# Teacher Education for Mother Tongue-Based Education Programs

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## Introduction

The success of mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB MLE) programs—indeed, of all education—depends in large part on the teachers in the classroom.

Teacher education institutions in many countries, often operating in difficult circumstances, do an admirable job of training pre-service teachers to provide instruction for learners in the formal education system using the official school language.  Teachers learn how to present curriculum materials in a way that allows children who understand and speak the school language to gain the prescribed standards for their grade level.  The assumption in teacher education programs for schools that use only the official school language is that all students have the level of fluency they need to learn effectively in that language. However, in many multilingual contexts this assumption is not correct and children from non-dominant language communities tend to do poorly in formal education systems.

There is a growing awareness around the world that MTB MLE is an important part of the solution to the problem of high drop-out and attrition rates among children who do not speak the official school language when they begin their education.  Students in MTB MLE programs must achieve the same grade-level standards as students in mainstream classrooms who speak and understand the official school language.  The difference in MTB MLE programs is that curriculum writers, supervisors and teachers recognize that while their students do not know the school language when they begin school, they *are* fluent in their own language--their mother tongue.

In order for teachers in MTB MLE classrooms to help their students achieve a successful education, the teachers must understand and follow two specific pedagogical approaches.  First, they must begin with what the students already know--their own language and the knowledge and skills they have acquired through living in their own community--and use that as the foundation for teaching new content and concepts.  Second, teachers must help their students to develop oral, written and higher level thinking skills in the language they know best and, at the same time, support the students as they gradually learn the official school language. The goal is that, by the end of the program, students will be bilingual and bi-literate[1], having gained fluency and confidence in using both languages for oral and written

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[1] In most cases, students are expected to learn 3 languages, their home language, the official school language (usually a regional or national language) and an international language.

communication and for life-long learning.

For these reasons, and as seen below, a new approach to teacher education is needed for MTB MLE.   This paper presents the rationale and some basic suggestions for innovative and effective teacher education that supports successful MTB MLE in non-dominant language communities.

## I.  Rationale for adding an MTB MLE component to Teacher Education

*What happens in classrooms where the children do not understand the School language and the teacher cannot speak the language the children understand?*

Most teachers, even in multilingual countries, are trained to instruct children in one or more official school languages.  The problem is that some children, especially those from non-dominant language communities, may not speak or understand the official language(s) when they begin school.  If the teachers cannot speak the students' language or feel it is not permissible to use it, the results are predictable.  As Alidou and Brock-Utne (2010) observe: "the use of unfamiliar languages forces teachers to use traditional and teacher-centered teaching methods" (p. 85). Rather than encouraging meaningful learning, teachers expect only short, one or two word choral responses to their questions. Rather than encouraging higher level writing, they expect their students only to copy and memorize text from the chalkboard or from books.

In many classrooms, teachers observe the lack of self-confidence in students who are not fluent in the official school languages.  Teachers who are familiar with modern learning theories and practice feel trapped.  They know that their students learn best in child-centered, activity-based classroom environments. They know they should encourage their students to talk about new concepts and that students learn best when they can talk with each other about what they are learning.  However, when students do not understand the classroom language, the oral communication needed for effective learning is not possible.  The instructional technique of having students work in small groups cannot be done effectively because the students do not control the classroom language well enough to use it for communication with each other and with the teacher.  In short, the most effective early primary teaching methods are extremely difficult – in many cases, impossible – when the teacher cannot use a language the students understand.

The result is that many teachers feel they must resort to controlling, rather than encouraging, their students. They rarely ask open-ended questions because they realize their students do not have the language they need for extended replies.  The children may memorize passages in the school language and recite them when asked but they do not understand the content of the memorized texts.

*What happens in classrooms where the teacher is able to use a language that the children understand?*

In MTB MLE programs, the students' home language is the **first language** (L1) used in school. Teachers and students communicate in the language the students' know best and the knowledge and experience that students bring from their home and community are the foundation for learning new concepts. Teachers help their students build fluency in understanding, speaking, reading and writing the L1 and then develop oral and written skills in the official language (the **second school language** or L2). In math, science, health, social studies, arts and music, students achieve standard competencies in the L1 as they gain fluency in the L2. By upper primary grades students use both languages for effective communication and learning. In well-planned and implemented programs, students in later primary grades are able to achieve standard competencies in the L2.

Unlike teachers who are not allowed to use their students' home language in school, MTB MLE teachers can incorporate modern learning theories and practices into all class activities. They can assign students to work in teams to do problem-solving activities that use higher thinking skills because the students are using a language they understand. Teachers are also able to begin effective literacy teaching earlier because the language and content of the reading and writing activities are familiar to the students.

As the students build fluency in speaking, reading and writing the L1, teachers introduce them to oral L2 and help them gradually to build confidence in understanding and speaking that language, a key step toward the students' comprehension of official language texts.[2] When the students have built a foundational vocabulary in Oral L2, teachers help the students transfer their knowledge and skill in L1 literacy to reading and writing the L2.

As teachers and students use both languages for different learning tasks, the students have the added advantage of being able to compare and contrast the two languages in ways that develop and increase their verbal and cognitive abilities.[3]

A natural and important question at this point is, "What should be included in teacher training programs to equip teachers to be effective in MTB MLE classrooms?" The next two sections of this paper describe four types of MTB MLE teacher training programs and two issues which must be considered in all of them. The last section then presents recommendations on the content of training programs for MTB MLE teachers.

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[2] Droop, M. & Verhoeven, L. 2003. Language Proficiency and reading ability in first- and second-language learners. *Reading Research Quarterly 38*, No. 1 (pp. 78–103)
[3] Cummins, J.. (2001). Instructional conditions for trilingual development. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism 4*(1), 61-75.

**II. Four types of teacher training programs for MTB MLE**

Effective and sustainable MTB MLE programs require teachers who are fluent in speaking, reading and writing both their students' mother tongue and the official school language. A critical problem is that in most countries, there are too few certified teachers from local language communities who have the level of fluency needed to use both languages in the classroom. Without the advantage of MTB MLE, many of the students who do not speak the school language have done poorly in primary school. Relatively few of them have been able to progress through secondary school and even fewer have qualified for tertiary education institutions. In short, the reason that bilingual teachers are needed for MTB MLE is the same reason they are not available.

To help overcome the serious shortage of teachers for MTB MLE, we suggest four types of teacher training programs. The first three programs are meant to prepare certified teachers for MTB MLE classrooms while the fourth focuses on non-certified teachers who speak a local language. In those cases where there are not enough certified teachers who are bilingual, the teacher training programs would prepare certified teachers who speak only the official language to work with teaching assistants who are fluent in a local language[4].

1. ***MTB MLE incorporated into regular 2-, 3-, or 4-year teacher certification programs.*** In this program, pre-service teacher trainees would have the option of focusing on MTB MLE. Individuals who are bilingual in one of the local languages and the official school language learn how to read and write the local language fluently and how to teach their students to do the same. They learn effective **second language acquisition** (2LA) theories, how to apply the theories in the classroom and how to use the local language effectively as the initial language of instruction. On completion of the program these pre-service teachers will have achieved the same educational qualifications as mainstream teachers with the additional qualification for teaching in MTB MLE classrooms.

2. ***"Fast track" programs for graduates with non-teaching baccalaureate degrees.*** This one-year certification program would provide trainees with the pedagogical knowledge and skills required for regular teacher certification as well as the theories, principles and practical skills (as in #1, above) that they will need in MTB MLE classrooms.

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[4] Some advocates of MTB MLE suggest that dominant language teachers who want to teach in MTB MLE programs should learn the local language. The problem with that idea is that it takes an adult at least three years of intensive study to learn a language well enough to communicate fluently in it and a poor grasp of the students' language is nearly as bad as not using it at all. For that reason we suggest that a better solution is to recruit and equip fluent mother tongue speakers from the students' home communities and provide them with the training they need to serve as L1 teaching assistants. It should be noted that this will require the certified L2 teacher to take on a new role in the classroom. The teacher-TA relationship is another issue that must be included in the MTB MLE teacher training program.

3. ***MTB MLE intensive workshops for experienced certified teachers.*** These 2-4 week workshops would enable certified teachers with experience in mainstream schools to gain the additional theoretical and practical knowledge and skills needed to be effective in MTB MLE classrooms.

4. ***Non-certification training programs for paraprofessional teachers or teaching assistants***. These intensive training workshops would be for individuals from local language communities who are bilingual in their home language and the school language and but lack the necessary educational background to qualify for regular teacher certification programs.  Pre-service and regular in-service training workshops would build their capacity to work with certified classroom teachers who are fluent in the official language but do not speak the children's L1.   Paraprofessional teachers from non-dominant language communities have proven to be effective in situations where certified bilingual teachers are unavailable.[5]  As Bartlett (2010) observes:

> *Extra para-professional support appears to be the most promising alternative*
> *[to single teacher classes of over 60 students] and experience in India has*
> *shown excellent results with the assistance of minimally trained young women*
> *from the community to assist lagging members of the class. (p. 14)*

As students achieve success in formal education as a result of effective MTB MLE programs, more of them will complete secondary school and hopefully, will have the desire to become certified bilingual teachers.   The long-term result should be that this category of training will eventually be unnecessary.

Existing teacher training institutions or teacher education departments of local universities could be sites for all four of these training programs.

**III. Two special issues for teacher education for MTB MLE**

***Building language competence***.  To be effective in MTB MLE classrooms, teachers need to be fluent in using the oral and written forms of their students' home language. Alidou (2003) noted that

> *Many bilingual teachers face serious professional challenges.  They*
> *may be able to speak the [non-dominant] language of instruction, but*
> *they have not mastered reading and writing in that language.* (p. 114)

Language education in the early grades of MTB MLE requires teachers to model reading and writing in the L1 and later in the L2.  Teachers model reading when they read stories to their students in a fluent and interesting way.  They model writing when students describe an experience or create a story together and then dictate the narrative to the teacher who writes it on the chalkboard.

Teacher education for MTB MLE thus needs to begin with an assessment of the

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[5] The authors have observed bilingual Teaching Assistants effectively team teaching with certified official language teachers in MTB MLE classrooms in southern Thailand, Vietnam, and Bangladesh.

trainees' level of fluency in the L1 and the L2. Trainees then need many opportunities to practice speaking, reading and writing both languages so they have achieved fluency and confidence in both by the time they begin teaching.

*Teaching practice with children*.  In many places, MTB MLE is an innovative approach to primary education and its philosophy and teaching methodologies may be new both to teacher trainees and teacher trainers.  Their past experience (as teachers and/or as students) may have been in programs that focused on textbooks and on students' ability to copy and/or memorize passages or main points of the texts.  The emphasis on child-centered and activity-based learning in the students' mother tongue may seem unnatural and unreasonable.

For these reasons, an essential focus of MTB MLE training must be on providing opportunities for trainees to see for themselves how children respond to a child-centered pedagogies and how much children can achieve when they are motivated and empowered through active learning in a language they understand well.  If the trainees only read about MTB MLE and hear about it in lectures, they may not be motivated to implement it in the classroom.  When their training includes preparing interesting learner-centered instruction for real children, they can see why their students will achieve more of the primary grade competencies than they ever have before.

## IV. Components of teacher training for MTB MLE

The following outline presents our suggestions for the essential components of teacher training programs specific to MTB MLE.

### Language (L1 and L2) assessment before training begins

#### Assess trainees' oral & written L1:

- Ability to hear, speak and apply L1 correctly and use it to talk about topics that require abstract language
- Ability to understand and apply the L1 orthography correctly in writing.
- Ability to write neatly and correctly on paper and the chalkboard and to write what the students say (for example, as students tell a story about a shared experience).
- Ability to use and create interesting age-appropriate oral L1 texts (stories, action songs, short poems)
- Ability to read a range of L1 texts aloud, fluently (story books, students' experience stories, and previously published L1 literature, if available).

***Intensive L1 learning*:** Based on the results of their language assessments, trainees receive the type and amount of L1 practice they will need to use L1 effectively in the classroom.

### Assess trainees' oral & written L2.

- Ability to understand the similarities and differences between the L1 and L2 writing systems and to teach their students to understand and compare the two systems.
- Ability to use correct L2 vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation.
- Ability to use L2 to talk about a range of topics from simple to complex and to use abstract terms for each subject correctly.
- Ability to write L2 neatly and correctly on paper and on the chalkboard
- Ability to read a range of L2 texts fluently (graded stories, textbooks, students' L2 experience stories, etc.) to their students
- Ability to use or create a range of oral and written culturally- and age-appropriate L2 texts.

***Intensive L2 learning*.** Based on the results of their language assessments, trainees receive the type and amount of L2 practice they will need to use L2 effectively in the classroom.

***Basic content of all teacher training for MTB MLE —the essentials*.** The following components should be included in all four types of pre-service MTB MLE teacher training.

### Trainees' language development

- Trainees understand and appreciate the central role that language plays in their own and their students' learning.
- They gain fluency in hearing, speaking, reading and writing the L1 and the L2.
- They are able to use both L1 and L2 as languages of instruction.

### MTB MLE students' background knowledge and skills

- Trainees think about their future students, responding to questions such as these: *What do the students know and what can they already do when they begin school? What kinds of knowledge do they learn from their parents, siblings, friends and others in the community? What responsibilities do young children have in the home and community?* If possible, local cultural experts help trainees answer these questions, especially for Year 1. Then for each grade after year

1, teachers from the previous year tell new teachers about what their students can and cannot do. (Especially important: Provide specific information on the students' L2 ability (which L2 teachers tend to over-estimate).

*Learning theories*[6]:
- Developmental learning theory (Piaget): Children learn in predictable stages from very concrete learning experiences to increasingly more complex and abstract concepts.
- Schema theory (Anderson): Children learn new concepts by relating the new to what they already know (their prior knowledge).
- Sociocultural learning theory (Vygotsky): Children learn from others and are able to progress in learning when teachers help them do a challenging mental or physical task that they could not do by themselves.

**Theories and good practices relating to L1 development**
- Trainees become familiar with the process by which small children acquire their first language.
- They learn the importance of providing students with plenty of opportunities to use their L1 and experiment with different ways to express their thoughts and ideas. They become familiar with a range of language development (L1) activities and know how to use them effectively in the classroom.
- They understand the process by which children use their knowledge of their oral L1 to learn to read and write that language. They learn how to introduce children to print, to alphabet knowledge, and to books, how to provide a systematic introduction to sound-symbol correspondence and how to encourage and support meaningful reading.
- They understand the value of graded reading material from the students' own cultural experience and are prepared to work with the community to develop materials that build students' reading comprehension and also affirm their cultural heritage.
- They learn different strategies for helping their students gain confidence in their ability to access and comprehend information from a variety of L1 texts.

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[6] Certified teachers should already have been introduced to learning theories but need to review and apply them to MTB MLE classrooms.

- They are committed to supporting students' continued oral and written L1 development throughout the primary grades and (where possible) into secondary education.

***Theories and good practices relating to second language acquisition.***
- Trainees recognize that many of their future students will begin school with little or no understanding of the official school language (the school L2 in MTB MLE programs). They understand why they need to move in "small steps" to build their students' confidence in understanding and speaking that language and have learned good strategies for making that happen.
- They understand that language learning in both L1 and L2 needs to equip students to use the L2 for meaningful oral and written communication and also to speak, read and write the language correctly.
- They learn that a good L2 speaking and listening vocabulary is an essential pre-condition for successful L2 literacy development.
- They learn how to apply sound second language acquisition (2LA) theories and practices to their students' L2 learning tasks and to provide the students with many meaningful, challenging activities that help them gain confidence in using the L2 for communication and life-long learning.
- When they complete their training, the new teachers are prepared to use these same theories and practices to help the students gain fluency in other languages that are part of the school curriculum.

***Theories and good practices relating to using L1 and L2 as languages of instruction***
- Trainees learn why they need to keep language learning and concept learning separate in early primary grades.
- They realize that children like to be challenged to solve problems and discover meaning.  They learn how to foster the students' learning, using both languages in meaningful and comprehensible ways that help the students' learn grade-level concepts and skills in all subjects.
- They learn how to incorporate language learning into content subjects in middle and higher primary grades and are confident in using "L1-L2-L1" approaches for teaching math, science and other subjects.

### Curriculum and instructional materials

- Trainees become familiar with government standards (competencies) for each grade and understand that those standards are the foundation for the MTB MLE curriculum; they understand that in following the MTB MLE curriculum they will enable their students to achieve the government standards.
- They are familiar with the MTB MLE curriculum and instructional materials and are confident in using all the materials to plan effective classroom activities that enable students to achieve government standards.

### Teaching principles for MTB MLE

- Trainees learn the importance of child-centered, activity-based instructional methods and are committed to using a variety of child-centered activities in their classrooms.
- They learn how to encourage their students through activities that build higher-level thinking skills.
- They understand the importance of providing opportunities for students to talk as an aid to their learning and they plan activities in which students work together with partners and in teams to solve problems, share ideas, ask questions and explain their own thinking.
- They learn how to encourage students to ask and answer questions based on their own understanding of issues and concepts.

### Suggested components of training for certified teachers (types 1, 2 and 3, above)

### Background to MTB MLE

- Trainees understand the educational problems encountered by speakers of non-dominant languages in dominant language-only education systems.
- They analyze case studies of MTB MLE programs around the world to identify program strengths and weaknesses and apply what they learn to their own contexts.
- They evaluate types of MTB BE and MLE programs (cf. Baker 2011). They then analyze the type of program in which they will teach and identify the steps that can be taken to strengthen their program.
- They analyze theories of learning (developmental, schema, sociocultural) and think creatively about ways to apply the theories in their MTB MLE programs.

- They identify principles that guide strong MTB MLE programs and demonstrate activities that put the principles into practice.
- They work in teams to develop the types of questions that encourage students to use higher level thinking in their responses.

### *Instructional methods for MTB MLE —focus on language development*
- Trainees who are fluent in the L1 learn how to help their students develop listening, speaking, and thinking skills in their L1.
- They learn about the two-track approach to introducing L1 literacy; they practice each step of the method so they are prepared to use it effectively in their classrooms.
- Trainees who are fluent in the L2 learn how to introduce and build students' fluency in oral L2.  They become confident in using L2 language learning activities and are creative in planning additional activities and planning ways to use them effectively in their classrooms.
- They learn how to use their students' knowledge of L1 literacy and oral L2 to help them "bridge" to L2 Literacy.  They practice bridging activities and are creative in planning additional activities to use in their classrooms.

### *Instructional methods for MTB MLE —focus on concept development*
- Trainees identify the difference between *language* development and *concept* development and identify the basic principles that guide teachers in helping their students achieve both.
- They understand the importance of meaningful (higher level) learning in addition to memorizing and recalling.
- They understand why students can learn new concepts only when they are learning in a language that they understand well.
- They learn how to introduce students to the abstract L2 terms that the students will need to use as they progress through higher grades; they have a good plan for helping the students to understand the terms and use them correctly.

### *Materials for MTB MLE classrooms*
- Trainees become familiar with MTB MLE instructional materials and their relationship to government standards.
- They practice using the different instructional and learning materials effectively.
- They learn how to develop and use MTB MLE-specific lesson plans.
- They learn how to use graded reading materials effectively and how to encourage their students to create their own stories.

***Documentation and evaluation of MTB MLE classroom activity***
- Trainees learn how to keep relevant records, including portfolios for each student, to track their learning progress.
- They learn the principles of assessing students' progress using a variety of instruments, focusing especially on those that measure students' ability to apply, analyze, evaluate and think creatively.

***Role division in the MTB MLE classrooms.*** Trainees identify and discuss the essential issues to consider with respect to relationships in different MTB MLE classroom settings
- Self-contained classroom with bilingual teacher
- Self-contained classroom with L2 teacher and L1 Teaching Assistant
- Classroom with different L2 teachers for each subject and an L1 Teaching Assistant who teaches L1 as a subject and the L1 part of lessons for non-language subjects.

### Specific components of non-certification training programs for paraprofessional teachers (type 4, above)

***Learning theories and their application***
- Trainees learn and can explain the basic learning theories (see above).
- They work in teams to plan ways they can apply relevant theories and good practices in their classrooms, then share and consolidate ideas.
- They observe and analyze role plays that demonstrate the difference between "teacher-centered" and "learner-centered" classrooms.
- They comprehend and apply "principles for teachers" in practice sessions. In teams, they identify additional principles that are appropriate in their context.
- They practice asking questions that stimulate children's higher level thinking and talking.
- They practice the 2-track method for introducing L1 literacy and analyze the differences between "meaning" and "accuracy" track.
- They learn the rationale, principles and methods for using the L1-L2-L1 method for teaching non-language subjects in mid- to upper-primary grades; they demonstrate their understanding and ability to teach the L1 part of the L1-L2-L1 method effectively.

***Lesson plans and teachers guides***
- Trainees study the lesson plans, teacher guides and other teaching materials that they will use in their classroom. They ask questions for clarification and suggest ways to add to or revise the materials.
- They work in teams to add local content to generic lesson plans and activities and plan ways to incorporate local culture into lessons and

activities and in teams, they think creatively about new ways to bring the local culture into the classroom.
- They learn how to encourage community members to take an active role in classroom activities.
- They gain confidence in using lesson plans, teachers' guides and other resources and demonstrate the way they would teach at least one full day of lessons.

### Documentation and evaluation
- Trainees are familiar with the kinds of records (attendance, dropouts, teacher-generated test scores, learner portfolios) they will be expected to keep and plan the most efficient ways to maintain the necessary information.
- They understand and can explain the rationale, purpose and best practices for using the L1 to assess their students' progress.

### Working together with certified L2 classroom teacher(s)
- Trainees learn the roles and responsibilities of L2 teacher and L1 teaching assistants in MTB MLE classrooms.
- They learn and practice effective classroom management techniques (especially in overcrowded classrooms)

## Conclusion

Teacher education is clearly an essential component of successful and sustainable MTB MLE.  The issues involved are complex and still a "work in progress."  The good news is: there *has* been progress.  Relevant and useful collaborations among all stakeholders--communities, teacher training institutions and government agencies--will help to develop and maintain teacher training programs that will produce effective MTB MLE teachers.

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