



## How can pilot MLE (MTB-MLE) programs be successfully scaled up?

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### 1 Introduction

Many governments around the world have recognized that first language-based multilingual education is crucial for providing effective education for all learners. There is a growing understanding of the vital role the mother tongue (MT) plays in cognitive development that impacts learning outcomes. The MT is important for developing academic knowledge, critical and creative thinking, multiple languages, and confident identities. The awareness of the value of home languages has resulted in an increase in Mother tongue-based Multilingual Education programs, also known as MTB-MLE. As a result, MTB-MLE has become accepted as a powerful means of developing multilingual populations of globally competent citizens with strong positive local identities. As Battiste (2015) clearly states, using the mother tongue is a step forward in education aimed at correcting previous wrongs that marginalized and discriminated against local languages. In addition, MTB-MLE strengthens national unity by fostering mutual respect across linguistic and cultural lines.

The need for MTB-MLE is real in every country in our linguistically diverse world. However, the places where MTB-MLE has been a center of focus are primarily in multilingual contexts where colonial languages such as English, Spanish, and French have remained dominant. Post-colonial countries often have a history of colonial language education that did not produce the same results as in the “mother country.” However, colonial language education has benefitted those who have access to extra resources such as private schooling, hired tutors, books in the home, and highly educated parents who may use the colonial language at home (Bray and Kwo 2013). The resources required to succeed in a foreign language immersion program are typically not available to many learners.

With the growing awareness of the importance of the learners’ first language in educational achievement, several countries have experimented with MTB-MLE in small pilot projects. These experiments continue to reveal educational benefits. However, international and donor agencies such as UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank, USAID and AUSAID are recommending that governments move beyond small test projects to provide the benefits to all learners by scaling up their programs to the national level. Perpetual experimentation is no longer justifiable in light of the positive outcomes. Moving from pilot projects to national implementation is not easily done. In this chapter we will examine contextual considerations that are important to address for successful MTB-MLE implementation.

### 2 Context

The move from a foreign language educational system to an MTB-MLE system requires extensive effort. There are at least six important areas to consider when planning for strong implementation of MTB-MLE.

First, the entire nation should be engaged in dialogue around the research evidence for the value of local languages in cognitive development, learning academic content and second languages, and

developing strong identities. The conversation around the rationale of the new policy should address common concerns and alleviate fears of losing global language proficiency. There is great power in providing opportunity for community members to engage with and discuss the research that helps to unveil basic underlying assumptions in order to reconsider possibilities in light of the research to which communities generally do not have access. Such conversations should be maintained as an ongoing process in order to continue reaching out to help citizens understand and support the program. When such an advocacy program is set aside, the consequential resistance may be more difficult to overcome, resulting in compromise to the program as a whole.

Second, it is necessary to develop a language map of the languages spoken in various geographical areas. A linguistic map will aid schools in planning to meet the needs of diverse student populations. There may be multiple areas where communities are linguistically mixed and languages must be negotiated. In some cases, school-based planning may result in two or more of the local languages used, dividing teachers and students into linguistic groups rather than following national prescriptive plans. Language mapping is necessary for planning the best way to meet the teaching and learning needs of all.

Third, it may be that local languages are in need of developing a written form. In this case orthographies should be developed by engaging local linguists and with community participation and agreement. Community members, as language owners and primary users, participate with local linguists on orthography development processes in order to negotiate on a commonly acceptable orthography that accurately represents the sounds of the language in a manner conducive to literacy development.

Fourth, literature in the mother tongue is often lacking even within previously developed languages. School literature and reading materials will need to be developed to help learners acquire literacy skills in their first language first. Generally, a fairly substantial number of graded easy readers of interesting stories needs to be developed. Books that reflect the local culture back to the children in positive, affirming ways are most appropriate. Later-stage literature will begin to introduce outside information and outside life contexts. Primers are helpful for teaching initial sound-symbol patterns within whole texts. Transitional reading materials are equally important to support developing literacy skills in second languages.

Fifth, writers will need to be trained to produce these materials. Often skilled writers from more developed languages can work with local language writers in developing first language materials. A plan and budget will help to facilitate the on-going training process and materials development. Advocacy for each component of the program within the nation and the local community will assist in motivating gifted writers to participate in training local language writers.

And sixth, teachers, principals, supervisors, and superintendents, as well as other education policy-makers will require training and time to think through and to reframe their prior beliefs about language and how it should be taught. They will need time to reconsider bilingual pedagogies and transitional approaches in light of MTB-MLE. They may also need to study their own language and strengthen their home language literacy in order to contribute to materials development. School leaders and teachers will likewise need to engage with parents and include them in the change process so that they will understand and support teachers, possibly also contributing written stories, local knowledge, and histories for classroom use.

Differing contexts will require different processes. Some additional situations may be necessarily addressed in different contexts. The above list provides an overview of the main issues that will need to be addressed. Each location will need to establish its own contextualized strategic plan to guide the entire process over the course of a number of years to ensure strong implementation of MTB-MLE. Publication of lessons learned in this process will be vital for far-reaching impact.

### **3 Recommendations: Some ideas to try**

In contexts where few people have themselves experienced MTB education, it will be likely that even when people agree to the change, they may not feel confident with how to implement or make

necessary pedagogical adjustments. It is helpful to develop a core group of change agents including teachers, teacher educators, national department of education officials, and other leading stakeholders to lead the process. This group will need input to understand both MTB-MLE and educational change so that they can contribute to facilitating strong development and support for the new policy. Furthermore, this group will need opportunity to learn more about language in education, the value of the mother tongue, as well as how MTB-MLE affects learning outcomes, repetition, national economics, and even the cost-benefit ratio for this program. As the core group of people engages in discussions and fora and trainings, they can then share their thoughts and learning with others, widely disseminating the information while continuing their own journey of understanding. Out of this group may come the dominant trainers and advocates.

Once the policy is in place, a strategic plan for scaling up implementation created by a group of stakeholders will guide the process of implementation. These stakeholders may include department of education officials, educators from institutions of higher education, advocates of MTB-MLE such as politicians or professionals, members of the business sector, etc. A committee or individual may act as the initiator of the strategic design process and complete the documentation. The resulting document should serve as a guide for the program's development and implementation. Yearly updating of the plan may include recording and explanation of what went well, what was not accomplished and why, and what the current realities are, and may include a revised document for the ensuing year(s).

Once a strategic plan has been developed which outlines steps forward, the department of education and vested stakeholders may motivate and recruit domain-specific educators to assist in developing various components of the program. These specialists may include:

- subject specialists to adjust curriculum
- training specialists to prepare and initiate training for teachers, principals, supervisors, parents, and others
- teacher education institution specialists to help adjust teacher training programs to prepare incoming teachers to teach under the new MTB-MLE policy
- assessment specialists to train local educators to prepare student assessment tools in the MT
- language specialists to assist in orthography development and MT materials creation

An analysis and restructuring of the administrative framework in which the program is integrated will help ensure that everyone knows who is responsible for each component and will help processes run more smoothly. Adequate funding must accompany each stage of development, from strategic planning to restructuring administration, to training, advocacy and materials development.

Development of MT student assessment tools is crucial to any MTB-MLE program so that assessment of learning accurately reflects what the learners are learning and informs teachers. Testing must always be carried out in the language of instruction. Thus MT tests will be necessary in each language and for each subject and grade level.

Creation of monitoring and evaluation procedures should recognize that the new policy creates significant learning opportunities for teachers and monitors. Under a new MTB-MLE policy, monitoring should be seen as collaborative dialogue between supervisors and teachers that facilitates ongoing development for both and results in the strengthening of the program. This may be different from traditional styles of supervision where experts observe and inform teachers of required practices. In addition to this school-based supervisory plan, an overall program analysis should occur at specific points in the implementation process to assess implementation processes and problems in order to quickly address issues before they become too well entrenched in the new program.

Some may desire to continue to work on supportive legislative policy in order to ensure the success and continuation of ongoing programs that may be affected by the political change process. This process of ongoing development within the legislature may also be seen as a form of ongoing advocacy whereby politicians and public servants are continually informed of the benefits and value of MTB-MLE.

Because many post-colonial contexts have a long history of colonial language education, there may be deeply held fears of MT education. Ongoing advocacy for the program should invite dialogue and

research to examine the effects of language in education and in society in general. Many university professors and students often engage in debates on such political issues. They may be of service in simply introducing patterns of conversation that differ from previous patterns and that aim to strengthen entire countries as well as whole language groups.

Though similarities prevail across contexts, every context is different and will require different measures to ensure that all its citizens receive fair and equitable education that is based on their home language as well as focused on learning national and global languages. A general principle important in every context is that scaling up pilot projects to national levels will be impossible without executive support, administrative know-how, and adequate funding. It will be essential to engage local experts to collaborate and study together in order to create a principle-based, context-sensitive model program, and in order to lead in the educational change necessary to implement that program.

- Conditions and limitations on recommendations

Teachers, school leaders, and parents must support the new policy fully and be willing to work together to produce materials and support teachers in the implementation of MTB-MLE. If principals, supervisors, superintendents, and parents do not support the program and the teachers' work, efforts may be minimized or sacrificed and the program may ultimately fail. Thus, the most crucial first need is for adequate and ongoing advocacy to build understanding and support for the program through discussing the rationale, supportive research, and projected national impact of the program.

## **5 Conclusion**

With educational research currently emanating primarily from economically developed Western contexts, it is important that research to inform global best practices for language-in-education pedagogy be developed in Southern, often lower-income contexts. Transfer of recommendations or best practices is highly dependent on contextual factors. Such research will help us all to understand specific contexts and the constraints that affect implementation of MTB-MLE policies. In addition, locally based research will further the move toward providing strong education for all learners that builds on what learners know and who they are while developing multilingual, multicultural, academic, and social competence toward both local and global participation.

Furthermore, all stakeholders who have a role in the scale-up of MTB-MLE to national levels need to understand well and articulate concisely the principles of MTB-MLE because it is very easy to misunderstand what MLE is for those who just hear about it in passing or see it as a move backward rather than progression forward. As Battiste (2015) says, we are all complicit in the progressive move forward toward providing equity in education through addressing linguistic and cultural issues that have been previously overlooked. MTB-MLE for all learners provides social justice for all mankind as we move toward a more egalitarian society, appreciating and respecting one another as we should.

## References

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