Advocacy Kit for Promoting Multilingual Education: Including the Excluded

Policy Makers Booklet
Advocacy Kit for
Promoting Multilingual Education:
Including the Excluded

Policy Makers Booklet
Advocacy kit for promoting multilingual education: Including the excluded.
5 booklets.

[content: Overview of the kit; Language in education policy and practice in Asia and the Pacific; Policy makers booklet; Programme implementers booklet; Community members booklet]

1. Multilingualism. 2. Education policy. 3. Language of instruction. 4. Mother tongue.

ISBN 92-9223-110-3

Cover photo: SIL International

© UNESCO 2007

Published by the UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education
920 Sukhumvit Road, Prakanong
Bangkok 10110. Thailand

Printed in Thailand

The designations employed and the presentation of material throughout the publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of UNESCO concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning its frontiers or boundaries.
Introduction

Since UNESCO first initiated its programme of Education for All in 1990, many governments have increased their efforts to meet the educational needs of children and adults in their countries. Although much has been done, certain groups remain under-served – girls and women, in general, people who are poor, people with special needs, people with HIV/AIDS, and people who speak non-dominant or minority languages.

Whether they are from indigenous or migrant communities, learners who do not understand the official language are at a great disadvantage when they begin school:

*It is an obvious, yet not generally recognised truism that learning in a language which is not one’s own provides a double set of challenges: not only of learning a new language but also of learning new knowledge contained in that language. These challenges may be further exacerbated in the case of certain groups who are already in situations of educational risk or stress such as illiterates, minorities and refugees.*

The best way to overcome these challenges is through “mother tongue-based multilingual education” (MLE). In strong MLE programmes, learners from non-dominant language communities use their own language for learning in the early grades as they are also learning the official language as a subject. As the learners gain competence in speaking, reading and writing the national language, teachers begin using it for teaching. The best MLE programmes encourage learners to use both languages for communication and for learning throughout primary school.

UNESCO’s recognition of the important relationship between language and education is clear in the organization’s three-part rationale for supporting multilingual education:

1. *UNESCO supports mother tongue instruction as a means of improving educational quality by building upon the knowledge and experience of the learners and teachers.*

2. *UNESCO supports bilingual and/or multilingual education at all levels of education as a means of promoting both social and gender equality and as a key element of linguistically diverse societies.*

---

3. UNESCO supports language as an essential component of inter-cultural education in order to encourage understanding between different population groups and ensure respect for fundamental rights.2

The rest of this booklet provides further information about mother tongue-based MLE programmes. Questions that are frequently asked about MLE serve as headings for the different sections. Answers to the questions include quotations from educators, government officials, researchers, and people from minority language communities around the world.

Questions and Responses:
Language and Education in Minority Language Communities

Q1. What is the educational situation for members of non-dominant or minority language communities?

Many members of non-dominant or minority language communities, especially those living in remote areas, face significant challenges when they try to get a good quality basic education:

- Some have no access to school at all; others have access to schools, but not to trained teachers – or teachers of any kind.
- Even if schools are adequately staffed, many of the teachers use a language that the learners do not understand.
- Textbooks and lessons focus on the language and culture of the dominant group. If the learners are unfamiliar with that culture, as many are, it is very difficult for them to understand the concepts that are being communicated.
- Teachers who come from the dominant language society may consider the learners “slow”. They may fail to appreciate – or may even look down on – the learners’ heritage language and culture.

For these learners, school is often an unfamiliar place teaching unfamiliar concepts in an unfamiliar language. Such was the case described by an educator who visited a classroom in a minority language community in India in which Hindi was the language of instruction:

The children seemed totally disinterested in the teacher’s monologue. They stared vacantly at the teacher and sometimes at the blackboard where some [letters] had been written. Clearly aware that the children could not understand what he was saying, the teacher proceeded to provide even more detailed explanation in a much louder voice.

Later, tired of speaking and realizing that the young children were completely lost, he asked them to start copying the [letters] from the blackboard. “My children are very good at copying from the blackboard. By the time they reach Grade 5, they can copy all the answers and memorize them. But only two of the Grade 5 students can actually speak Hindi,” said the teacher.\(^3\)

Forcing children, or adults, to attend schools that use a language they neither speak nor understand hinders rather than helps them to develop their potential as productive members of society. When lessons constantly focus on the world outside their community and ignore all that they know and have experienced, the not-so-hidden message is that their own language, culture and experiences have no value. This is how schooling causes children to lose respect for their community, their parents and themselves. One parent in Papua New Guinea has described such a situation in this way:

---

When children go to school, they go to an alien place. They leave their parents, they leave their gardens, they leave everything that is their way of life. They sit in a classroom and they learn things that have nothing to do with their own place. Later, because they have learned only other things, they reject their own.\(^4\)

The result, in many cases, is that learners who want to succeed in the formal education system can do so only at great cost, by sacrificing their linguistic and cultural heritage:

They [language minority communities] are allowed into that mainstream life – if at all – only by leaving behind their ethnic and linguistic identity and taking on the language and culture of the dominant society. This is not a new process. It is the long, well-known, well-documented, and sad history of minority communities throughout the world.\(^5\)

**Q2. How does mother tongue-based multilingual education (MLE) improve the educational situation for learners who do not understand or speak the official language when they begin school?**

Mother tongue-based MLE programmes enable learners to begin their education in the language they know best. As they use their own language for learning, they are introduced to the new (official) language and begin learning to communicate in that language. At the same time, teachers help the learners develop their academic vocabulary in the new language so they can understand and talk about more abstract concepts.\(^6\) *In the best programmes, learners continue to develop their ability to communicate and to learn in both languages throughout primary school.*

The “steps” below help to illustrate the progression of language learning in strong MLE programmes:

---


6 This process is based on the educational principle that concepts learned in one language are easily transferred to another language once the learners have developed the necessary vocabulary in the new language. (See Cummins, J. 2000. *Bilingual Children's Mother Tongue: Why Is It Important for Education?*)
Having established an educational foundation in their home language, students begin learning the new language, first orally and then in written form. They do not stop using their first language as soon as they have achieved basic competency in the new language. Rather, they continue using both languages for learning, at least through primary school:

*When children continue to develop their abilities in two or more languages throughout their primary school years, they gain a deeper understanding of language and how to use it effectively. They have more practice in processing language, especially when they develop literacy in both, and they are able to compare and contrast the ways in which their two languages organize reality.*

The most important features of this process are that:

- Education begins with what the learners already know, building on the language and culture, knowledge and experience that they bring with them when they start school;
- Learners gradually gain confidence in using the new (official) language, before it becomes the only language for teaching academic subjects; and
- Learners achieve grade level competence in each subject because teachers use their home language, along with the official school language, to help them understand the academic concepts.

---

7 Some researchers find that the L2 can be introduced early, as long as teachers continue to use the children's home language as one of the languages of instruction throughout primary school.

Q3. *What is the relationship between mother tongue-based MLE and development in general?*

Education programmes that exclude certain segments of the population make it difficult for those groups to take an active role in local or national development because such education

… does little to equip them [students] with the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to contribute positively to community or national development.⁹

Education-for-development should ensure that all learners – no matter which home languages they speak – can develop to their fullest potential and contribute to their own well-being as well as to that of their community and their nation:

---


The five million people of PNG speak over 800 distinct languages. Until 1993, English was the language of the formal education system. Recognizing the negative impact of English-only education, the PNG government revised its entire primary education system in 1995. By 2005, mother tongue-based MLE programs had been established in over 400 of Papua New Guinea’s 800+ languages.
The principle objective of a nation, we believe, should be to encourage and facilitate the development of all its members and the larger system(s) of which it is a part… National development is not so much a matter of what governments do as it is of what they enable the governed to do.\(^\text{10}\)

All cultural groups, large and small, have acquired strategies for making the most of the world in which they live. Every language has the ability to communicate the knowledge and wisdom its speakers have developed over generations. The nation as a whole benefits when people from a variety of cultural backgrounds, speaking different languages and having different perspectives, share their ideas and plan together for a common future. One of the long-term goals of strong MLE programmes in non-dominant language communities is to ensure that their members will gain the knowledge, skills and confidence to participate in and contribute to the development of the nation as a whole:

Our greatest national resource is the diversity of cultures in our country. Diversity means more viewpoints to clarify, more ways of solving problems, more creative ideas, a greater ability to deal with change… Where diversity is crushed…the nation becomes weak and divided.\(^\text{11}\)


\(^{11}\) Dr. John Waiko, Minister of Education PNG, 2001.
Government support for strong MLE programmes demonstrates to all citizens that minority languages, and those who speak the languages, are valued. MLE programmes that help learners to build a good “bridge” between their home language and the official languages help to build national unity without forcing people to sacrifice their unique linguistic and cultural heritage. Experiences around the world have demonstrated that denying or suppressing people's linguistic and cultural heritage has been a cause for division and strife. MLE supports unity through affirming diversity rather than instead of diversity.

Q4. **What is the relationship between mother tongue-based MLE and gender equality?**

In 1993, linguistic researcher Corson found that the three groups most affected by unjust language policies and planning in education are women and girls, the poor, and groups with languages not represented in formal structures. The injustice is clearly greatest for those who experience all three conditions simultaneously. Gender research has demonstrated that unless girls and women are working in markets or factories, they are much less likely than boys and men to be exposed to an official language because their lives are more often restricted to the home and family where the local language is spoken. This means that girls are less likely than boys to understand school instruction. Unfortunately, this difference goes unnoticed because girls are given fewer opportunities to speak and are expected to perform less well than boys. In spite of increasing international awareness of the need to achieve gender equality in education, girls are still more likely than boys to be denied access to schooling, and girls from minority language communities are frequently the most disadvantaged of all.

Multilingual education provides more opportunities for girls to get a good education.

*Gender considerations cross cut... situations of educational risk, for girls and women may be in a particularly disadvantaged position. In most traditional societies, it is the girls and women who tend to be monolingual, being less exposed either through schooling, salaried labour, or migration to the national language, than their sons, brothers or husbands.*

Mother tongue-based multilingual education provides specific benefits for girls from minority language communities:

- Parents may be more confident in putting their girls in schools that teach the community language, and, by association, a familiar culture and set of values. In addition, parents have access to information about enrollment and schooling processes in their language. Girls may be encouraged to stay in school longer if their language continues to be used, along with the official language.

- MLE programmes encourage communication between parents and teachers, enabling more community participation in school activities. This helps to ensure that schools respond to community needs and values.

---

Male teachers who come from the same linguistic and cultural communities as their students may be less likely to exploit their female students because they are more subject to social control. Teachers who interact socially with students’ families are potentially more trustworthy and/or more subject to social control, reducing the risk that they will abuse girls sexually or otherwise.

Because girls can communicate as freely as boys in their home language, they are able to demonstrate in the classroom that they learn as well as boys. Teachers are more likely to see that they should give girls the same opportunities that they give boys.

Opportunities to teach in their home communities, with teacher training close by, encourages more women to become teachers. This provides female students with more role models and also provides more women with income-earning opportunities.13

---

Q5. What about cost? Are multilingual education programmes expensive to implement and maintain?

Some people oppose mother tongue-based MLE because they think that it will be too expensive to implement and maintain. However, studies in the field of language economics, analyzing the cost of language-related public policies, have found that MLE programmes have a very reasonable cost, especially given their long-term benefits:

“The added expenditure entailed by moving from a monolingual to a bilingual education system is much smaller than commonly believed. Where evaluations have been made, they point in the direction of a 3-4 percent range, because even if the education system were to remain monolingual, children would have to be schooled anyway. Therefore, only comparatively modest additional financial outlays need to be factored in.”

Perhaps it would help to put this issue into perspective if, rather than asking how much MLE costs, we ask: What is the cost of an educational system that results in failure for most learners who do not speak the official language at home?

If we compare the cost of establishing an MLE programme with the social and economic costs of inadequate or failed education for minority language learners, it is clear that multilingual education is a wise long-term investment, as some World Bank studies on cost-effectiveness have shown. For example, one study using Ministry of Education data from Guatemala compared the repetition and drop-out rates of two groups of Mayan students – one in a bilingual education programme and the other in an L2 (Spanish-only) programme and found the following:

“A shift to bilingual schooling would result in considerable cost savings, as a result of the reduced repetitions, saving the government more than 31 million quetzals (U.S. $5 million), which equals the cost of providing primary education to about 100,000 students per year.”

Another study using data from Guatemala and Senegal found that the cost of publishing in local languages represents only a fraction of a percent of the recurring education budget (0.13% in the case of Guatemala), and startup costs can be recovered after two to three years.

---


Q6. **What are the features of a strong and sustainable MLE programme?**

MLE programmes require innovative thinking and cooperation among individuals, organizations and agencies – the “stakeholders” in the programme. The graphic below displays the “essential components” of the strongest programmes.\(^{17}\)

Although policymakers are not usually involved in the actual implementation of mother tongue-based MLE programmes, their active support is essential for the programmes’ long-term success. One of their most important contributions is in establishing a political climate that supports strong mother tongue-based MLE. There is more international recognition than ever before that language and education policies are essential to providing access to better quality schooling for all, including those who speak non-dominant languages.\(^{18}\)

---


With respect to creating a supportive political environment, the best policies are those that establish multilingual education as an integral part of both formal and non-formal education systems and include clear directives for implementation and support. Important policy decisions include:

- Stating clearly which grades in primary school (and ideally, in secondary school) will be included in the programme.
- Institutionalizing the programme by establishing structures within an appropriate government agency to take responsibility for coordinating implementation and support.
- Establishing on-going sources of funding that are specifically designated for the MLE programme.

Policymakers also contribute to the success of mother tongue-based MLE by fostering an atmosphere of cooperation among all the supporting agencies – government, NGOs, universities and others – in working with local communities to develop and sustain strong programmes. A third and essential activity is helping to ensure that adequate funding is provided for planning, implementing and sustaining the MLE programme at national, sub-national and community levels.
Q7. Can it be done? Can strong mother tongue-based MLE programmes be established and sustained?

With encouragement and support from UNESCO, UNICEF and other multilateral and bilateral agencies, mother tongue-based MLE programmes have been and continue to be established throughout the world. In the Asia and Pacific region, programmes have been implemented or are being planned in Papua New Guinea, China, Thailand, Cambodia, Bangladesh, India and Solomon Islands, to name only a few. The hope is that these programmes will “light the path” for others who recognize the need but have not yet taken the steps to ensure that “Education for All” will, indeed, be for everyone.
Principle I:
UNESCO supports mother-tongue instruction as a means of improving educational quality by building upon the knowledge and experience of the learners and teachers.

1) Mother-tongue instruction is essential for initial instruction and literacy and should be extended to as late a stage as possible.

2) Literacy can only be maintained if there is an adequate supply of reading material, for adolescents and adults as well as for school children.

3) All educational planning should include at each stage early provision for training, and further training, of sufficient numbers of fully competent and qualified teachers of the country concerned who are familiar with the life of their people and able to teach in the mother tongue.

Principle II:
UNESCO supports bilingual and/or multilingual education at all levels of education as a means of promoting both social and gender equality, and as a key element of linguistically diverse societies.

1) Communication, expression and the capacity to listen and dialogue [should be encouraged] first of all in the mother tongue, then, [if the mother tongue is different from the official or national languages] in the official [or national] language in the country, as well as in one or more foreign languages.

2) Emphasis should be given to the formulation of strong national policies designed to promote...languages teaching in cyberspace [and strengthening and extension of international support and assistance to developing countries] to facilitate the development of freely accessible materials on language education in the electronic form and to enhance human capital skills in this area.

Principle III:
UNESCO supports language as an essential component of inter-cultural education in order to encourage understanding between different population groups and ensure respect for fundamental rights.

1) Measures should be taken to eliminate discrimination in education at all levels on the basis of gender, race, language, religion, national origin, age or disability or any other factor.

2) The educational rights of persons belonging to... minorities, as well as indigenous peoples, should be fully respected through:
   - the implementation of the right to learn in the mother tongue and the full use of culturally-appropriate teaching methods of communication and transmission of knowledge;
   - the teaching of and through, not only the MT, but also the national or official languages...so that minorities and indigenous peoples will have the opportunity to participate in and contribute to the larger community.

3) Education should raise awareness of the positive value of cultural [and linguistic] diversity, and to this end:
   - Curriculum [should] promote a realistic and positive inclusion of the minority [or indigenous] history, culture, language and identity.
   - The cultural component of language teaching and learning should be strengthened in order to gain a deeper understanding of other cultures; languages should not be simple linguistic exercises, but opportunities to reflect on other ways of life, other literature, and other customs.
References


Department of Education. 1991. Education Sector Review. Waigani, Papua New Guinea, Department of Education.


## Glossary of Terms – Languages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dominant language</td>
<td>Language spoken by the dominant social group, or language that is seen as the main language of a country&lt;br&gt;May have official or national language status even if it is not spoken by a numerical majority of the national population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign language</td>
<td>Language that is not spoken in the immediate environment of the learner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heritage language</td>
<td>Language of a person’s ancestors or ethnonlinguistic group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home language</td>
<td>Language spoken in the home (see also L1, mother tongue)&lt;br&gt;Some people have more than one home language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L1</td>
<td>First language, native language (see also mother tongue, home language, local language)&lt;br&gt;Refers to language or languages learned from birth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L2</td>
<td>Second language, non-native language, language of wider communication, or foreign language&lt;br&gt;Often refers to contexts where the language is spoken in the wider society outside the home; in bilingual education, refers to second (official, foreign) language introduced after the L1&lt;br&gt;For ethnonlinguistic minorities, the L2 is usually an official and/or national language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language of instruction</td>
<td>Language used for teaching and learning the school curriculum, also called medium of instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local language</td>
<td>Language spoken in the immediate community&lt;br&gt;May refer to languages that are not yet fully developed in written form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majority language</td>
<td>Language spoken by the majority of people in a region/country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority language</td>
<td>Language spoken by a social and/or ethnic minority group&lt;br&gt;Sometimes used to refer to the language of a numerically large group that is not dominant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mother tongue (MT)</strong></td>
<td>First language, native language (see also L1, home language, local language)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Language that a person: (a) has learnt first; (b) identifies with or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>is identified as a native speaker of by others; (c) knows best; or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(d) uses most</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **National language** | Language considered to be an important, widely-spoken language in a      |
|                       | country; sometimes also an official language                           |
|                       | Example: India recognizes two official and 22 national languages;       |
|                       | Bahasa Indonesia is both national and official language of Indonesia   |

| **Official language** | Language adopted by a country for public administrative and institutional use, often including schools |
|                       | Example: India has Hindi and English as official languages of the country and a number of different official state languages |
### Glossary of Terms – General

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alienation</td>
<td>Being disconnected from one’s own language and culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>➢  <em>Minority language speakers in dominant language education may later reject their own language and culture</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness-raising</td>
<td>Providing information that can help people achieve the goals and needs that they have identified for themselves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilingual</td>
<td><strong>Individual:</strong> Ability to speak/understand (and sometimes read/write) at least two languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Society:</strong> Presence of at least two language groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competencies</td>
<td>Knowledge, abilities or skills in language or other subjects of the school curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>Teaching plan, content and instructional materials for an education programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominant group</td>
<td>Most powerful social group of the country due to population (numerical majority), economics (wealth) and/or politics (power)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Language</td>
<td>Schooling beginning with the L1 for reading, writing and learning, while teaching the L2 (see <em>multilingual education</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First MLE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender equality</td>
<td>Situation in which women and men have equal conditions for realizing their full human rights and for contributing to, and benefiting from, economic, social, cultural and political development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>Person who has not yet had the opportunity to learn reading and writing in a language she/he understands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>The process of mobilizing people and resources to carry out a new programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>Person or group descended from original or early inhabitants of a region or country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interculturalism</td>
<td>Promotion of mutual understanding and tolerance between ethnolinguistic and/or social groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language minority</td>
<td>Group of people who share a language and often have less power in society due to population (numerically fewer), economics (less wealth) and/or politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Literacy</strong></td>
<td>Ability to read, write, calculate and otherwise use a language to do whatever is needed in life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mainstream</strong></td>
<td>Language and culture of the dominant group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Often refers to schools designed for members of the dominant group that do not meet the needs of linguistic minorities</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Migrant</strong></td>
<td>Person or group that has moved from one region to another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mobilization</strong></td>
<td>The process of organizing a community (and its supporters) to work together to plan and implement a programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Multilingual</strong></td>
<td><em>Individual</em>: Ability to speak/understand (and sometimes read/write) more than two languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Society</em>: Presence of more than two language groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Multilingual education (MLE)</strong></td>
<td>Use of more than two languages for literacy and instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Ideally this begins with developing the L1 and adding other languages gradually</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-governmental Organization (NGO)</strong></td>
<td>Agency that is not part of any national government, often working for community development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Orthography</strong></td>
<td>Standardized system for writing a language, including a script and rules for spelling and punctuation (see also writing system)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sustainability</strong></td>
<td>Setting up a programme so that it will continue for a long time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transfer</strong></td>
<td>What is learned in the L1 contributes to competence in other languages; one only needs to learn to read once</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Writing system</strong></td>
<td>Graphic representation of a spoken language (see also orthography)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>