

# MOTHER TONGUE BASED MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION: FRAMEWORK, STRATEGIES AND IMPLEMENTATION

(Concept Note for an International Workshop & Strategy Dialogue)

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## **Introduction**

Two states in India – Andhra Pradesh (AP) and Orissa – have started mother tongue based multilingual education (MLE) on a pilot basis for tribal children. AP started MLE in 8 tribal mother tongues (MTs) in 2004 and Orissa in 10 tribal MTs in 2006. The states have the program in over 500 schools with first batch of children in grades IV and V, respectively, in AP and Orissa; AP is adding over 2300 schools in the year 2011 and Orissa is scheduled to add 500 schools. Few more states are also expected to join the MLE movement in India. Jharkhand, Assam and Chhattisgarh are already planning to start MLE in the states. Mother tongue based MLE is now an international movement especially for those from dominated minor, minority and marginalized languages and suffering negative consequences of submersion and assimilation forms of education in non-mother tongue languages. MLE is seen as a critical input for reduction in number of school dropouts and increase in learning attainment levels. MLE is also necessary for developments and revitalization of languages and for quality education of the minorities as well as the general population. India is a pioneer in South Asia in initiating large scale programmes of MLE and other countries in the SAARC region are joining the MLE movement. Nepal has accepted the policy recommendations (Skutnabb-Kangas & Mohanty, 2009) for mother tongue based MLE at a national framework for education in mother tongues, Nepali and English. Small-scale mother tongue education programmes and MLE have started in Bangladesh and Pakistan. Bhutan is in the process of developing a National Education Framework in which a framework for education in mother tongues, the major state language Dzongkha and English is being considered as a major option. Apart from their immediate impact on quality of educational output, these programmes of mother tongue education and MLE are significant initiatives in the context of serious threat to linguistic diversity in South Asia with endangerment of a large number of languages in the region. In fact, with 196 languages in UNESCO's list of endangered languages in the World Atlas of Languages in Danger released on the International Mother Language Day on February 21, 2009, India has the highest number of languages in danger in the world. Educational use of languages is seen as a major step towards maintenance and revitalization of languages. Mother tongue based MLE is internationally promoted and actively supported by UNESCO, UNICEF and many other international organizations as a necessary practical step towards quality education and as an effective measure for linguistic and cultural maintenance.

The Rights of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act of 2009 not only guarantees education for all up to the age of 14 but also recommends education in the mother tongues and mandates provision of education of a minimum quality. Thus the Right to Education Act opens up new challenges for the system of education in India. As the load on the state educational mechanisms increase many fold, mother tongue based MLE acquires new significance. MLE offers a proven method for quality education rooted in children's home language and early cultural experiences. It shows the directions to enable the young learners to move effectively from their mother tongue as a resource to high levels of competence in multiple languages including the regional or the state majority language, Hindi as the major language of national communication and International Language of Wider Communication like English. While the global experience with MLE and the international research evidence show that it is highly successful as a method of effective education, it also throws special challenges in complex multilingual societies like India (Mohanty, Panda, Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2009; Heugh & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2010). Challenges and issues confronting the practitioners of MLE in India are many. The complex socio-political relationship between languages affecting gross differences in the attitudinal orientations for different mother tongues, the nuances of framing policies in respect of languages in education, scheduling (and timing) of languages to be introduction in the MLE programmes and within-classroom diversity of languages are some of the major issues in development of a suitable MLE framework in India. On the implementation side, the expected surge in enrollment figures in Primary education, consequent need for teachers and resources, challenges of training and capacity building, and requirements for pedagogical reforms for MLE are some pressing problems that need to be seriously taken up. The proposed workshop aims at development of a blue print for meeting the multiple challenges to effective mother tongue based education in India and for planning strategies for implementation, training and capacity building for large-scale application of MLE for primary education. Since the last conference on MLE in February 2008 (sponsored by UNICEF), there have been substantial developments in MLE in India. New issues and challenges have come up; some of the issues are indicated in the above sections. It will be a timely exercise to have a fresh round of international dialogue between the national MLE practitioners and international experts to take up the emerging challenges to MLE in India.

## **Background**

The recent MLE initiatives in India have led to some decisive developments. The mother tongue based MLE programmes in Andhra Pradesh and Orissa have successfully gone beyond the initial phase of hesitation; they are now accepted as viable models for education of tribal children (Mohanty, Mishra, Reddy & Ramesh, 2009) and are being up-scaled. Other states like Chhattisgarh, Assam and Jharkhand are now planning to launch MLE for tribal language children and there are strong and compelling grounds for similar initiatives in many other areas in India particularly the ones with large tribal populations. The growing interest in MLE in

India is supported by forceful developments in theory and practice of MLE around the world and in India. In fact, MLE programmes in Orissa and Andhra Pradesh have caught international attention of MLE professionals and have influenced new initiatives such as in Nepal. There is also a visible body of committed MLE practitioners, professionals and experts in Government and NGO sectors in India involved in activities to promote MLE in the country although a much larger resource pool is needed to meet the projected requirements.

MLE forms a major innovative initiative of MHRD and, apart from the state level efforts to provide mother tongue based MLE for tribal language communities under the SSA programme, there have been several national and international programmes organized by the Ministry in collaboration with other national and international bodies like UNESCO, UNICEF, NCERT, CIIL, JNU. In 2005, a national level workshop, sponsored by UNESCO, UNICEF, MHRD and others, was held in CIIL, Mysore as an initial consultation to discuss MLE as an approach to quality education for tribal children in India. In 2006, state representatives from Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Orissa along with UNICEF officials participated in an International conference organized by UNESCO in Bangkok. The same year, Orissa Primary Education Programme Authority organized a National Level workshop in collaboration with state UNICEF. This workshop paved way for implementation of MLE in Orissa. MHRD organized another National level conference on MLE for Tribal Children in Delhi in the year 2007. In 2008, Jawaharlal Nehru University, in collaboration with UNICEF, CIIL, NCERT, and Save the Children, organized an International conference on MLE, which was followed by a state level consultation in Orissa drawing some of the international experts who participated in the Conference in Delhi.

These activities have consolidated theoretical insights for application in our MLE programmes and have also raised issues regarding aspects of the existing programmes. More importantly, however, the national level focus on MLE in these programmes have demystified MLE as an effective approach for education of linguistic minorities and tribal communities and have generated awareness and willingness to implement mother tongue based MLE programmes in larger scales. The recommendations and insights from these collective activities have focused on a greater need for training and indigenous capacity building, academic and research support, coordination among different initiatives and development of policy framework keeping the socio-linguistic complexities of India in view. Some of the recommendations have been acted upon at several levels; many more remain to be taken up.

A major development in this respect has been setting up of the National Multilingual Education Resource Consortium (NMRC) ([www.nmrc-jnu.org](http://www.nmrc-jnu.org)) in Zakir Husain Centre for Educational Studies in JNU with support from UNICEF and in active collaboration with MHRD, CIIL, NCERT, NEUPA and many national and international experts. The NMRC, which started on April 15, 2009, has taken up several activities for promotion of MLE in India. The following are some major activities of the NMRC for carrying the MLE movement forward:

- Preparation of MLE status reports in consultation with State implementing agencies.
- Preparation of Suggestive MLE Road Map for planning and implementation of MLE Programme by State level Education authority.
- Documentation of MLE Resources in India.
- Advocacy Materials in several languages including Hindi, English, Telugu, Oriya and 10 tribal languages such as Saora, Kui, Gondi for non-technical exposition of mother tongue based MLE; Documentary Video film: “MLE: A new beginning” and several audio-video materials.
- Publications of *Swara*, the NMRC Newsletter for popularization of MLE.
- Longitudinal study of the ongoing MLE programmes in Andhra Pradesh and Orissa for formative feedback and evaluation.
- Capacity building workshop for state level functionaries.
- Development of website as an E-resource

With all these activities with collaborative initiatives from several quarters, MLE is poised for major developments and applications in India. It is expected that such initiatives will bring major transformations in the national approach to education for ALL and for tribal children in particular.

As the existing MLE programmes are to be up-scaled and new state level programmes planned, it has become necessary to take stock of our insights and issues from the experimental initiatives, to consolidate the available expertise and knowledge base, to generate new thrust and plan our strategies for meeting the challenges of larger scale implementation of MLE. The proposed Workshop and Strategy Dialogue can be seen as a timely exercise for furtherance of the MLE agenda in the country.

### **Rationale**

Developments in respect of planning and implementation of mother tongue based MLE in India are promising. MLE is distinctly seen as offering an effective and innovative alternative to the current submersion forms of early education that involves neglect of the home language and cultural experiences of children, subtractive language learning, large scale school failure and high ‘push out’ rate. The urgent need for revitalization of endangered languages also compels a rethinking of our current educational practices in imposed dominant languages. Existing models of MLE need to be re-assessed in light of our experiences and insights from the ongoing programmes. Issues have been raised in respect of multilingual transition plans in MLE calling for an appraisal of the scheduling of exit from the mother tongues to major languages, timing of introduction of English and application of current MLE strategies to linguistically diverse classrooms with simultaneous presence of multiple languages which is a very common phenomenon across the country. Pedagogic issues arising out of our complex socio-linguistic realities, diverse cultural practices, and the need for a more effective culture-based classroom transaction for teaching of languages, mathematics, EVS, Sciences and other school subjects also need to be examined. With up-scaling of the existing MLE programmes and new state level

initiatives in sight, a much larger resource pool is required and, therefore, it is necessary to evolve national strategies for development of indigenous resources and expertise and for training and capacity building. This also calls for development of a long-term framework for MLE policy and practice. In brief, the proposed Workshop and Strategy Dialogue on MLE will address the following issues:

1. Taking stock of MLE programs in India:
  - a. Program/outcome evaluation of MLE in India (including NMRC Longitudinal Study Report & report on MLE+ program)
  - b. Reflections on the nature of MLE programs (Timing & duration of MT/L1, L2, L3 etc); early-exit vs. late-exit & other issues (keeping in view the international findings (such as in Ethiopia; Heugh & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2010)
  - c. Policy & implementation issues; MLE and India's Right to Education Act 2010 (with its objective of free and compulsory education for ALL, minimum quality assurance and its provision for education in mother tongue "*as far as practicable*")
2. Issues in extension of current model of MLE:
  - a. MLE for linguistically diverse & multiple MT classrooms (majority of the classrooms have multiple MTs; some states like Jharkhand would like to try MLE only for such multilingual classrooms which are the modal patterns)
  - b. Capacity building issues (meeting the requirement for a large number of trained MLE teachers; in some cases since required number of teachers are unavailable from within a language community alternative approaches have to be thought of), Training Strategies and Details
3. Pedagogic Issues:
  - a. Issues in Language Teaching in multilingual contexts
  - b. Teaching of MT and L2 (regional dominant language)
  - c. Teaching of English: multilingual strategies
  - d. Pedagogic strategies for teaching of Mathematics and Science

### **Duration**

The consultative workshop can be held for 3 days during September 6 - 8, 2011.

### **Collaboration/Partnership**

NMRC, UNICEF, CIIL, NCERT, JNU, UNESCO, AIISH (Mysore), Univ. of Mysore (UNESCO, NCERT, AIISH, Univ. of Mysore to be contacted for collaboration)

### **Venue**

CIIL, Mysore has expressed its willingness to collaborate with NMRC in hosting the Workshop in Mysore.

## **Objectives**

1. To take stock of the developments in the field of MLE in India and facilitate integration of MLE theory, Practice, Research and International experience with the National initiatives in India.
2. To discuss and evolve strategies for capacity building and training for MLE in India.
3. Developing a model of MLE for linguistically diverse and multiple mother tongue classrooms.
4. To recommend strategies for MLE pedagogy including Multilingual transition plan, exit from Mother tongue and introduction of English and other languages in light of the International experiences and major research findings.
5. To bring into focus state of the art pedagogic practices in MLE in respect of diverse cultural and community practices, linguistic variations and orthographic issues etc based on international practices and research evidence and to link MLE pedagogy to all the subject areas in school curriculum and to the NCF 2005.
6. To recommend initiative for development MLE policy and practice framework and advocacy strategies for promotion of MLE in India
7. To develop a network of National and International resources, organizations, Professionals and Practitioners of MLE for Promotion of MLE objectives.

## **Expected Outcomes**

1. Outline of a plan for capacity building, training and development of training resources for MLE.
2. Recommendations regarding scheduling of MT, L1, L2 etc. in MLE framework in India, strategies for linking languages in MLE programme and points of introduction of languages like English and continuation of MT as a medium of teaching and as a language subject.
3. Recommendations regarding specific action plans and strategies for extension and suitable applications of MLE practices for the common classroom scenario in India with simultaneous presence of multiple languages (Mother tongues) within the classroom.
4. Recommendations of specific Pedagogic strategies for MLE classroom transitions, teaching learning practices, and TLM for a. Focused cultural practice based pedagogy, b. Linking linguistic (and orthographic) community practices to classroom practices, c. Extending good MLE practices to teaching of Mathematics and science and other school subjects
5. Recommendations for evolution of a long term framework for MLE policy practice and advocacy

### **Suggested List of Institutional Participants**

1. MHRD
2. JNU
3. NCERT
4. CIIL
5. NUEPA
6. State SSA/ SCERT –  
Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal, any other interested states
7. UNICEF & State UNICEF Officials
8. UNESCO
9. NMRC
10. Room to Read Asia
11. Govt. Participants from – Nepal, Bangladesh and Bhutan
12. Save the Children, Room-to-Read & other MLE NGOs.

### **Expected number of Participants**

Institutional Participants from Partner Organizations (MHRD:4, UNICEF:12, CIIL:7, U of Mysore:3, AIISH:3, UNESCO:3, NCERT:5, NMRC/JNU:5, ZHCES Project Staff:10, Other NGOs:4)	-	56
National Level MLE Experts/Professionals	-	08
State SSA & MLE Program Functionaries	-	20
SAARC Country MLE Professionals (Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan)	-	08
International MLE Experts	-	08
MLE Teachers, Tribal Community/Organization Representatives	-	08
Local Participants	-	20
Conference Directors (2) & Support Staff (10)	-	12
<b>TOTAL</b>	-	<b>140</b>