ❑ Without limiting the theoretical framework adapted in this study using the mixed methods paradigm further research might consider employing only either a quantitative paradigm approach or a qualitative paradigm approach based on the successes of pidgin, creole or mother tongue based bilingual education programs in other countries. The inclusion of children's views in this study without the influence of parents and teachers is very important as it sets a precedent in PNG's bilingual education history which calls for further research.

# CONCLUSION

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- ▶ To conclude, it is imperative that more research work is done to add to what is known about using Tok Pisin and vernacular languages in bilingual education programs. Evidence suggests that knowledge gained from further investigations in different settings and different population samples will provide a more comprehensive view of the bilingual education programs.
- ▶ Lastly as per the 2016 PNG Update theme ‘Sustaining Development (in PNG) Beyond the Resources Boom’, I would like to add that Tok Pisin and vernacular languages are here to stay, Tok Pisin in particular is a fast changing language that has been seen nationally as the language of unity and development among ordinary Papua New Guineans down to the grassroots level . It began as a bastardised pidgin language but has now been recognised internationally among linguists as a fully-fledged language with a grammar of its own.

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