

# The role of indicators in evaluating language policy

Michele Gazzola

Evaluating language policy is a complex, multi-phased process which is based on several basic parameters. Language policy is never evaluated in an abstract manner, but always by taking various criteria into account. The most important of these criteria include effectiveness, efficiency (interpreted here as cost-efficiency) and fairness. Effectiveness refers to the ability of a policy to produce an impact or results in line with the predefined objectives. Assessing the efficiency of a language policy involves comparing the results achieved with the resources used, i.e. assessing the allocation effects of a policy. Fairness is another important evaluation criterion, but it usually has no moral significance in analyses of public policies. It refers much more to identifying and assessing the distributive impact of a policy on the stakeholder groups. In other words, the aim is to determine who wins and who loses (or who benefits more and who benefits less) if a specific policy is adopted instead of another one. In the case of language policy, the stakeholder groups are generally identified based on their mother tongue or primary school language. Naturally, evaluating fairness as described above can provide useful input for the debate on ethical issues associated with a language policy.

As with every assessment, the criteria of effectiveness, efficiency and fairness initially have to be rendered quantifiable with the help of appropriate indicators. An indicator can be defined in general terms as the unit of measurement for a desired goal, an impact achieved, a quality criterion or a background variable. An indicator provides quantifiable information based on which state players can communicate, negotiate and take decisions. The most important indicators for evaluating a language are those which are linked to the success criteria of the policy itself. Their main function is to semantically present the concept they represent and thereby to provide a quantitative measure of support for language policy decisions.

The presentation shows how the evaluation criteria of effectiveness, efficiency and fairness can be rendered quantifiable and used for language policy evaluation. The role of indicators in the various stages of the evaluation process, their development and their most important features are also highlighted, and various existing indicator systems are presented. The presentation focusses on the meaning of the term "effectiveness" linked to language policy – in particular with regard to the management of multilingual communication – to understand how this concept can be transformed into an operative evaluation instrument which does not reduce communication merely to the transmission of information. Finally, the role of indicators in comparative evaluations of language policy in different countries or administrative regions is discussed, giving some relevant examples for Switzerland, the European Union and Canada.

Contact :  
Michele Gazzola  
Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin  
Institut für Erziehungswissenschaften  
Ökonomie und Sprache / Wirtschaftspädagogik  
Unter den Linden 6  
DE - 10099 Berlin  
+49 30 2093 99411  
gazzola@hu-berlin.de



## Michele Gazzola

Michele Gazzola is a research fellow at the Department of Education Studies at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin and a research fellow at the Institute for Ethnic Studies (Inštitut za narodnostna vprašanja) in Ljubljana. He is currently working on a research project on mobility, inclusion and language policy in the European Union (MIME project).

He completed a PhD in Multilingual Communication Management at the Faculty of Translation and Interpreting of the University of Geneva, a Master of Science in Economics at the University of York and a degree ("laurea") in Public Administrations and Management of International Institutions at the Bocconi University in Milan.