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ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR LATIN AMERICA
Office for the Caribbean

CARIBBEAN DEVELOPMENT AND CO-OPERATION COMMITTEE

Meeting on Removal of Language Barriers
Belize City, Belize
4-7 April 1978

REPORT ON MEETING ON REMOVAL OF LANGUAGE BARRIERS

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MANDATE

The Second Session of the Caribbean Development and Co-operation Committee (CDCC), held in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, 16-22 March 1977, agreed to the following:

> "in an effort to undertake special measures and programmes to overcome language barriers, (a) a Joint CEPAL/UNESCO mission is proposed in order to establish with government officials the priority target groups, and also (b) a meeting of experts to be convened in order to advise on teaching methods appropriate to the respective target groups." 1/

2. At its Seventeenth Session held in Guatemala City, Guatemala, from 25 April to 5 May 1977, the Economic Commission for Latin America (CEPAL), in resolution 372 (XVII), requested the CDCC "to proceed with the implementation of the tasks assigned for the period between second and third session of the CDCC observing the priorities decided by the Committee and, in particular, the proposals for the Caribbean Documentation Centre, the Removal of Language Barriers, and for Science and Technology for Development." 2/

3. A Consultant, engaged by CEPAL/UNESCO, visited most CDCC countries to carry out an initial survey of foreign language teaching policies, facilities and methodology in the Caribbean. This report was included in documentation for the meeting.

1/ Report of the Second Session of the Caribbean Development and Co-operation Committee (CDCC), /E/CEPAL/CDCC/21/Rev.1 - E/CEPAL/1039/

2/ Resolution 372 (XVII), E/CEPAL/1030/Rev.1.

4. Under the joint sponsorship of the Caribbean Development and Co-operation Committee (CDCC), and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the meeting on Removal of Language Barriers was hosted by the Government of Belize in Belize City, Belize, from 4 to 7 April 1978.

ATTENDANCE 3/

5. Representatives of the following member countries of the Committee attended the meeting: Dominican Republic, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Republic of Cuba, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago. Belize was also present as Associate Member of the Committee.

6. A representative of UNESCO also attended the meeting.

7. In addition, special consultants were also present.

AGENDA

8. The Agenda for the meeting was as follows:

1. Exchange of information on foreign language teaching in Caribbean countries:
   - (a) for international communication;
   - (b) for national language policy reasons.

2. Identification of foreign language teaching needs:
   - (a) Short term needs:
     - identification of target groups
     - foreign language teaching for specific technical co-operative projects
     - rationalization of existing services
     - up-grading of existing institutions.

3/ A full list of participants and consultants appears in Appendix I.

(b) Medium term needs:

- reforms in education system (curriculum, materials, methodology, teacher training, research)
- creation of machinery for new functions outside the education system (e.g. translation and interpretership)
- the use of the media in reducing communication barriers.

3. Regional co-operation in development of foreign language teaching.

4. Utilisation of external sources of assistance.

5. Adoption of Final Report.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

9. At the Plenary Sessions, the report of the consultant on "Initial Survey of Foreign Language Teaching Policies, Facilities and Methodology in the Caribbean", papers presented by other consultants and government representatives together with oral presentations on national experiences formed the basis of discussions. The list of papers presented is given in Appendix II.

10. The meeting agreed to constitute two Working Groups. Working Group I concentrated on identification of target groups and their training programmes. Working Group II concentrated on regional co-operation in development of foreign language teaching and the utilisation of external sources of assistance.

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

11. The general consensus of the meeting was that, except in one case, the teaching of languages in the Caribbean countries - national language, mother tongue, official or foreign languages - was being carried out within severe limitations and constraints with the result that the output was unsatisfactory both quantitatively and qualitatively. It was felt that the elimination of language barriers should be focused at two levels, each having a different priority. These were:

- internal linguistic barriers
- barriers to communication at Caribbean and international levels.

I. Internal linguistic barriers

12. It was stressed that adequate teaching of the mother tongue and of the official language is linked with the output of the whole educational system. Very high rates of absenteeism observed in Haiti were attributed to the deficiencies in language teaching. In the Dominican Republic there appears to be a "degradation" of the mother tongue; it has been observed that the vocabulary possessed by secondary school students was getting narrower and narrower and the command of syntactic structures was also becoming weaker.

13. The diglossic (i.e. functional specialization of languages) situation prevailing in most non-Spanish-speaking countries, causes very negative impacts on the use and learning of languages. Where the vernacular is lexically related to the official language, one observes a continuum of situations whereby the population sometimes does not distinguish when one or the other language is spoken. This is particularly the case of Haiti where the learning of foreign languages by rural migrants add to the confusion by strengthening the idea that the vernacular is not a language. In the case of Suriname and the Netherland Antilles, the vernaculars are observed as quite definite languages in view of the history of their predominance and the fact that they are not related to the official language. Nevertheless, the functional specialization of the vernacular and the official language leads to a situation whereby bilingualism is only apparent - one may say that the population commands

half languages, a specialized half for private life and the other half for public life.

14. The situation of Belize appears quite different since apart from vernacular (English creole) there is a predominance of two languages of Caribbean and international communication. The problem raised seems to be at what point to introduce one or the other language in the school system. Furthermore, exposure to Spanish and English is quite different from exposure to Standard English or Standard French in other Caribbean diglossic situations. The particular circumstances in Belize may have an important bearing on language teaching.

15. It was agreed that the learning process of the children should start by the teaching in, and of their mother tongue; when a good command of the mother tongue is achieved extensive programmes of foreign language teaching would be more effective. However, this problem should be solved within specific national contexts.

16. Before any progress can be made it will be necessary for considerable research to be carried out at the theoretical level (e.g. the study of Creole itself), and at the technical level (development of methods and techniques and production of teaching materials). In view of well-entrenched vested interests militating against the vernacular, political decisions may be required.

17. The use of the vernaculars also implies overcoming resistance of parents, preparation of qualified and motivated teachers, the production of adequate teaching material and the standardization of the vernacular.

18. It was suggested that the use of the media to teach foreign languages in diglossic situations may seriously affect the context of language teaching as it tends to give more prestige to languages of international communication thereby adding to the discrimination against the vernacular. The media should be used principally as a means for imparting basic knowledge and eliminating resistance (mentioned in paragraph 17 above), and then used for teaching foreign languages.

19. In relation to teaching materials, the urgent need was stressed of producing adequate Caribbean literature and of dissemination of information on the Caribbean countries where the same vernacular was spoken. Mention was also made of the possibility of stressing as a long-term objective pan-Creole communication.

20. In summary, there does not appear to be a national language policy in most of the countries. In most cases there is need to stimulate theoretical research and to produce adequate teaching materials. The training of teachers and their re-training is of the utmost importance, since they constitute the key target group for the whole process of foreign language teaching.

II. Intra-Caribbean Language Barriers

Training and Research

21. It was stressed that the basic elements needed for foreign language teaching were research programmes and production of materials; these will need to be created in most cases and reinforced where they exist at present. The development of linguistic and language teaching research implies three levels of actions:

(i) Research at local level for specific courses and purposes, using such generalized methodology for the development of specialized courses as they exist;

(ii) Standardization and centralization at a Caribbean level;

(iii) Connections with the worldwide academic community.

Target Groups

22. The identification and training of specific target groups is seen as the end product of the overall process of establishing a proper language teaching policy and of the process of social and economic development. In this context, the problem of training and re-training language teachers, the fundamental target group, is recognized as the most important.

23. It was stated that the process of intra-Caribbean technical co-operation could be accelerated by establishing a proper and well qualified system of translation and interpretership service. While each Caribbean country may not individually have the possibility of fully utilizing a national team of interpreters and translators, consideration should be given to organizing on a regional basis a pool of such experts. While the formation of a translation and interpretership service has been initiated to meet specific needs and challenges, experience has shown that it has served as a catalyst in general foreign language teaching and may provide motivation for the learning of foreign languages. This may be significant because if a proper selection of candidates is made and an assurance of employment given, a team of translators and interpreters could be trained in less than six months.

24. It was pointed out that efforts to increase the teaching of foreign languages should not be done in isolation but that it should be integrated in the whole developmental strategy. It is necessary to create a whole context in which the skills acquired in language could have a meaningful use. In addition, the development of foreign language teaching would be facilitated by actions taken to create an awareness of the similarity of cultural forms and living in the various Caribbean countries.

25. As a long term objective, one might envisage a co-ordination of education systems which would facilitate both foreign language learning and cultural exchange by, among other things, mutual recognition of educational qualifications to permit students to complete part of their training in different countries.

Existing Resources

26. It was felt that the existing resources for foreign language teaching were not fully utilized and there was much scope for rationalization. This applied at all levels - individual country, bilateral and multi-lateral. In this context, mention was made of the language institutions existing in Barbados, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and possibly in Grenada; the technical assistance schemes between Cuba, Guyana and Jamaica; those involving countries outside the CDCC; and international organizations. Co-ordination and rationalization of all these facilities implied and required political decisions, which if secured, could lead to immediate short term action.

27. There is also need to tap accumulated experience in other regional schemes and ventures and especially the South East Asian Regional Language Centre which has been working on similar problems. UNESCO should be requested to facilitate such an exchange of experience.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND DECISIONS

28. The meeting unanimously agreed to the reports and recommendations of the two Working Groups which were set up. It also recommended that the CDCC Secretariat take the necessary action with Governments either jointly or severally or with organs and agencies of the United Nations system, or with other organizations involved in linguistic and language problems in order to implement the recommendations contained therein.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF WORKING GROUP I

1.

Member countries should take steps to institute the use of the mother tongue as the language of instruction in the early years of schooling. The modalities of this process - identification of the mother tongue, standardization of the vernacular, transition to the standard where it is different from the mother tongue, point of introduction of the second and foreign languages in the curriculum - must be decided by the individual countries but support in terms of action and resources should be provided at the sub-regional level. In addition, teaching of the mother tongue and/or the standard language must be reformed in order to facilitate the mastery of verbal expression in its widest application and laying the foundation to facilitate the acquisition of foreign languages later in the school system and for specific purposes.

2.

A working group comprising a small number of linguists and teachers should be set up to investigate:-

- the improvement of the quality of teacher training in the light of the observed inadequacies of foreign language teaching;
- the improvement of the teaching of the official language as a second language, in view of the fact that in a number of countries which have at least one vernacular language, the teaching is inadequate;
- the need for research into language learning with special regard to the needs of speakers of indigenous languages which do not have a known writing system;
- the use of electronic media for language teaching.

3.

With respect to target groups it is recommended that these be not identified in advance; they will be defined by developments in technical co-operation and other areas of contact. Furthermore, the teaching of foreign languages in advance of need, as well as running counter to modern teaching theory is counter productive because it reduces motivation and because communicative skills atrophy if they are not used. In so far as target groups are identifiable now, they are:-

i. personnel relating to technical assistance agreements now in existence among countries speaking different languages (physicians, agriculturalists, fishermen, construction workers, aviation workers, sugar technologists, sport coaches, hotel employees, secretaries;

ii. translators and interpreters because they can be trained reasonably quickly and without excessive cost, especially in the context of sub-regional co-operation. This will reduce expensive dependence on external sources and the effect of such career outlets will stimulate student motivation in the learning of foreign language;

iii. teachers of foreign language: every effort should be made by countries of the sub-region, in collaboration with relevant sub-regional, national and international institutions to improve and expand teacher training.

4.

Reforms of the educational system are necessary in order to provide three levels for language training:

i. at the basic level, the inculcation of verbal ability and linguistic intuition;

ii. at a more advanced level, courses related to specific programmes of study

iii. at the adult level, a wide range of courses with the objective of creating communicative competence in specific areas.

The long term aim should be a level of bilingualism or multi-lingualism for all citizens which would enable them to achieve Caribbean-wide communication.

5.

Continuous testing should be introduced in language teaching processes and be closely adapted to course objectives as opposed to fixed formal examinations. National and inter-governmental examination authorities should monitor the quality of tests and testers to certify the acceptability of the tests.

6.

There is a need for intensive programmes of language teacher training. In view of the scarcity of resources within the sub-region it is recommended that a system of itinerant teams of teacher trainers be established to be used on request in member countries for specific purposes. International support should be requested in this field. In addition, there should be programme for the exchange of language teachers between member countries and an alternative scheme of young volunteers to be used as native speakers of a foreign language in schools.

7.

There is need for substantial development in research activities in the field of language teaching (vernacular, official and foreign languages) both on theoretical and technical grounds.

8.

The important reports and studies on the problem of language barriers in member countries should be made available to other countries. The Documentation Centre at the CDCC Secretariat should provide a referral service and arrange for translated abstracts to be provided to the requesting party.

The translation of documents elaborated in Caribbean languages that are spoken by a minority of countries should be utilized as one motivational component to the training of translators and interpreters referred to in Recommendation 3(ii) above.

9.

Any national or regional directory of skills should include a list of translators and interpreters.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF WORKING GROUP II

1.

There is need to reiterate the relevant resolutive paragraph in the Constituent Declaration of the CDCC which gives the rationale for the importance of the removal of language barriers in order to achieve the objectives of the Committee particularly with respect to technical co-operation. These paragraphs relate, inter alia, to joint complementation projects in the field of education and public health, training and development of human resources, and setting up cultural exchange programmes.

2.

The overall work programme for the removal of language barriers should include:

a) the study of local languages in order to re-evaluate Caribbean cultures and foster their development;

b) the need for higher educational institutions to intensify research into and study of all languages of the sub-region particularly vernacular and indigenous languages;

c) the inclusion in the curricula of secondary schools and university institutes of regional languages, and subjects dealing with history, literature and folklore, in short, the history of the cultures and civilizations of the Caribbean peoples, with the aim of removing cultural barriers to comprehension;

d) support for current research projects with a view to preparing a "History of the Culture of the Caribbean Peoples" and related school texts.

3.

Exhaustive research in member countries is needed in order to take account of:

a) the diversity and nature of the various official and private bodies devoted to language teaching;

b) the curricula, study programmes, and methodologies used and the duration of studies in these institutions;

c) the teaching and research staff of each institution, their academic training and experience;

d) the capacity for co-operation, either through accepting foreign students or sending teachers and experts to countries of the area;

e) the research projects carried out or in progress in the region;

f) relevant bibliography inside or outside the sub-region on the problems of language teaching within the Caribbean.

4.

There is need for closer collaboration among CDCC member countries in order to facilitate and promote:

a) the interchange of existing programmes in the language training institutes with a view to arranging exchanges among students, taking the experiences acquired into consideration in the requirements of the study programmes of the university in which the complete course is being followed through;

b) the setting up of a scholarship programme which will help to implement the project referred to in (a);

c) regular meetings between representatives of the various institutions in the sub-region in order to discuss both the internal and the external problems of language barriers and find solutions to particular national features of teaching in both formal and non-formal education;

d) the holding of seminars with the aim of solving specific problems of linguistics applied to language teaching;

e) the improvement and expansion of current projects and creating new ones in the region on new methods and the appraisal of educational results;

f) enhancement of the role of the current language teachers' associations and increasing the links with similar international organizations and participation in international events;

g) the circulation of regular publications, books, reviews, pamphlets and research papers on language teaching, in the context of formal and non-formal education.

5.

The CDCC Secretariat should be requested to:

a) explore all possibilities of external resources available in order to finance studies and implement sub-regional co-operation projects;

b) ensure that members of the CDCC Committee present to the General Assembly of UNESCO, scheduled for October 1978, a specific request for technicalaassistance and financing for research into regional resources in language teaching and the mechanism for co-ordinating them for use in the countries;

c) seek support from national, sub-regional, and international specialized organizations for holding meetings of teachers and researchers in studies in the humanities relating to the languages and cultural situations of the Caribbean.

6.

The need for setting up a sub-regional Centre for co-operation and exchange of information in carrying out foreign language teaching and for research on the linguistics, methodology, cultures and civilizations of the member countries, in connection with the teaching of a foreign language was stressed. The initial task of co-ordinating the setting up of the Centre and the exchange of information will be the responsibility of the Secretariat until it can function independently. In setting up the Centre, every effort should be made to pool and utilize resources already existing in the sub-region.

Appendix I

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

1. Members of the Commission

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3. United Nations System

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5. CEPAL System

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Appendix II

LIST OF DOCUMENTS

CDDCC/LB/1 CDCC/LB/1 Corr.1	-	Initial Survey of Foreign Language Teaching Policies, Facilities and Methodology in the Caribbean by Denis Solomon
CDCC/LB/2	-	Draft Provisional Agenda
CDCC/LB/3	-	Foreign Language Teaching for Special Co-operation Projects by Daphne E. Adams
CDCC/LB/4	-	The Language Programmes of Haitian Educational Radio by Michel Bourgeois
CDCC/LB/5	-	Foreign Language Teaching in Cuba
CDCC/LB/6	-	Translation and Interpretation Services by Luis H. Garcia
CDCC/LB/7 CDCC/LB/7/Corr.1	-	Teacher Training in the Development of Foreign Language Teaching by Daphne G. Cuffie
CDCC/LB/8	-	Some Strategies for Inter-Caribbean Co-operation in the Short and Medium Term by Pedro Ureña Rib
CDCC/LB/9	-	Creation of Mechanisms Outside the Educational System to Co-operate in the Elimination of Language Barriers (Translation, Interpretation, etc.) by Cuban Delegation