MTB MLE RESOURCE KIT
Including the Excluded: Promoting Multilingual Education

Booklet for Policy Makers
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Contents

Introduction ................................................................................................................. 1

Background to the current MTB MLE movement ......................................................... 1

Part 1: Purposes, benefits and essential features of MTB MLE ................................. 3

Q1: What is the educational situation for children in many minority language communities? .......................................................... 3
Q2: What are the challenges to MTB MLE and what has been done to overcome them? ................................................................. 4
Q3: How does MTB MLE help minority language children achieve a quality education? .......................................................... 5
Q4: How does MTB MLE support gender equity? ...................................................... 12
Q5: How does MTB MLE support social cohesion and national development? ........ 14
Q6: Does MTB MLE cost more than single-language education to implement and maintain? ...................................................... 14
Q7: What are the essential components of successful and sustained MTB MLE programmes? .................................................. 16
Q8: Can it be done? Can strong MTB MLE programmes be established and sustained? .................................................. 23

References .................................................................................................................. 24

Part 2: Research-based answers to questions about mother tongue-based bilingual or multilingual education ............................................ 27

Introduction ................................................................................................................. 27

Q1: Does MTB MLE help students learn the official school language? .................... 28
Q2: Does MTB MLE help students achieve grade-level competencies in other academic subjects? ................................................. 30
Q3: Does MTB MLE prepare students for secondary schooling? ............................ 32
Q4: Does MTB MLE help girls achieve academic success in primary school? ........ 34

Final comments .......................................................................................................... 35
Introduction

This booklet for policy makers describes the purposes, benefits and principles for establishing Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB MLE) programmes for children who are not yet fluent in the official language of education when they begin school. Why do UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP, the World Bank, numerous international organizations and many national governments support MTB MLE? They support it because they have seen that it works! Here is what one well-respected researcher has written about bilingual / multilingual education:

> 40+ years of research from countries around the world have provided a solid basis for planning bilingual education programs.

> Bilingual programs have demonstrated “proof of concept” both for developing fluency and literacy in two languages for linguistic minority and majority students and for promoting academic achievement among subordinated group students... (Cummins, 2008).

Background to the current MTB MLE movement

In 1990, government officials from 155 countries met in Thailand for the first “World Conference on Education for All”. During that conference, they identified the actions that governments should take to ensure that all children and adults in their countries have access to quality education (UNESCO, 1990).

In 2000, government officials from 164 countries met in Senegal for the second “Education for All” (EFA) conference. Once again, delegates agreed on the activities that governments should take to support EFA. Special emphasis at the second EFA conference was on primary school-age children, including those who have traditionally lacked access to formal education (UNESCO, 2000).

Also in 2000, in a meeting at the United Nations (UN) headquarters in the USA, leaders of 189 countries agreed to work together to achieve eight “Millennium Development Goals” (MDGs) by 2015. Goal 2 called on governments to “Ensure that by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling” (United Nations, 2000)

By 2010, however, it was clear that few governments would achieve the Education for All priorities or Goal 2 of the MDGs by the target date of 2015. The Working Group on EFA identified the problem:
The key message to emerge is that failure to place inclusive education at the centre of the Education for All agenda is holding back progress towards the goals adopted at Dakar. Governments have to do far more to extend opportunities to hard-to-reach groups such as ethnic minorities, poor households in slums and remote rural areas, those affected by armed conflict and children with disabilities (UNESCO, 2010, p. 8).

Why did the EFA Working Group emphasize ethnic minority children in this document? Here is what they said:

One reason that many linguistic and ethnic minority children perform poorly in school is that they are often taught in a language they struggle to understand. Around 221 million children speak a different language at home from the language of instruction in school, limiting their ability to develop foundations for later learning (Ibid. pp. 10-11).

In September 2015, in another meeting at UN headquarters, leaders from 193 countries agreed to work together to implement seventeen “Sustainable Development Goals”. Goal 4 calls on all governments to “Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning” (United Nations Development Programme, 2015).

All the booklets in this MTB MLE Resource Kit support the EFA goals for inclusive education, focusing specifically on education for children in minority or non-dominant language communities. It is based on the recognition that “Education For All” will not truly be “for all” until children from every language community have access to schooling in a language they speak and understand. This booklet also explains the principles and processes that help students in strong MTB MLE programmes to become fluent readers and writers in their mother tongue (MT) and in the official school language(s).

As noted by UNESCO, the benefits of MTB MLE go beyond education. Strong, well-planned MTB MLE programmes also help to support national development and build social cohesion:

Education has a vital role to play in building resilience against violent conflict. Schools in the twenty-first century need above all to teach children what is arguably the single most vital skill for a flourishing multi-cultural society – the skill of living peacefully with other people... Awareness of religious, ethnic, linguistic and racial diversity should not be banished from the classroom. On the contrary, diversity should be recognized and celebrated (UNESCO, 2011, p. 23).

This booklet has two parts. Part One describes the purposes, benefits and essential features of MTB MLE for children who do not hear or use the official school language at home. Questions that are frequently asked about MTB MLE serve as headings in each section. Answers are based on lessons that have been learned from experiences in planning and implementing MTB MLE programmes around the world. Part Two presents a summary of recent research relating to MTB MLE and lessons we can draw from that research.
Part 1: Purposes, benefits and essential features of MTB MLE

When students have solid knowledge developed in their mother tongue, they can learn Vietnamese faster and better. The MOET has assigned its best and most experienced specialists to work on the Action Research on MTBBE in cooperation with UNICEF, and we recognize that this approach is an effective solution for ethnic minority education (Le Tien Thanh, Director, Primary Education Department, MOET, in UNICEF 2012. p. 6).

Q1 What is the educational situation for children in many minority language communities?

Children from minority language communities often face significant educational challenges:

- If they have access to a school—many do not—their teachers use a language they do not understand and they are not allowed to use their home language or mother tongue (MT) in the classroom or on the school grounds.

- If their school has textbooks—many do not—they are written in the official school language and focus on the dominant culture. The students’ own knowledge and experience, gained at home and in their community, are excluded from the classroom.

- They are expected to learn to read and write in a language they do not yet understand.

- They are expected to learn new math, science and other concepts in a language they do not understand or are in the process of learning.

For these students, school is an unfamiliar place teaching unfamiliar concepts in an unfamiliar language. Teachers who do not speak the students’ home language may think their students are “slow” because they have trouble understanding the lessons. Without support from their teachers, many students become frustrated and discouraged. The fact that more than 50 percent of the world’s out-of-school children come from minority language communities is not surprising when we consider the difficulties that those children encounter in schools that use only a dominant language.
This was the problem in the Philippines before 2009 when the government officially recognized and supported MTB MLE in the formal education system. When parents in one language community were asked how their children were doing in school, they reported that:

_The children feel out of place. They ask us questions at home in our language that they were ashamed to ask in the classroom because the teacher speaks to them only in Filipino and English_ (Parent of a Grade 1 child in the Philippines; in Malone, 2001, p. 10).

When teachers use only the official school language in the classroom, the unspoken message for minority language children is that their home language is not “good enough” to be used in school. When lessons focus on the dominant culture and ignore all that the students know and have experienced in their home and community, the message is that their own culture and their life experiences have no value. Of course, some minority language students do manage to succeed in spite of the many barriers to learning in dominant language-only schools. But the cost is too high for too many of them. To be successful in the dominant language and culture they must abandon their own.

**Q2 What are the challenges to MTB MLE and what has been done to overcome them?**

People who support MTB MLE in different parts of the world encounter many challenges as they try to plan and implement strong programmes. Here are a few of the challenges:

- People think that MTB MLE is not necessary. (“Everyone in this country understands the school language. It’s our national language!”)
- People think that MTB MLE is impossible. (“There are too many minority languages!” Or, “Some languages do not have an alphabet!”)
- There is no language and education policy that provides official support for MTB MLE so local, district or provincial officials who do not understand its purpose and benefits can force schools to cancel their MTB MLE programmes.
- There is an MTB MLE policy but it allows only weak programmes that move students out of their MT and into the official language too quickly. As a result, students do not have time to build the strong foundation in reading and writing their MT that will help them learn the official language(s) and other subjects successfully.
- There is an MTB MLE policy and it does allow for strong programmes but it does not provide the necessary funding or assign responsibility for planning and implementing the programme components that are necessary for success and sustainability.
As noted, these are only a few of the many challenges to MTB MLE. The good news is that people involved in MTB MLE programmes have identified strategies to overcome the challenges, even in difficult situations. As you read this booklet and others in this MTB MLE Resource Kit, you will learn about some of the creative ways that policy makers are working with programme implementers and community members to develop and sustain strong and successful MTB MLE programmes.

Q3 How does MTB MLE help minority language children achieve a quality education?

When children begin their formal education, they bring with them the language, knowledge and skills that they have learned from parents and others in their home and community. All of these are essential resources for helping them to achieve success in school.

Students in “mainstream” schools who use the official school language at home can learn to read and write in that language because they already understand it. MTB MLE students, who do not hear the official language at home, learn to read and write in their MT—the language they know best. As they gain confidence in reading and writing their MT and have achieved a basic level of oral fluency in the official school language, they are ready to begin reading and writing that language. As noted in the introduction to this booklet, there is no longer any argument among researchers regarding the benefits of bilingual and multilingual education. MTB MLE students who achieve fluency in reading and writing their MT are prepared—and have the confidence—to transfer their literacy skills to additional languages.

Language education in well-planned six-to-eight year MTB MLE programmes (ideally one or two years of pre-primary and six years of primary school) follows a step-by-step process. This process is based on the principle that underlies all good education: *We learn best when we can use what we already know to help us understand what is new.* Because MTB MLE students know their MT when they begin school, it is their foundation for learning other languages. MTB MLE students may take longer than mainstream students to achieve fluency in reading and writing the official school language, but they achieve success because they understand.

The step-by-step diagram below displays the essential features of language education in successful MTB MLE programmes. As noted above, students continue learning and using their MT throughout primary school as they also learn other languages. The diagram (starting at the bottom step) thus includes MT as subject and as language of instruction from the first year (pre-primary or Grade 1) to the last year of primary school.
They learn additional languages as required in the curriculum.
Students continue developing oral and written fluency in both languages.
Teachers use the MT to support the school language for instruction.

They begin reading and writing the official school language.
They continue developing oral fluency in the official school language.
Students continue developing oral and written fluency in the MT.
Teachers use the MT and the official school language for instruction.

They begin learning the official school language.
They learn to read and write in the MT.
Students develop fluency in the MT and expand their school vocabulary.
Teachers use only the MT for instruction.

Students expand their MT vocabulary and develop confidence in using the MT in school.
Teachers use only the MT for instruction.

Progression for teaching languages as subjects and using them for instruction in MTB MLE.¹

Following is a short description of the main features (in orange) of each step in the diagram, starting at the bottom and moving to the top.

Students expand their MT vocabulary and develop confidence in using the MT in school. Small children quickly learn to enjoy school when they can use their MT to talk about things they know and do every day. They develop confidence in using their MT for learning when their teacher introduces new concepts in the MT and then encourages them to share ideas, work together to solve problems and report on what they have done. They expand their MT school vocabulary when their teacher introduces new MT terms gradually and always in a meaningful way.

¹ Adapted from Malone, 2010.
They learn to read and write in their MT, beginning with short and simple stories about people and places that are familiar and interesting to them. They learn how letters are put together to make words and how words are put together to make sentences. Their teacher encourages them to create their own “picture stories” even before they can form letters and spell correctly—the first step in becoming confident and creative writers. They also practice writing MT letters, words and then sentences neatly and correctly.
Rajbanshi pre-primary students find words in poster stories. (Nepal) © SIL International, Nepal

They begin learning the official school language when their teachers introduce it using activities that make language-learning fun. Teachers use a carefully constructed plan that adds new words and phrases each day, always building on what the students know to help them learn new words and new sentence constructions.

When students demonstrate that they are ready, teachers begin asking questions in the official school language about familiar topics that students can answer in single words or short phrases. Their answers gradually get longer, and soon they can use their new language to talk about a variety of topics relating to their everyday life. As they build their “everyday” vocabulary in the official language, they also gain an understanding of its basic grammar. The entire process aims to help students learn the language through meaningful interactions rather than by repeating and memorizing words and phrases that they do not understand.
They begin reading and writing the official school language. When students have learned to read and write their MT and have a basic level of fluency in speaking the official school language, they begin transferring their reading and writing skills to the school language.
They learn additional languages as required in the curriculum. Many MTB MLE students are required to learn three or more languages in primary school. The process for learning each new language follows the same basic steps as for learning the official school language.

Below are the other essential features of MTB MLE classrooms:

**Teachers use only the students’ MT for instruction in early primary (usually to the end of Grade 2).** Young MTB MLE students learn successfully and gain confidence because they use their MT to learn and apply new concepts as they are also learning to speak, read and write the school language.

**Teachers use the MT and the official school language for instruction in middle to upper primary (usually Grades 3-5).** When students have gained confidence in using the official school language to talk about familiar topics, teachers use it with the MT for teaching math, science and other academic subjects:

- They introduce a new concept in the MT and provide an activity that helps students understand it.
- They carefully introduce 1-3 important academic terms (Examples in English: solar system, planet) relating to the new concept in the official school language. Then they use the terms as they briefly review the concept, speaking carefully and checking that students understand. They provide a short team activity relating to the new concept and encourage students to use their new language as they work together.
- They finish the lesson with a short review of the concept in the MT, checking again to make sure students understood the concept.
Teachers use the MT to support the official school language in the final year of the programme. Teachers introduce and teach concepts in the official school language and encourage students to use it as they do activities together. Teachers continue to speak carefully to help students understand. They introduce 1-3 new terms relating to the lesson that students will need to know as they continue into higher grades. Then teachers finish the lesson by using the students’ MT to check for comprehension.

The year-by-year schedule below is an example of the way this process might look in a seven-year MTB MLE programme for children who have at least some exposure to the L2 outside of the classroom. You will notice that the students (age 5) begin learning to read and write in their MT in pre-primary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Pre-Primary</th>
<th>Grade 1</th>
<th>Grade 2</th>
<th>Grade 3</th>
<th>Grade 4</th>
<th>Grade 5</th>
<th>Grade 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Languages as subjects</td>
<td>Oral L1</td>
<td>Oral L1</td>
<td>Oral and written L1</td>
<td>Oral and written L1</td>
<td>Oral and written L1</td>
<td>Oral and written L1</td>
<td>Oral and written L1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Begin L1 literacy (2nd semester)</td>
<td>Begin L1 literacy</td>
<td>Oral written L1</td>
<td>Oral and written L2</td>
<td>Oral and written L2</td>
<td>Oral and written L2</td>
<td>Oral and written L2</td>
<td>Oral and written L2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Languages for teaching</td>
<td>L1 only</td>
<td>L1 only</td>
<td>L1 only</td>
<td>L1-L2-L1</td>
<td>L1-L2-L1</td>
<td>L1-L2-L1</td>
<td>L2-L1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In summary, MTB MLE students achieve success in school because...

- The language and culture, knowledge and experience they bring from their home and community are the foundation for learning when they begin school. Each grade builds on the knowledge and skills that they have already learned to help them understand new concepts and learn new skills.

- They gain confidence in using one or more official school languages through activities that are meaningful and enjoyable. By the end of primary school they are prepared to use the official school language(s) to continue learning in secondary school and beyond.

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2 L1: first language or MT; L2: official school language (MTB MLE students’ 2nd school language)
Q4 How does MTB MLE support gender equity?

In spite of international efforts to improve gender equity in education, girls in many countries are still more likely than boys to lack access to a quality education. Girls from language minority communities are the most disadvantaged of all:

From UNESCO:

*Women and girls are disproportionately represented amongst the world’s most marginalized people. In developing regions overall, despite improvements since 1990, many millions of girls are still not in school. Nearly two-thirds of the world’s 796 million illiterate people are women, and a high proportion of these are from ethnolinguistic minority communities.*

*Women from minority groups are often particularly excluded from opportunities to improve their situations. They suffer the “compound” impact of discrimination based on gender and discrimination based on ethnic, religious or linguistic diversity* (UNESCO Bangkok, 2012, p. 24).

MTB MLE provides specific benefits for girls from minority language communities because

- When girls are able to use their home language in school, they gain confidence in their ability to learn and to use what they learn.

- MTB MLE encourages communication between parents and teachers. Parents are able to visit their daughters’ school and meet their classmates, teachers and other school staff. This helps parents feel more confident that their daughters are in a safe learning environment.

- As girls build confidence in their ability to learn and to communicate what they know, they are encouraged to take leadership in the classroom and to help other students who might have learning problems. Successful interactions in the classroom build girls’ confidence in their ability to take responsibility outside the classroom.
Pashai girls happy to be learning in school. (Afghanistan)
© Serve, Afghanistan

Patani Malay G2 student explains a lesson to her classmate. (Thailand)
© Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia, Mahidol University, Thailand
Q5 How does MTB MLE support social cohesion and national development?

None of the 196 nations recognized in the world today are truly monolingual. Multilingualism is the norm, even in those countries that recognize only one official language. In the past, policy makers may have assumed that “development” was possible only if all citizens used a single language. Most language and education policies from those years required teachers to use only the officially recognized language for teaching. Teachers were even told to punish students who used their home language in the classroom or on the school grounds. Since then, many educators have realized that dominant language-only classrooms do not support “Education for All”. Many policy makers have realized that language-exclusive education does not necessarily teach students to respect people from different backgrounds or prepare them to contribute positively to national unity and development. In fact, a study of language policy in Africa concluded that:

...political stability, peace, poverty reduction, economic development, and fully functional institutions require the recognition of linguistic and cultural plurality as indispensable resources (Wolff, 2011. p, 47).

There is now broad agreement that, with increasing globalization, countries that affirm and support multilingualism and multiculturalism are more prepared to deal with social, cultural and religious differences in their own country and in other countries. Well-planned and well-supported MTB MLE programmes encourage students to be proud of their heritage language and culture and prepare them to interact successfully with people who look, talk, act and believe differently than they do.

Q6 Does MTB MLE cost more than single-language education to implement and maintain?

Policy makers, especially in low-income countries, may assume that MTB MLE is much more expensive than education that uses only one language. However, if we compare the cost of MTB MLE with the social and economic costs of inadequate or failed education for children from minority language communities, it is clear that MTB MLE is a wise long-term investment. Here is what researchers found about costs and benefits of bilingual education in Guatemala:

The benefits of bilingual education for a disadvantaged indigenous population as an investment in human capital are significant. Students of bilingual schools in Guatemala have higher attendance and promotion rates, and lower repetition and dropout rates. Bilingual students receive higher scores on all subject matters, including mastery of Spanish. The efficiency of bilingual education is confirmed by a crude cost–benefit exercise. A shift to bilingual schooling would result in considerable cost savings because of reduced repetition. The higher quality of
education generating higher promotion rates will help students complete primary education and will substantially increase completion rates at low cost. The costs saving due to bilingual education is estimated at $5 million, equal to the cost of primary education for 100,000 students (Patrinos and Velez, 2009, p. 1).

Although MTB MLE does require additional "start-up" funding, the amount is far less than is sometimes assumed. With respect to reading materials, for example, experiences in many countries have shown that glossy pages and multi-coloured illustrations are not necessary and, in fact, are often a distraction for children from non-print environments who are just learning to read. The most important feature of reading materials for early primary grades is that they are in the students' MT, about topics that are familiar and interesting to them and with simple illustrations that they understand. Black and white line drawings and paper covers are fine if students like the stories and recognize the people in the pictures.

In summary, MTB MLE is more cost effective than monolingual education in multilingual countries because it reduces high repetition and dropout rates for children from minority language communities. When all factors are considered, it is safe to say that

...supporting effective MT based programs in multiple mother tongue languages is a better investment than continuing to fund an education system that is failing to educate children in any language. The cost of inattention to language is that millions of dollars will continue to be wasted on education programs that are ineffective—and millions of children will lack access to a quality education (Phlepsen, 2011, p. 4).
Q7 What are the essential components of successful and sustained MTB MLE programmes?

A study of MTB MLE programmes that have been established and sustained within formal education systems reveals that all successful programmes include the same basic components. The diagram below places the components in a circle to emphasize that activities relating to each component often take place at the same time and most will continue, often in cycles, throughout the life of the programme.

Responsibility for planning and implementing MTB MLE is usually divided among policy makers, education officials, NGO representatives, school principals, teachers and community members. If MTB MLE is to succeed, policy makers’ input and clear directions are essential, especially for these components:
Preliminary research. Policy makers identify the organizations and/or individuals who will be responsible for conducting preliminary research in each language community. They ensure that the research provides clear answers to questions like these:

- What language(s) do students in each school understand and use at home? 3
- What national, regional and local resources can be mobilized to support MTB MLE?
- What national, regional and local factors might delay or hinder programme implementation and sustainability?

Realistic implementation plan. If policy makers are responsible for an MTB MLE pilot programme, they set the time frame for the pilot and ensure that it is implemented in a language community that has an established alphabet and MT speakers who can serve as teachers. After the pilot programme, policy makers identify the criteria for expanding the programme to new schools and then new languages. They also identify the agencies and organizations that will develop the expansion plan.

Acceptable alphabets. Policy makers identify institutions and/or organizations that will support communities in creating new alphabets (if the language has not previously been written) or revising existing ones if the alphabet is outdated or MT speakers find it too difficult. Policy makers also ensure that there is a process in place for testing, revising and approving new or revised alphabets.

3 A “language map” that identifies schools with students from only one or two language communities is a valuable resource for planning an MTB MLE pilot project and later for expanding the programme to new schools and then new languages. A report of the language mapping project in Viet Nam can be found at http://www.unicef.org/vietnam/resources_20765.html
Curriculum and instructional materials. Policy makers provide clear directions regarding MTB MLE curriculum, focusing specifically on these points:

- Teachers use only the MT for instruction in early grades. They use the MT and the school language for instruction in middle to upper primary and they use the MT to support the school language in the final year of the programme. (See the language education example above.)

- Students’ MT is taught as a subject (listening, speaking, reading and writing) from the first year of the programme to the end of primary school. The MT is the first language of literacy and provides the foundation for learning to read and write other languages.

- The curriculum provides time for students to gain a basic level of oral fluency in the official school language before they are expected to read and write it.

- Tests for math, science and other academic subjects are given in the language(s) used for instruction for that subject. When the students’ MT and L2 are both used for instruction, tests include items in both languages so they are assessing students’ knowledge of the subject, and not their L2 ability.

- Mainstream and MTB MLE learning competencies for all academic subjects except the official language(s) are the same for all primary grades; only the language of instruction is different. (Again, see example above.)

- Grade 1-5 learning competencies for the official school language are adjusted to allow more time for MTB MLE students who must learn to understand and speak the language before they can read and write it.

- Mainstream and MTB MLE learning competencies for the official school language are the same only in the last year of primary school.

- Instructional materials, based directly on the MTB MLE curriculum, are developed for each grade and provided for each teacher in the programme. Since MTB MLE teachers are bilingual and biliterate, their teaching materials can be written in the official school language.

Reading and learning materials. Policy makers ensure that capable and respected MT speakers from the minority language communities are identified and equipped to develop graded reading materials and other classroom materials in the students’ MT. Policy makers also ensure that sufficient numbers of those materials are printed and distributed to each classroom and that there are safe storage containers to keep them.4

4 A resource for developing MT graded reading materials can be found at http://bloomlibrary.org/landing.
Chakma experts create classroom materials in their language. (Save the Children, Bangladesh)
© Save the Children, Bangladesh

LLEME teachers prepare to take graded MT reading materials back to their classrooms. (LIBTRALO, Liberia)
© Liberian Translation and Literacy Organization, Liberia
**Teacher recruitment and training.** Policy makers provide clear directions for recruiting and training teachers for MTB MLE:

- Teachers who are fluent in the students’ MT and understand and speak the official school language are recruited for MTB MLE schools in their language area.

- MTB MLE-specific pre-service teacher training courses are developed and incorporated into regular teacher training programmes in established institutions.

- MTB MLE teacher trainees do their practice teaching in their home areas and in schools that understand and support MTB MLE.

- MT teachers are assigned and encouraged to remain in their home language area and in schools that understand and support MTB MLE.

- Supervisors are responsible for providing regular in-service training.5

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5 A resource for institutionalizing teacher training can be found at http://www.sil.org/sites/default/files/files/institutionalizing_teacher_training_for_mtb_mle_12-2011.pdf (Note that you must have Adobe Reader to view this document.)
Monitoring and evaluation. Policy makers assign responsibility for assessing MTB MLE students’ progress as well as programme components such as pre-service and in-service training and materials. They give specific attention to these points:

• Supervisors make regular visits to each MTB MLE classroom and provide written documentation of their observations.
• Testing for each subject each year is in the language that teachers use for instruction in that subject.
• Each component of the MTB MLE programme (the circle diagram in p. 16) is evaluated during and at the end of the pilot phase and as the programme expands.6
• People responsible for implementation use programme evaluation results to make necessary adjustments to the programme as needed, and specifically at the end of the pilot and at each stage of expansion.

Supportive partnerships. Policy makers foster an atmosphere of cooperation among all supporting agencies—government, NGOs, universities and others—in working with local communities to develop and sustain strong programmes.

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6 An example is UNICEF’s end-of-pilot evaluation of the MTB BE pilot project in Viet Nam. See http://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/index_90456.html
Supportive MTB MLE policy. Policy makers understand that successful and sustained MTB MLE requires a strong and supportive language and education policy. They begin with a carefully planned pilot project in a limited number of languages and schools and use the knowledge gained in that process to develop the long-term policy. In addition to the issues described in the paragraphs above, policy makers ensure that their national language and education policy includes these points:

- A clear statement of the school years that will be included in the programme: Beginning in Pre-primary (if possible) or Grade 1 and continuing to the end of the last year of primary school.

- A clear statement that after the pilot project is successfully completed, MTB MLE will be incorporated into the formal education system with a clear statement of responsibility for developing the expansion plan.\

- Criteria for selecting the minority languages that will be used in the programme as it expands.

- A clear statement regarding the rate of expansion after the pilot project (needed to guard against too-rapid expansion, which leads to loss of quality and programme death.)

- Identification of the department within the Ministry of Education that will have overall responsibility for MTB MLE.

- Clear directions to ensure that the necessary financial support will be available to implement and sustain the programme as it expands to new schools and new languages.

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7 A resource for planning MTB MLE expansion can be found at http://www.sil.org/sites/default/files/files/planning_for_mtb_mle_program_expansion.pdf
Can it be done? Can strong MTB MLE programmes be established and sustained?

Throughout the world, and in spite of many challenges, the number of MTB MLE programmes is growing. The lesson we can learn from those experiences is that when government agencies work in partnership with non-government organizations and language communities, they can develop and sustain strong MTB MLE programmes. And surely, when “Education for All” also includes children in minority language communities, the results will be worth the effort.

Multilingual education is, at its best, (1) multilingual in that it uses and values more than one language in teaching and learning, (2) intercultural in that it recognizes and values understanding and dialogue across different lived experiences and cultural worldviews, and (3) education that draws out, taking as its starting point the knowledge students bring to the classroom and moving toward their participation as full and indispensable actors in society—locally, nationally, and globally (Hornberger, 2009, p. 2).
References


Part 2: Research-based answers to questions about mother tongue-based bilingual or multilingual education

Introduction

This part of the booklet for policy makers presents research relating to MTB MLE programmes in several parts of the world. The purpose is to answer questions that you as policy makers might ask as you are planning for MTB MLE in your country.

Several issues relating to MTB MLE research are worth noting at this point:

1. Most of the MTB MLE research in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Pacific is quite recent. MTB MLE programmes have been established for many decades but there is little information about the educational outcomes of those programmes because student assessment results are not available.

2. Many communities with MTB MLE programmes lack funding so they cannot afford to support a large number of schools. Even when programme leaders provide careful documentation, the number of students included in the research is small—sometimes very small.

3. The most extensive research on MTB MLE has been completed in the USA and Canada but research evidence from these countries is often less convincing to policy makers in other parts of the world.

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8 This part of the policy maker’s booklet was written by Stephen Walter, PhD., Graduate Institute of Applied Linguistics, Dallas Texas, USA
Fortunately, the number of research studies relating to MTB MLE is increasing. This section presents information from studies of programmes in five countries—Cameroon, Guatemala, the Philippines, Viet Nam and Thailand. The information presented here aims to provide answers to the following questions:

- Does MTB MLE help students learn the official school language?
- Does it help students achieve grade-level competencies in other academic subjects?
- Does it prepare students for secondary schooling?
- Does it help girls achieve academic success in primary school?

**Q1 Does MTB MLE help students learn the official school language?**

Three studies, from the Philippines, Thailand and Cameroon, help to answer this question. The studies examine the results of student assessments in two kinds of schools in each country. (Note that in each country, students in both kinds of schools use the same MT at home)

- MTB MLE (or simply “MLE”) schools in one language area that use the students’ MT plus the official school language
- Non-MLE schools in the same language area that use only the official school language

Over a period of up to six years, researchers assessed students’ progress in both kinds of schools and in more than twenty different field settings to compare students from MLE and non-MLE schools. Each year they assessed all the students using tests that were based on government-approved curriculum. All the tests included at least one section that evaluated students’ proficiency in the official school language.

The results in Figure 1 (p. 29) show students’ progress in learning the official school language.

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9 The author limited this report to these five programmes because (1) he had personal knowledge of how the data were collected or (2) he had done previous work on the data so knew how it could be used to answer the four questions that guide this report. Other information exists but is not publicly available or there is insufficient information about how testing was done and data analyzed.

10 See Part 1 of this booklet for more about teaching the MT as a subject and using it for instruction in MTB MLE schools.

11 One study from Grade 4 in the Patani Malay programme in Thailand is not included in Figure 1. That study compared Grade 4 students in their ability to use standard Thai. Since the results for Grade 4 students in both MTB and non-MTB MLE schools were significantly different than their results in Grade 3 and Grade 5, the team set aside the grade 4 result as being non-typical.
Figure 1: Comparison of MLE and non-MLE programmes with respect to students’ proficiency in the official school/national language

The results shown in Figure 1 seem to be typical of what happens when MTB MLE students are compared with non-MLE students from the same MT community on their ability to use the official school language: Children in MLE classes consistently show an advantage of 30-60 percent over students in the same grades in non-MLE classes.

In Figure 1, the result for Kom G1 Oral English (the official school language) is the most reliable of these comparisons because the research team used the same assessment to test students each year for three years. Approximately 300 Kom students in the MLE schools and in the non-
MLE schools were tested each year—a total of approximately 1,800 students. Many people were surprised that even on this measure of oral English, MLE students did much better than students in the non-MLE (English-only) schools.

The greatest difference shown in Figure 1 is in “Kom G3 Eng” reading comprehension. UNESCO and others have repeatedly found that African children in non-MLE schools consistently take 4-5 years to gain basic reading skills. About two-thirds of the students in the Kom MLE schools were reading English—their second school language—by the end of grade 2. This means that the Kom MLE students scored more than twice as high on the assessment of English reading comprehension as the Kom students in non-MLE (English-only) schools.

These and other research data show consistently that using the MT in school does NOT reduce students’ ability to learn and use the official school language. Instead, teaching them to read and write first in their MT, through instruction in the MT, helps them learn to speak, read and write the official school language more quickly and with better comprehension.12

Q2 Does MTB MLE help students achieve grade-level competencies in other academic subjects?

Some people think that non-dominant languages cannot be used in school because they lack the academic terms that students need in order to learn subjects like science, history, mathematics, literature and social studies. Part 1 of this booklet describes the importance of teaching academic terms in middle and later primary. A separate booklet on Implementation describes the process for introducing academic concepts in the MT and then introducing the matching academic terms in the official school language. This prepares students to continue learning the concepts as they move into middle and upper primary grades and to use both the MT and official language for learning.

Is the lack of academic terms in the students’ MT a problem for MLE students in early primary grades? To help answer this question, Figure 2 displays research that compares MLE students and non-MLE students’ assessment results in math, social studies and science.

12 Part 1 of this booklet helps to explain why and how MTB MLE helps students gain proficiency in speaking, reading and writing the official school language.
When we compare the performance of the two groups of students, it is clear that MTB MLE students have consistently done better than students from their language community who attend non-MLE schools. The advantage for MLE students is generally between 15 and 50 percent. It should be noted here that in the research literature on educational innovations in western countries, improvement rates of 5 to 10 percent are usually considered very acceptable. Improvement rates greater than 20 percent, especially in a large population, are surprising. Many/most people would have difficulty believing that improvement rates of 50 percent are possible.

The Kom math scores in grades 2, 4 and 6 provide an important lesson to policy makers. In this programme (an "early-exit" programme\textsuperscript{13}), MT instruction stopped at the end of grade 3 and instruction in grades 4, 5 and 6 was in English only. At the end of Grade 3, children in the twelve Kom MLE schools had an average math score of just under 60 percent. In grade 4, after a full year of instruction in English-only classrooms, the average score for this group dropped to 40 percent and after grade 6 the average score dropped to 38 percent. The move from MLE to English-only classrooms reduced the performance of those children by close to 50 percent.

\textsuperscript{13} “Early-exit” programmes use the MT for instruction for three years or less and then take students out of their MT and use only the official school language for instruction. Late-exit programmes use MT-only for instruction in early to mid-primary and then use a mix of the MT and official school language for instruction. The research literature provides solid evidence that late-exit programmes are educationally more effective than early-exit programmes.
Meanwhile the math scores for children who had been in English-only classrooms for all of their basic education gradually increased from 24.9 percent in grade 2 to 34.3 percent in grade 6. This very slow rate of improvement might reflect their slow process of learning English well enough to understand the content of their classes.

**To summarize:** Research relating to this question shows us that MT instruction does not delay children's academic progress in early education. In fact, we see the opposite. Children in MLE schools learn more than students from their same language community who attend non-MLE schools. An important point from the Kom research is that students in the early-exit MLE programme suffered educationally when they moved to English-only instruction after Grade 3.

**Q3** Does MTB MLE prepare students for secondary schooling?

Research evidence on this question is still scarce. In order to collect the necessary information, researchers need to follow the progress of individual students for five or six years after they finish primary school. Fortunately, there is data from two research studies, one from Guatemala and one from Cameroon that help to answer this question.

In 1999-2000 two researchers conducted a survey of four secondary schools in Guatemala that had mostly indigenous Mayan students. The researchers asked the Mayan students whether the primary school they attended for their basic education provided instruction only in Spanish or in some combination of Spanish and their MT. The survey produced 1,202 usable responses. The results are reported in Figure 3.

**Figure 3:** Primary school background of Mayan children in secondary schools

![Bar chart showing predicted vs actual number of students in Spanish-medium and bilingual (MT) schools.](chart.png)

- Predicted: 810 Spanish-medium; 392 Bilingual (MT)
- Actual: 620 Spanish-medium; 582 Bilingual (MT)
Based on official enrollment information from the Guatemala Ministry of Education, approximately 33 percent of Mayan students attend bilingual (MT & Spanish) schools. Based on that information, we could predict that, of the 1,202 Mayan high school students who responded to the survey, about 392 would come from bilingual or MT-medium schools. In Figure 3, this is what “Predicted” means at the bottom of the graph on the left side.

In the survey however, 582 of the 1,202 students said they came from bilingual schools. (These are the numbers in the “Actual” column in Figure 3.) These statistics show us that bilingual education raised the rate for attending secondary school by 48 percent among Mayan students.

In the case of Guatemala, it is a bit difficult to know which factors—academic, psychological, emotional, political or a combination of these—were most important in preparing the Mayan students for secondary education. Also, we know that some teachers in the ‘bilingual schools’ use more Spanish than MT for teaching. Even so, the effect of bilingual education schools for the students is highly significant in showing the relationship between bilingual and multilingual education in primary grades and higher rates of participation in secondary education.

In Cameroon, the Kom experimental study followed Kom students’ progress through six years of primary school (2006-2013), even though the MTB MLE students had moved out of their MT and into English after Grade 3. At the end of primary, all students can take a competitive exam to qualify for secondary school. When researchers analyzed the results of those exams, they found that, among the Kom children who qualified for secondary school, 70 percent came from the Kom MLE schools while only 30 percent came from the English-only schools.

Even though the number of Kom children who finish primary school in just six years is quite small, the percent of Grade 6 Kom students who did well on secondary qualifying exam is quite large. From research evidence on mother tongue-medium education we can assume that Kom students’ advantage would have been even greater if their MLE programme continued to the end of Grade 6 rather than ending at Grade 3.

To summarize: While more research evidence is needed on this topic, the information we do have shows that MTB MLE does increase the probability that students will move on to secondary schooling.
Q4 Does MTB MLE help girls achieve academic success in primary school?

In this section researchers looked for evidence that MTB MLE helps girls succeed in primary grades. Over the years, research studies have indicated that girls normally do just as well as boys in school when they can use their own language for learning in early grades. There is some evidence that MLE schools may help girls more than boys with respect to achieving academic success in early grades.

Figure 4 (below) presents the results of assessments from three countries—Cameroon, Thailand and Viet Nam. Results are divided between girls (orange) and boys (blue). As before, the more lightly shaded bars show performance in non-MLE programmes (labeled “standard”) and the darker bars show performance in MLE schools.

**Figure 4**: Boys and girls in MLE and non-MLE programmes

[Bar chart showing performance of girls and boys in MLE and non-MLE programmes in Cameroon, Thailand, and Viet Nam.]

In all cases, girls in MLE schools did better in learning academic content than girls in non-MLE schools. In Figure 4, we see that girls in mother tongue schools made the most dramatic gains in Kom G3 Language Arts and Vietnam G2 Math. The smallest gains were seen in Kom G6 Math. The Patani Malay (PM) programme is interesting in that girls did better than boys in most subjects even in standard schools.
To summarize: The research studies that are available at this point show that MTB MLE does help girls to achieve academic success in primary school. We can assume as above, that as more girls achieve academic success in primary school, the doors to secondary education will also open to them.

Final comments

The evidence is quite clear that forcing children from minority language communities to attend schools that do not let them use their MT for learning leaves those children educationally, economically, politically, and socially marginalized. Ultimately, implementing MTB MLE is a choice between two costs. One is the social and economic cost of leaving a significant part of the population undereducated, year-after-year. The other is the economic cost of implementing MTB MLE programmes that have been proven effective in meeting the educational needs of children from minority language communities. Only one of those two choices is likely to enable multilingual nations to achieve quality education for all.