Expanding MTB MLE programs: Planning for sustainability

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There is tendency to push for rapid expansion of MTB MLE pilot programs that show signs of success. The danger is that expansion without careful assessment and adjustment almost always leads to lower quality and eventual failure.

Preconditions for expansion of MTB BE programs in multilingual societies—some suggestions
1. A pilot program has been established, ideally with 2-5 schools in each of several languages;

2. Curriculum and teaching materials have been prepared, used, assessed, modified as needed, and approved;

3. A teacher training program with qualified teacher trainers has been established, assessed, modified as needed and approved;

4. Local or regional printing facilities have been identified in or near each language area;
5. A system for creating, illustrating, editing, testing, printing and distributing learner-centered reading and other classroom materials is in place;

6. The program has been officially approved by relevant government authorities and is supported by existing education policies;

7. Criteria for acceptance into the program have been established;

8. Awareness-raising and advocacy materials suitable for different groups (parents and community leaders; school principals and teachers; local, district and provincial education authorities) have been prepared.
Problems relating to MTB MLE program expansion and some suggested solutions
Problem: Expansion without the necessary preliminary research

Languages / schools are selected without carefully checking that they meet the criteria established for inclusion in the program;

Too little time is provided to identify resources (e.g., people, materials, cultural knowledge) or potential constraints to program implementation and sustainability in the selected areas.
Suggested solutions

Set clear criteria that languages and schools must meet before they can be incorporated into the program and then make sure that only those languages and schools that meet the criteria are selected.

Develop a detailed research plan; develop and test research instruments and train researchers before the “expansion research” begins.
Problem: Expansion without the necessary awareness-raising

Principals or local officials want the program but teachers and staff do not understand or support it;

Supervisors do not understand the program’s principles and methods and tell teachers that they must go back to the “old” way or they stop the program completely;

Parents do not understand why their children are using their L1 in school and think it is a way to keep their children from getting good jobs.
Suggested solutions

Develop awareness-raising materials for each group of stakeholders;

Equip L1 speakers from each language who understand the value of the program and can share what they know with different stakeholder groups;

Include awareness-raising in research visits.
Problem: Expansion without adequate calculation of costs

The tendency in pilot projects is to provide the highest quality teaching and learning materials to help ensure “success”; but the high costs cannot be sustained as the program expands to additional grades, schools and especially to additional languages.
**Suggested solutions**

Calculate costs for each component of the program as it expands to additional schools in the pilot languages and then into additional languages.

Recognize that systems for producing textbooks and classroom materials for mainstream schools will not be appropriate for a multiple-language MTB BE program, and identify good, less expensive alternatives.
Problem: Expansion without on-going evaluation and adjustment

Pilot projects are expanded without careful assessment of each component to identify strengths and weaknesses;

Problems identified in the pilot are not recognized and rectified before the program expands. As the program expands, the problems also expand and may eventually destroy the program.
Strategy to avoid / overcome the problem: incremental expansion...

Implement the pilot

Evaluate the pilot

Adjust program plan, as needed

Begin expansion

Evaluate expanded program

Adjust program and plan as needed

Etc
Sequence of expansion in MTB BE programs

1. Expand to higher grades in the pilot schools;

2. Expand to new schools in the pilot languages;

3. Expand to additional languages.
Essentials for expanding to higher grades in pilot schools

Evaluate students’ progress to identify strengths and weaknesses in each part of the program: awareness raising; alphabet design, curriculum, teaching and learning materials, teacher training, monitoring and evaluation;

Use input from the evaluations to revise curriculum, teaching and learning materials and equipping teachers, as needed, for the next grade. Continue doing this each year until the first cohort completes the program.
Essentials for expanding to additional schools within the pilot languages

1) Conduct research to identify schools within the pilot languages that meet the established criteria and will be brought into the program
2) Mobilize each group of local stakeholders;
3) Revise teaching and learning materials as indicated by the assessments and then produce the numbers of each kind of material that will be needed in the new schools
5) Provide pre-service training for teachers and local education officials in the new schools.
**Essentials for expanding to additional languages**

1) Collect and analyze information about the languages in the country to identify those that can be incorporated into the program and the order in which they will be added; Identify 5-10 schools in each language to pilot the program in that language.

2) Identify L1 materials development teams to develop materials for early grades; identify local or sub-regional production (printing) establishments.

4) Establish pre-service and in-service teacher training programs in each language area

5) Equip the research, evaluation, and documentation team to monitor the program.