CLOSING THE LEARNING GAP
IN MAE HONG SON
The Case for Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education
Executive summary

The purpose of this document is to recommend a path to help close the learning gap for ethnic minority children in Mae Hong Son Province through mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE). It will address the longstanding learning gap experienced by Thailand’s ethnic minority children, building on the Royal Thai government’s new National Language Policy Action Plan and using successful “made in Thailand” models to propose recommendations for prioritized actions for building back better in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The longstanding learning gap

The Royal Thai Government has made impressive progress in all areas of national development, becoming what the World Bank called a “widely cited development success story.” In terms of education, virtually all children in even the most remote regions of the country have access to a local primary school. This is a massive accomplishment for which the Ministry of Education deserves praise.

But access to a school does not guarantee learning. The 2019 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) conducted by the National Statistical Office and UNICEF found large learning gaps between different social groups, with children from non-Thai speaking households performing the lowest of all children in Thailand in foundational literacy and numeracy. Poor foundational learning causes these children to lag behind their Thai-speaking peers throughout the education cycle.

Mae Hong Son Province demonstrates the longstanding challenges of closing the learning gap. For decades, the government has invested heavily in education, through both formal and non-formal channels. As a result, almost all primary and early secondary-aged children are in school—including children in very remote areas. Yet grade 6, 9 and 12 O-NET scores in Mae Hong Son remain among the lowest in Thailand, while the province ranks last in Thailand’s Human Achievement Index and has the highest severity of child multidimensional poverty in the Kingdom. Mae Hong Son has an abundance of smaller schools in remote areas which are often under-resourced. Many children in Mae Hong Son enter school unable to speak Thai, and lag far behind their Thai-speaking peers throughout primary and secondary school. Only 45.1 per cent of Mae Hong Son’s 3 to 4-year-olds are developmentally on track for literacy and numeracy (compared to 83.9 per cent of children in Bangkok), while only 40.7 per cent complete upper secondary school. The Mae Hong Son situation clearly illustrates how the language gap contributes to the learning gap.

Government officials, teachers, and parents all agree that steps need to be taken to improve the learning of Mae Hong Son’s ethnic minority children, so that they can grow up to be confident, productive, knowledgeable citizens of Thailand. But how?

1 World Bank, 2020b.
5 National Economic and Social Development Council, 2017.
6 UNICEF, 2019b; Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, National Economic and Social Development Council and UNICEF Thailand, 2019.
The New National Language Policy Action Plan

On 29 June 2021, the Council of Ministers approved the National Language Policy Action Plan (2021-22) (NLPAP) proposed by the Royal Society and endorsed by the National Economic and Social Development Council. The NLPAP is built around the idea that all languages are important and should be viewed as resources that can be utilized for the social and economic development of the nation. Simultaneously, the NLPAP recognizes the importance of each individual’s mother tongue, with the action plan stating, “At the heart of the National Language Policy is the idea that learning development can be accomplished by promoting the study and use of the mother tongue as a strong foundation, linked to the study and use of the Thai language in its capacity as the national and official language. Further links can then be made to the study of other languages, such as languages of commerce, international languages, and the languages of neighboring countries.”

One objective of the NLPAP is “to encourage the use and development of local languages as educational tools, as well as to pass on indigenous knowledge to children and youth,” with the goal that “local people use their local languages more in a wide variety of settings while promoting the use of local languages alongside the Thai language in education.” Toward that end, the policy indicators call for an increase in the “percentage of educational institutions using local language along with the Thai language as a medium of instruction.”

The NLPAP thus has clear implications for schools in Mae Hong Son Province and other border areas which are home to linguistically and culturally diverse communities. Could the policy’s focus on mother tongue-based education also help to close the learning gap?

Successful “made in Thailand” models

In other parts of Thailand, Mother Tongue-based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) programs, in which the children’s first or home language is used as the main language of instruction in the early years before beginning a systematic bridging to the national language, has proven to be a cost-effective method of improving the learning of ethnic minority children. In Chiang Rai, the Hmong-Thai MTB-MLE Programme raised student performance on national reading and writing evaluations for grades 1 to 5. In the Chiang Mai Education Sandbox Innovation Zone, 17 remote schools have implemented MTB-MLE or programmes. In the Deep South, the Patani Malay-Thai Multilingual Education Programme (PMT-MLE) has dramatically improved Thai language abilities and grade 6 O-NET scores.

MTB-MLE programmes in India, Nepal, Vietnam, PRC-China, Cambodia and Timor-Leste have demonstrated similar positive outcomes. Indeed, successful MTB-MLE pilot projects in the Philippines resulted in a national policy wherein 65 mother tongues are now used alongside Filipino and English as mediums of instruction in government pre-primary and primary schools.

The Investment Case for Education and Equity found MTB-MLE to be one of the most effective methods for improving school survivability for linguistically disadvantaged children, thus contributing to social equity. Similarly, the International Commission for Financing Global Education Opportunity found MTB-MLE to be the most-cost effective way to improve disadvantaged children’s learning, ranking above school feeding, cash transfers and computer-assisted instruction. By improving the learning of young children, MTB-MLE provides what Noble Prize-winning economist James Heckman called a high “return on investment” in education. As a 2021 World
Bank report states: “When children are first taught in a language that they speak and understand well they learn more, are better placed to learn other languages, are more likely to stay in school, and enjoy a school experience appropriate to their culture and local circumstances….Appropriate language of instruction policies also promote equity in schools and in labor markets, improve the cost-effectiveness of education, and promote inclusiveness.”

Recommendations for prioritized actions

This document thus proposes that Mother Tongue-based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) and specialized Thai-as-a-Second-Language (TSL) instruction as used elsewhere in Thailand be implemented at the pre-primary and early primary levels in Mae Hong Son to give ethnic minority children the basic literacy, numeracy and Thai language tools they need to succeed. This could build on the success of MTB-MLE in other provinces and be scaled-up to reach many of Mae Hong Son’s 342 schools as more teachers are trained and mentored in MTB-MLE and TSL training techniques. Action should be taken along three lines:

**M** MATERIALS: Evaluate MTB-MLE materials (both print and digital) already being used in Chiang Rai and Chiang Mai Provinces, adapt them for Mae Hong Son, train teachers to produce new materials, and pioneer the use of educational technology for MTB-MLE.

**H** HUMAN RESOURCES: Recruit more local teachers who share the same mother tongue as their students; train current and future government certified and local contract teachers in MTB-MLE; develop a plan to meaningfully engage parents and community members in all aspects of school life, including as linguistic and cultural resource persons for the MTB-MLE program.

**S** STRATEGIC ONGOING RESEARCH: map the mother tongues used in each school of Mae Hong Son and correlate this data to student achievement; collect baseline literacy and numeracy data for students in MTB-MLE schools; develop culturally appropriate systems for evaluation and monitoring; conduct a systems analysis of education in Mae Hong Son Province to identify barriers to student success (including budgetary and personnel constraints) and entry points for reform.

Along with the above actions, successful implementation of MTB-MLE in Mae Hong Son will require a change in mindset. Ethnic minority languages will need to be seen as tools for learning, instead of obstacles. Teachers, administrators and parents will need to understand that the appropriate use of the mother tongue in the early years will make Thai language learning much more enjoyable, efficient and effective while also having a multiplier effect on learning in other subject areas.

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Building back better

The COVID-19 pandemic makes this even more urgent. The global evidence is clear: children who were educationally disadvantaged before the pandemic have fallen even further behind their more fortunate peers. Lockdowns and travel restrictions make it even more difficult for teachers from outside the local community to reach and remain in remote villages. School closures have reduced ethnic minority children’s exposure to the national language and the digital divide has limited their access to online learning. Many children whose education has been interrupted by COVID-19 may never return to school, making them more vulnerable to human trafficking, premature entry into the labour market, and early marriage.

Nonetheless, the shock of COVID-19 can also be a trigger for educational innovation. Longstanding problems can be engaged with new energy, guided by past experiences and future hopes.

Now is the time to address the language-in-education issue in Mae Hong Son. Now is the time to train both government certified and local contract teachers in modern methods of mother tongue and Thai language teaching. Now is the time to produce child-centered, child-accessible digital and print learning materials in ethnic languages. Political will and commitment to the idea that problems are meant to be solved will make this possible, uplifting Mae Hong Son’s children and working toward a more united, prosperous, equitable Thailand.

The main objective of this document is to inspire and empower Mae Hong Son’s educators to do just that, fulfilling the vision of Thailand’s National Language Policy Action Plan while improving the lives of thousands of ethnic minority children by closing the learning gap.

## Contents

**Executive summary** iii

**Abbreviations and acronyms** ix

**Figures** x

**Tables** x

**Background** 1

- The good news: improved access to primary education 2
- The bad news: low levels of learning 3
- Grassroots voices: How do local educators see the situation? 4

**The language gap drives the learning gap** 5

- Does Thailand have a language gap? 5
- “But the children speak some Thai…” 6
- Does the language gap affect PISA? 7
- What about other countries? 7
- Has COVID-19 worsened the language gap? 8
- Closing the learning gap with the mother tongue 9
- But isn’t MTB-MLE just one of many options? 10
- What does Thai research tell us? 12

**How does MTB-MLE help close the learning gap?** 15

**Introducing MTB-MLE in MHS: leveraging the “latecomer’s advantage”** 17

- Research and data 18
- Advocacy and cooperation 19
- Creating orthographies, curriculum and local materials 19
- Recruiting and training teachers 20
- Monitoring and evaluation 22
- Parent and community engagement 23
- Educational technology 23
Financing MTB-MLE in Mae Hong Son

Conclusion

Annex A: Toward sustainable teacher recruitment, training and deployment in Mae Hong Son

Annex B: Breakdown of estimated first year costs for MTB-MLE in Mae Hong Son

Annex C: Developing a school language map

Annex D: The Bangkok Statement on Language and Inclusion

Annex E: Thailand’s New National Language Policy Action Plan

Works cited

Acknowledgments
Abbreviations and acronyms

AY  Academic year
CMRU  Chiang Mai Rajabhat University
DLTV  Distance Learning Television
EEF  Equitable Education Fund
ESAO  Education Service Area Office
FAL  Foundation for Applied Linguistics
LCT(s)  Local Contract Teacher(s)
IDIL  International Decade of Indigenous Languages
MHS  Mae Hong Son
MICS  Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MOE  Ministry of Education
MOOC  Massive open online course
MTB-MLE  Mother Tongue-based Multilingual Education
MU  Mahidol University
NIETS  National Institute of Educational Testing Service
NLPAP  National Language Policy Action Plan
OBEC  Office of the Basic Education Commission (under MOE)
O-NET  Ordinary National Education Test
PCF  Pestalozzi Children’s Fund
PISA  Programme for International Student Assessment
PTA  Parent-teacher association
SDG(s)  Sustainable Development Goal(s)
SEAMEO  Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization
TSL  Thai-as-a-Second-Language
UNESCO  United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF  United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund
Figures

Figure 1  The 342 schools of Mae Hong Son  
Figure 2  Grade 6 O-Net results in Mae Hong Son  
Figure 3  Share of children aged 7 to 14 with foundational reading and numeracy skills  
Figure 4  Differences in average reading, writing and mathematics scores by whether the language of instruction is spoken at home  
Figure 5  Educational interventions and their impact on survivability of disadvantaged students  
Figure 6  Effective/efficient interventions  
Figure 7  First grade, first semester Thai writing assessment results  
Figure 8  Grade 6 O-Net scores of Patani Malay-Thai MTB-MLE students  
Figure 9  Hmong-Thai MTB-MLE student and comparison school reading screening results, academic year 2015-16  
Figure 10  Bridging from the mother tongue to the national language  
Figure 11  Step-by-step language sequence in MTB-MLE projects  
Figure 12  Components of MTB-MLE for Mae Hong Son  
Figure 13  Yala Rajabhat University MTB-MLE teacher training course materials  
Figure 14  TSL materials produced and field-tested by FAL and PCF  
Figure 15  Chiang Mai Rajabhat University MTB-MLE teacher training MOOC (2021)  
Figure 16  The Alpha Tiles android app supports minority language literacy in multiple scripts  
Figure 17  EEF’s iSee database contains extensive information about individual schools and students, but not data on language or ethnicity  
Figure 18  Ethnolinguistic Maps of Thailand  
Figure 19  Lao Cai school language map  

Tables

Table 1  Major allocations, Mae Hong Son Provincial Education Budget (2019-22)
Mae Hong Son is the least populated, most forested, most ethnically diverse, and poorest of Thailand’s 77 provinces. Roughly 60 per cent of its 274,322 people come from ethnic minority groups, each with their own unique language and culture. Mountainous terrain makes travel difficult, especially during the monsoon season.

The challenges of educating Mae Hong Son’s children are well-known and difficult to solve. These include remote geography, small schools, limited electricity, undependable internet/cell phone service, little or no understanding of the Thai language among many students and parents, a high rate of teacher attrition, stateless children, migrant children from neighboring Myanmar, etc. One thing most of Mae Hong Son’s children have in common is low academic achievement. Indeed, only children in the violence-stricken, Malay-speaking provinces of the Deep South post lower standardized test scores. Teacher attrition is high, with positions sometimes remaining vacant for weeks before a new government certified teacher arrives. Virtually all remote schools in the province thus rely heavily on local contract teachers (LCTs)—ethnic minority people with some higher education—to communicate with young students and relieve the teacher shortage.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the challenges facing vulnerable populations worldwide. Children from disadvantaged families, ethnic minority and migrant children have been particularly impacted, as they often are unable to access the online distance learning options which have become the educational lifeblood for millions of children worldwide. Nonetheless, the pandemic also provides policymakers and implementers with the opportunity to reflect on how to better serve underprivileged populations and maintain momentum on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4’s vision to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education” for all and to “build back better.”

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20 The Nation, 2014.
The good news: improved access to primary education

The Royal Thai Government has worked very hard to expand access to primary education throughout Mae Hong Son. Schools have been built in extremely remote areas. Few children are out-of-school, drop out before grade 6, or repeat classes. Gender parity in primary school enrolment has been achieved, although boys are slightly more likely than girls to drop out of secondary school. Provincial electricity or at least basic solar systems power computers in virtually all rural classrooms, while administrators constantly work to upgrade these systems—often with private sector assistance. Similarly, many schools have basic water and latrine systems although constant maintenance and public-private partnership is needed to keep these running. Free school lunches and other forms of nutritional support have had an impact on student health and school readiness, although stunting remains a problem. These are impressive accomplishments, especially given the remote location of many schools.

Figure 1 Distribution of the 342 schools of Mae Hong Son Province (EEF iSee Database, 2021)

Data in this paragraph are summarized from National Statistical Office and UNICEF Thailand, 2021 and UNICEF, 2021. The Equitable Education Fund’s iSee Database contains information on every school in Thailand as the basis for policy decisions. https://isee.eef.or.th/screen/pmt/cctall_map_school.html
The bad news: low levels of learning

Despite dramatic improvements in access, learning outcomes in Mae Hong Son remain stubbornly low. Grade 6, 9 and 12 O-NET scores are among the lowest in the country, placing the province in the MOE’s O-NET “red zone”; only children in the violence-torn, Malay-speaking Deep South do worse.28,29 This is especially true for rural youth of ethnic minority backgrounds; teachers and administrators report that children from urban areas whose mother tongue is Northern Thai or Shan (both closely related to Thai, the sole medium of instruction in most schools) do much better academically. More attention thus needs to be given to improving the academic outcomes of ethnic minority children from rural areas who enter school with limited Thai language abilities. Some 60 per cent of Mae Hong Son’s population are from ethnic minority groups;30 minority children thus comprise the majority of students in the province’s primary schools.

Figure 2  Grade 6 O-Net results in Mae Hong Son (NIETS, 2018)31

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29 In January 2021, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Education made grade 6 and grade 9 O-NET testing a “voluntary…individual right” rather than an obligation of all Thai students. As of this writing, it is unclear whether schools, parents or students themselves are deciding whether or not to test, as well as what impact the new policy will have on test scores. (Bangkok Post, 2021; Thansettakij, 2021)
30 UNESCO, 2017
31 Data extracted from http://www.serviceapp.niets.or.th/onetmap/.
The problem of high access and low outcomes is not unique to Thailand. A meta-analysis of 238 educational studies in 52 low- and middle-income countries conducted by the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation found that most educational interventions had little impact on learning. The greatest impact came from “structured pedagogy programmes” which included “development of new content focused on a particular topic, materials for students and teachers, and short-term training courses for teachers in delivering the new content.”

Grassroots voices:
How do local educators see the situation?

This report benefitted greatly from the input of approximately 100 education officials, school directors, teachers and students who participated in interviews and roundtable discussions from 2018 to 2020. These individuals provided a grassroots view of the practical problems faced everyday by Mae Hong Son’s most disadvantaged children and the educators seeking to improve their lives.

While all 100 persons interviewed had a unique perspective, many expressed similar views. Common concerns expressed by more than one participant or group of participants included:

- The language gap, as many students are unable to speak Thai when they enter school and are thus unable to interact meaningfully with the standard curriculum. Early primary teachers must focus so much time on teaching the Thai language that there is not time for other subjects (e.g., math, science, social studies). This has a long-term impact, as few ethnic minority children are able to “catch up” with their Thai-speaking peers.

- Teacher recruitment and retention, as newly certified government teachers spend the minimum time required in hardship posts before requesting transfer to more attractive urban areas, while LCTs receive small salaries, no benefits, and no opportunities for professional development.

- Infrastructure challenges (paved roads, reliable electricity/internet) and funding shortages (school budget allocated on a per-head basis, meaning that smaller schools have little funding) make educational delivery difficult in remote areas.

- Data management issues, as a lack of coordination between government agencies results in ambiguities about such basic things as the number of children enrolled in grade 1 or the number of lower secondary graduates who continue their education in upper secondary or vocational schools.

- Family tensions, as many older, and some quite young ethnic children from remote areas are compelled to live in boarding schools far from their home villages with little adult supervision where they often develop attitudes and risky behaviours that are at odds with traditional values.

- Parental engagement with education is low; many are happy to help with school maintenance but are unlikely to attend Parent-teacher association (PTA) meetings due to the language gap. This became even more problematic during COVID-19 lockdowns, and many parents were unable to help their children with distance learning.

- Limited employment opportunities for young adults

- Mae Hong Son has one of the highest suicide rates in Thailand

32 Snilstveit et al., 2015.
The language gap drives the learning gap

Of the challenges highlighted above, the language gap was mentioned most often by teachers and local school administrators. It also was also frequently discussed in interviews with ethnic minority secondary and university students. As part of the learning gap, the language gap is also implicated in challenges related to teacher training, education budgets, school management and parental engagement.

The following pages will discuss how the language gap drives the learning gap, drawing on evidence from within Thailand, as well as the experiences of other countries.

Does Thailand have a language gap?

Thailand values its national language and has done much to strengthen it, through the standardization efforts of the Royal Society, a strong emphasis on Thai language learning in the national curriculum, and the rigorous application of Thai language standards in mass media (e.g., newspapers, radio, television). And while Thailand has historically underestimated the importance of ethnic minority languages to the education system, the new National Language Policy Action Plan is a step in the right direction.

While over 98 per cent of Thai youth are literate (an enormous achievement!), children growing up in non-Thai speaking homes are also less likely to be literate, enter grade 1 at age six, or to be enrolled in primary or secondary school.33 It is not surprising, then, that the eleven provinces identified as O-NET “red zones” (Figure 2, previous section) are all home to large linguistic minority populations. As shown in Figure 3, over half of non-Thai speaking children aged 7 to 14 lacked foundational reading and numeracy skills.34 The reading and numeracy gaps between Thai and non-Thai speakers is greater than the gaps between the richest and poorest children, or urban and rural children. Clearly ethnic minority children will not receive an equitable education until the language gap is addressed.

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“But the children speak some Thai…”

Teachers and school directors in Mae Hong Son and other remote areas are not surprised by these depressing statistics; they experience these problems daily. Nonetheless, many point out that after a few years, their ethnic minority students have usually acquired enough Thai to converse with their teachers. Yet they continue to perform poorly in school. Why is this?

Canadian bilingual education expert Dr. Jim Cummins provides a possible answer. Cummins’ research has found that there are two types of language ability: Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). BICS is the type of language we use in everyday communication, while CALP refers to more technical or academic language. A child can develop BICS skills in a new language in one to three years. CALP skills take much longer to develop: five to seven years for children who had some mother tongue-based education, seven to ten years (and sometimes never) for children who never studied in their mother tongue.35

The Royal Thai Government is aware of the language gap and has taken some policy-level actions (in addition to the NLPAP) to help. For example:

- The National Education Scheme (2017–2036) promotes “teaching and learning by integrating the curriculum in accordance with local languages, cultures, and local society...[so that] people of all ages in special areas can read and write Thai and local languages”.
- The Policy and Focus of the Ministry of Education, Fiscal Year 2020 calls for schools in remote areas to help students in remote areas learn “local languages (mother tongues) for communication.”
- The Equitable Education Fund (EEF, created in 2018) is working to recruit and train “homegrown teachers” from remote areas, many of whom speak ethnic minority languages.
- Thailand was one of the first 16 Asia-Pacific nations that endorsed UNESCO’s Bangkok Statement on Language and Inclusion, which contains clear action points for improving ethnic minority children’s education, including the recruitment of more mother tongue-speaking teachers (See Annex D).

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Figure 3  Share of children aged 7 to 14 with foundational reading and numeracy skills (Adapted from National Statistical Office and UNICEF, 2019)

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This is what seems to be happening among many ethnic minority children in Thailand’s border regions. After a few years in Thai-only schools they acquire enough basic speaking skills (BICS) to converse with their teachers but lack the deeper understanding of academic Thai language (CALP) needed for more advanced subjects. Inadequate CALP skills contribute to these students’ poor academic performance in early secondary school and even university where they struggle to keep up with their native Thai-speaking peers.

Indeed, weak CALP skills may explain why so few ethnic minority university graduates perform well enough on the highly-competitive national teacher exam to become government teachers. The lack of mother tongue teachers perpetuates the language gap and the learning gap—a depressing cycle.

Does the language gap affect PISA?

In analyzing the 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) scores of 15-year-old Thai students, the World Bank concluded:

There is a wide gap in student performance between students who speak the language of the test [Thai] at home and those who speak a different language at home: yet, there are no policies to provide remedial support to ethnic minorities….77 per cent of students who speak a different language [not Thai] at home scored below minimum proficiency in reading.36

Low PISA scores among ethnic minority students are indicative of an achievement gap that begins in pre-primary and continues through high school and adulthood.

What about other countries?

Is Thailand the only country with a language gap that creates a learning gap? The answer is no. In 2005, the World Bank found that half of the world’s out-of-school children did not speak the language of the school.37 More recently, the World Bank estimated that 37 per cent of children in low- and middle-income countries did not have access to education in their home language, which has a negative impact on their studies.38

This is true of Thailand’s closest ASEAN neighbors, which are also home to many ethnic minority groups. The Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM) project conducted by UNICEF and the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) found significant differences in the reading, writing and mathematics abilities of children from Cambodia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines and Vietnam, depending on whether the home language was the same as the school language, as shown below.39

36 World Bank, 2020c.
37 World Bank, 2005.
38 World Bank, 2021.
Similar situations exist in many other countries. Educators in Latin America, Africa and other parts of Asia also struggle to reach ethnic minority students in remote areas. Western nations including the United States, Canada, Australia, Spain and Finland have attempted to improve education for both indigenous peoples and migrant communities by addressing linguistic, cultural and economic barriers.

Has COVID-19 worsened the language gap?

More than 1.5 billion students worldwide have been affected by pandemic-related school closures. While this has had a serious impact on all children, children with multiple vulnerabilities due to poverty, remote location, lack of internet access, parental illiteracy, etc., have been particularly hard hit.40 In case studies from across Asia “marginalization was intensified by the exclusion of minority language groups from remote learning due to a lack of materials in their language.”41 Some Thai teachers reported hand-delivering printed materials to rural households without internet access, only to discover that the parents were illiterate and unable to help their children with distance learning. School closures have caused ethnic minority children to have had less interaction with native Thai speakers, meaning that their already slow acquisition of the national language has been further delayed.42

42 Ironically, some remote schools in Mae Hong Son were able to re-open before urban schools in Bangkok and Chiang Mai.
Closing the learning gap with the mother tongue

One reason why the language gap is so difficult to close is that many people believe that “children can learn any language easily” through submersion in school. However, research has shown that this belief is false. Large-scale longitudinal studies in multiple “developed” and “developing” countries, in nations as different as Australia and Papua New Guinea, Canada and Cambodia, the Netherlands and Nepal, demonstrates that linguistic minority children learn both national and international languages much better if they develop strong listening, speaking, reading and writing skills in their mother tongue first. For example, researchers in the People’s Republic of China found that ethnic minority children who learned in their mother tongue first learned both Mandarin and English better. Conversely, global research demonstrates that exclusion of the mother tongue from school almost guarantees that minority children will not develop strong skills in the national language or international languages such as English.

The language gap is thus a significant cause of the learning gap experienced by ethnic minority children in Thailand’s geographically remote, under resourced schools. This is why the World Bank’s Thailand: Advice on Narrowing the Learning Gaps between Schools, commissioned by the Royal Thai Government’s Equitable Education Fund, states: “All ethnic minority students [should be] provided with materials strengthening the learning of Thai as a second language, after mother tongue language [learning].”

Mother tongue in the Philippines

The Philippines is famous for exporting English teachers to other Asian nations, but the country itself is home to many ethnic minority language communities. For many years, only Filipino and English were used as languages of instruction. However, MTB-MLE pilot projects in the 1990s demonstrated that ethnic minority children actually learned Filipino, English and mathematics much better when they began with their mother tongue. In 2013, President Benigno Aquino signed an education law that created MTB-MLE programmes in 19 mother tongues. Today, 66 mother tongues are used in pre-primary and primary school MTB-MLE programmes throughout the Philippines, with strong community support. Thousands of mother tongue books created by local teachers were digitized to support distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

What about Finland’s famous schools?

Like Thailand, Finland is home to many ethnic minority and migrant children. Over 200 Finnish schools operate bilingual programmes, where the students’ mother tongue is used as a medium of instruction and Finnish is taught as a second language. Minority languages used in Finnish schools include Arabic, Somali, Russian, Vietnamese, Estonian, Saami and Swedish.

43 Lambelet and Berthele, 2015.
44 Feng and Adamson, 2015.
45 Collier and Thomas, 2019.
47 World Bank, 2020: 98.
48 Areola, 2021.
But isn’t MTB-MLE just one of many options?

How does MTB-MLE compare to other approaches to reaching disadvantaged children? As part of its global mandate to “unite for children,” UNICEF has conducted extensive research on the impact of many different educational reforms and interventions. While the world’s disadvantaged children come from a great variety of languages, cultures and geographical settings, educationalists have implemented a finite set of interventions designed to enhance access to and survivability in school. UNICEF’s Investment Case for Education and Equity (2015) uses a meta-analysis to analyse basic interventions used in many different countries. The report then ranks the interventions according to their effectiveness in promoting “school survivability”—keeping children in school and learning. The results are shown below.

The International Commission for Financing Education Globally, comprised of world leaders including former United Kingdom Prime Minister Gordon Brown and former Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard, reached similar conclusions when they researched the educational interventions most likely to succeed at minimal cost. Their list of interventions is slightly different from UNICEF (2015), but mother tongue/bilingual instruction was found to be the most cost-effective way to improve children’s learning, ranking far above school feeding, cash transfers and even computer-assisted learning, as shown below:

“When I was working in Mae Hong Son, we tried many different innovations to improve education—the horseback teachers, the motorcycle teachers, solar panels, tablet computers, satellite dishes, school gardens and finally the ‘District School’ model. I’m sorry that we did not know about MTB-MLE then, because it could have helped many children. Now I am retired, but I am working hard to help the MTB-MLE network.”

Gosol Pracom, Chair, Administrative Committee, Chiang Mai Education Sandbox Innovation Zone
Students in Mae Hong Son have already benefited from almost all of the interventions shown in figures 5 and 6. At least two years of preschool/kindergarten are offered to all children. Cash transfers for especially poor families are provided through several government channels. Parents do not pay school fees, and the recently created Equitable Education Fund (EFF) is working hard to keep smaller schools in remote areas open so that young children will not be forced to travel long distances or live apart from their families to attend school. Grade repetition is very rare in Thailand. Through the interest of Her Royal Highness Princess Sirindhorn and other members of the Thai Royal family, as well as the tireless efforts of local educators, many schools in remote areas supply free meals to poor students. School uniforms are often provided by private organizations and individual donors. Female teachers can be found in all schools. Parent-teacher associations exist in theory for all schools in the province, and while ethnic minority parents are less likely to attend regular PTA meetings (due to limited Thai language skills and long working hours) they are happy to help with school repairs and food donations for teachers and students alike. The pupil-teacher ratio is often lower than in urban Thai settings (thanks to the presence of LCTs), and textbooks are provided free of charge. Computers can be found in even the most remote schools, although electricity and internet access can be sporadic.

So, what has not been tried? **Mother-tongue based instruction.** Most of Mae Hong Son’s most disadvantaged children do not speak Thai (or the closely related Shan or Northern Thai languages) as their mother tongue. In fact, most speak languages from the Sino-Tibetan family which are very different from Thai in terms of grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary. Some LCTs in Mae Hong Son use the mother tongue informally as a teaching tool, but they do not have any training in how to do this effectively. Similarly, government certified Thai teachers do not have training in or a systematic, modern curriculum for teaching Thai-as-a-Second-Language (TSL) to ethnic minority children.
What are LCTs and why are they important?

In Mae Hong Son and other rural areas of Thailand, the demand for teachers is greater than the supply. Thus, many small schools depend on Local Contract Teachers (LCTs).

LCTs are community members hired directly by the school director and paid through the local school’s budget or outside resources such as NGOs or foundations.\(^49\) Salaries are typically less than one-third of what government-certified teachers receive, with no fringe benefits and few professional development opportunities. While some have only a high school degree, the majority are university graduates.

Because they usually speak the local mother tongue, LCTs are typically assigned to teach pre-primary and primary students. Government teachers use LCTs as translators to communicate with young children and community members. One district level education official said, “Without LCTs, education here would be impossible.”\(^50\)

Improved training and structured capacity-building for LCTs would help them become more effective teachers, helping to close the learning gap. (For more information on sustainable teacher recruitment, training and deployment, see Annex A)

What does Thai research tell us?

Thailand already has several world-famous MTB-MLE programmes.\(^51\) These include the Patani Malay-Thai Multilingual Education Programme (PMT-MLE) in the Deep South (Ministry of Education, Mahidol University, Thailand Research Fund, UNICEF Thailand) and the Hmong-Thai, Karen-Thai and Lahu-Thai MTB-MLE programmes in Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai (Ministry of Education, Foundation for Applied Linguistics, Pestalozzi Children’s Foundation, Child Dream Network).

These Thai-style MTB-MLE programmes have also demonstrated that developing literacy skills in the mother tongue first greatly improves the students’ learning of Thai. Grade 1 PMT-MLE students, for example, were found to have much higher Thai writing abilities than comparison group students in Thai-only schools, as shown below:

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\(^{49}\) Through its local donors, UNICEF Thailand support 41 LCTs in remote schools in Mae Hong Son.

\(^{50}\) UNICEF, 2021.

\(^{51}\) Thailand’s MTB-MLE programmes have received prestigious international awards. These include: the 2016 UNESCO King Sejong Award for Literacy; honorable mention for the 2013 and 2017 UNESCO Wenhui Awards for Educational Innovation; and national awards from the Thailand Research Fund and the National Innovation Agency.
Similarly, grade 6 O-NET scores in Thai language, math and science for PMT-MLE students were higher than the regional average and close to the national average, indicating that the learning gap had been reduced.

Figure 7   First grade, first semester Thai writing assessment results (adapted from Burarungrot, 2016)

Figure 8   Grade 6 O-Net scores of Patani Malay-Thai MTB-MLE students (UNICEF, 2018)
These positive results are not limited to the Deep South. Students in the Hmong-Thai MTB-MLE Programme in the northern province of Chiang Rai were twice as likely to achieve "excellent" scores on OBEC’s National Reading and Writing Screening Assessment throughout grades 1 to 5 than their Hmong peers in Thai-only schools, as shown in figure 9.

Figure 9  Hmong-Thai MTB-MLE student and comparison school reading screening results, academic year 2015-16 (Pestalozzi Children’s Foundation and Foundation for Applied Linguistics, 2019, used by permission)

The evidence is clear: Thailand has developed internationally-respected expertise in MTB-MLE through innovative projects in the far north and Deep South that have decreased the learning gap. The challenge for today is to expand MTB-MLE to other remote areas of the country—including Mae Hong Son—to benefit more disadvantaged children.
How does MTB-MLE help close the learning gap?

The preceding section demonstrates that the MTB-MLE model can have a positive outcome on Thai ethnic minority children’s learning outcomes, but how does it actually work? And how does starting in the mother tongue make learning Thai and other languages such as English easier for ethnic minority children?

MTB-MLE is a systematic way of using a student’s knowledge of his or her home language and culture as a learning tool. As shown in the diagram below, students in MTB-MLE schools first develop strong listening, speaking, reading and writing skills in their mother tongue, while also learning academic content (e.g., science, math, social studies) through the mother tongue. A special Thai-as-a-Second-Language (TSL) curriculum then helps them develop listening and speaking skills in the national language through internationally validated language teaching techniques. Thereafter, students build on their mother tongue literacy skills to gain Thai literacy using a specially-developed transitional primer. Finally, more national language vocabulary is introduced in the academic content courses, through the “sandwich” method (UNICEF 2018).

Figure 10  Bridging from the mother tongue to the national language (Pestalozzi Children’s Foundation and Foundation for Applied Linguistics, 2019, used by permission)
In Thailand, most MTB-MLE projects cover grades K1 to P3, with a small mother tongue/local wisdom component extending through grade 6. The following figure, based on MTB-MLE projects in Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai, illustrates this sequence:

**Figure 11  Step-by-step language sequence in MTB-MLE projects (Pestalozzi Children’s Foundation and Foundation for Applied Linguistics, 2019, used by permission)**

Thailand’s home-grown MTB-MLE programmes thus use a gradual, systematic approach which, in the words of the NLPAP, “corresponds to the nature of human language learning.” Thai-style MTB-MLE starts with what the students know—their mother tongue and local culture—to help them understand Thai language and culture, as well as other academic subjects such as math and science. This closes the learning gap, so that ethnic minority children are better prepared for upper primary and secondary school, as well as for life as productive citizens of Thailand.
Introducing MTB-MLE in MHS: leveraging the “latecomer’s advantage”

What would be needed to start a sustainable MTB-MLE programme in Mae Hong Son?

An MTB-MLE programme in Mae Hong Son would enjoy a huge “latecomer’s advantage,” because of the learnings of MTB-MLE programmes elsewhere in Thailand—particularly in the Chiang Mai Education Sandbox, where some of the same mother tongues are used. This would enable a quality MTB-MLE programme to be started in Mae Hong Son relatively quickly.

Experienced Thai MTB-MLE practitioners at Mahidol University and the Foundation for Applied Linguistics feel it would be best for Mae Hong Son to begin the first phase of MTB-MLE adoption with a cohort of 10 to 15 schools. This is because MTB-MLE approach is so different from “business as usual” in Thai schools that extra coaching is needed at the beginning to ensure that teachers consistently use MTB-MLE teaching techniques and do not fall back into old, non-productive habits. Experienced teachers from the first cohort of MTB-MLE schools could then help mentor others (both in person and digitally) in a cascading model “designed for scale” in subsequent project phases to reach many more schools.

In order to be effective, MTB-MLE programmes must account for a number of factors. The diagram below shows how the various “puzzle pieces” for successful MTB-MLE in Mae Hong Son would fit together:

Figure 12 Components of MTB-MLE for Mae Hong Son
Research and data

Successful MTB-MLE programmes begin with a preliminary research phase of up to one year—although that time could be shortened depending on the availability of local resources and commitment of the programme planners. The research phase seeks to collect linguistic and social data to guide programme planning, as well as to identify participating schools. As detailed in UNICEF 2018, the key information to be gathered during this phase includes:

- What language(s) do people understand and use daily in the programme area?
- What language(s) are spoken by certified government teachers and LCTs?
- Does the minority language have a suitable Thai-based alphabet?
- What attitudes do people have to the different languages around them?
- How engaged are parents with the school? Are there barriers (language, culture, poverty) to their involvement?
- What other factors (social, geographical, religious, etc.) could impact the MLE programme?
- What local resources (e.g., cultural experts, retired teachers, existing learning materials, religious leaders, local NGOs, supportive government agencies) are available to help programme implementation?
- Which schools are best positioned to develop successful programmes? Key criteria would include having a linguistically homogenous school—meaning that all the students and at least one teacher speak the same ethnic minority language—as well as support for MTB-MLE from the school director, parents and community leaders.
- What baseline data on student achievement is currently available, and what other forms of academic achievement should be collected in the early stages of the project to feed into longitudinal studies of intervention impact?

These questions should be revisited periodically to monitor demographic shifts that could impact programme planning and implementation.

What about schools with multiple mother tongues?

Small village schools in Mae Hong Son tend to be linguistically homogenous, meaning that virtually all students (and LCTs) speak the same mother tongue. Such schools are ideal for MTB-MLE, with Thai-as-a-Second-Language (TSL) included.

Nonetheless, some slightly larger schools serve children speaking multiple mother tongues which are not spoken by any school staff. In such situations, a strong TSL standalone programme might be more appropriate than a typical MTB-MLE approach. A TSL standalone would not reap the full academic benefits of MTB-MLE but would be a dramatic improvement over current practices. Standalone TSL is currently being piloted in several schools in the Chiang Mai Education Sandbox.

School language mapping (see Annex C) is needed to determine how many Mae Hong Son schools are linguistically homo/heterogenous. Similar language mapping projects in Vietnam and Timor-Leste actually found more homogenous classrooms than authorities expected.
Advocacy and cooperation

Advocacy and cooperation begins during the research phase, as the MTB-MLE programme implementers build bridges to national and local education officials, school directors, teachers, parents and community leaders. Effective MTB-MLE programmes need a strong team.

Again, Mae Hong Son has a latecomer’s advantage in that much advocacy has already been done on the national level (resulting in the NLPAP and various MOE policies). Some provincial and Education Service Area Office (ESAO) officials have heard about MTB-MLE through the Highland School Director’s Network and the Chiang Mai MLE Network. These organizations exist to strengthen and expand the MTB-MLE movement.

In addition, advocacy focused on systems analysis would be needed in Mae Hong Son to create a comprehensive approach that takes teacher training, teacher deployment, and budgetary allocation seriously so that schools would have the resources needed to support their ethnic minority students.

Elsewhere in Thailand, parents of children in MTB-MLE schools have become enthusiastic community advocates, happy to share their experiences with people in neighbouring villages. Many tell how their younger children (in new MTB-MLE schools) read and write Thai much better than their older siblings and have a deeper love of reading.\(^{54}\) Parents also point out that MTB-MLE helps children connect to their grandparents and be proud of their traditional culture.

Creating orthographies, curriculum and local materials

The earliest MTB-MLE programmes in Thailand were faced with the problem of how to write mother tongues which had previously existed only as spoken languages. All of those projects developed easy-to-learn, linguistically accurate Thai-based orthographies for the ethnic languages, a time-consuming but important step. Many of these Thai-based orthographies were later formally certified by the Royal Society, the government agency which is responsible for Thai language standardization.

An MTB-MLE project in Mae Hong Son would again have a considerable advantage because of the Thai-based orthographies previously developed for MTB-MLE projects in Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai Provinces. Nonetheless, some checking of these orthographies would be needed to ensure that any differences in Mae Hong Son dialects are accounted for. Mother tongues currently used in MTB-MLE projects in Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai include:

- S’gaw Karen
- Pwo Karen
- Hmong (green)
- Lahu (black)
- Lahu (yellow)

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54 For testimonials from parents, see UNICEF, 2018 and Pestalozi, 2019.
55 UNESCO, 2021b.

A Global Consensus

The United Nations General Assembly declared 2022-2032 the “International Decade of Indigenous Languages” (IDIL). The IDIL Global Action Plan lists improved MLE practices and policies as its #1 desired outcome.\(^{55}\) Many international development agencies likewise feel that MLE is crucial to fulfilling UN Sustainable Development Goal #4’s promise of “quality education for all” by 2030. Indeed, SDG indicator 4.5.2 asks countries to quantify the “percentage of students in primary education whose first or home language is the language of instruction”. Mae Hong Son’s ethnic minority children can benefit from this world-wide emphasis on including mother tongues in formal education.
If, however, programme implementers chose to include languages not listed above, they will need to cooperate
with professional linguists from Mahidol University and/or the Foundation for Applied Linguistics to develop new,
Thai-based orthographies suitable for children for those languages. Developing and field testing a new orthography
can take several months.

Mae Hong Son could benefit tremendously from materials already developed for FAL’s programmes for the
languages mentioned above. Nonetheless, all teachers should have the experience of creating and testing
their own materials, to increase their understanding of MTB-MLE pedagogy, build local ownership and add to
the corpus of mother tongue and TSL materials available to all MTB-MLE teachers. Materials highlighting local
cultural practices, geography, and history unique to Mae Hong Son should also be created. This is best done
through in-service workshops.

MTB-MLE programmes elsewhere in Thailand utilize a variety of materials, including:

- **Picture stories** with which students generate creative oral and written stories from a series of four to six
  picture

- **Big cultural scenes** (also called “Big busy pictures”), which stimulate classroom discussion based on
  pictures of everyday village life and custom

- **Big books** for group reading activities

- **Small books** (graded) for individual reading

- **Listening stories** to be read out loud by teachers (without pictures)

- **Primers** both for mother tongue literacy and the systematic transition to Thai reading and writing

- **Detailed lesson plans** to guide the teachers in using the materials correctly and systematically.

**Recruiting and training teachers**

Thailand’s government teacher recruitment system is highly competitive, favoring those who perform well on
standardized tests. As a result, ethnic minority young people from disadvantaged backgrounds rarely become
certified teachers—and the few who do are rarely deployed in areas where their mother tongues are spoken.\(^{56}\)

To the degree that it is within their power, school directors
should prioritize the hiring of local teachers who understand
the language and culture of their students—even if that
means passing over candidates from outside Mae Hong
Son who, “on paper,” might look more academically qualified.

Both native-Thai speaking certified teachers and teachers
who share the same mother tongue as their students are
crucial to MTB-MLE programmes. Mae Hong Son again
has an advantage here, in that most small schools already
employ LCTs who, because of shared mother tongues,
are usually assigned to the pre-primary and early primary
grades. With proper training, government certified teachers
and LCTs can become highly effective teammates in
teaching the mother tongue and TSL portions of an MTB-
MLE curriculum.

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\(^{56}\) For additional information on sustainable teacher recruitment, training and deployment see Annex A.
MTB-MLE pedagogy is very different from “business as usual” in Thai classrooms. For this reason, systematic, recurring in-service teacher training is an absolute necessary. Government certified teachers, LCTs, and school administrators should all attend. Workshop topics should include:

- Theoretical foundations of MTB-MLE
- Practice writing the ethnic language (for teachers who share their students’ mother tongue)
- Practice creating mother tongue materials
- Practice using MTB-MLE and TSL teaching techniques

Again, Mae Hong Son would have a latecomers advantage over earlier MTB-MLE programmes because Mahidol University, Yala Rajabhat University and FAL have all created Thai-language MTB-MLE teacher training materials. FAL in particular has extensive experience organizing MTB-MLE teacher training workshops in northern Thailand. These materials could thus be easily adapted for Mae Hong Son. In addition, Chiang Mai Rajabhat University (which has a branch in Mae Hong Son), FAL and PCF recently launched an interactive massive open online course (MOOC) to support MTB-MLE teachers. This MOOC (further described later in this document) could play a vital role in scale-up, especially as pandemic restrictions limit interprovincial travel.

Figure 13  Yala Rajabhat University MTB-MLE teacher training course materials
Monitoring and evaluation

This involves checking on student progress through conventional academic assessments, as well as conversations with parents, students and teachers. Such data will help the implementation team improve the MTB-MLE programme. The assessments should be conducted in such a way as to provide longitudinal data, to support further national and global education research.

Existing evaluation instruments could be utilized to gather baseline data and monitor children’s progress. These include:

- The Foundational Learning module introduced in NSO and UNICEF’s 2019 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS)
- The semi-annual National Reading and Writing Screening Assessment administered in all Thai schools in primary grades 1-6
- The primary grade 3 National Test (NT)
- Ethnic language evaluations developed by FAL

Community perceptions should also be monitored carefully. This can be gauged by teachers conversing informally with parents, or through a community interview-based approach like that conducted by the Thailand Research Fund in 2010 and 2013 for the PMT-MLE programme in the Deep South.57

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Parent and community engagement

Many teachers and school directors interviewed for this project commented on a lack of parental engagement in their children’s education. Community members are typically happy to donate their labor to build or repair school facilities, and often supply food to teachers. Nonetheless, attendance at Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and school committee meetings is sparse, partly because parents feel they have little to contribute owing to their own limited education and Thai language abilities.

MTB-MLE gives parents and community members the opportunity to engage more meaningfully in their children’s education because of the value MTB-MLE places on local language and culture. Parents, grandparents and other community members are transformed into experts with valuable information to share inside and outside the school. Among many other things, they can help teachers develop learning materials, explain village history and teach traditional music, dance and poetry. Students can be assigned projects that involve interviewing family members, go on fieldtrips led by villagers with knowledge of medicinal herbs, learn how traditional cloth is woven, etc.

These type of experiences will lessen the perceived knowledge gap between school and community, enhancing parental and community engagement as well as student learning.

Educational technology

Another “latecomer’s advantage” for Mae Hong Son is educational technology—which has been under-utilized in other Thai MTB-MLE programs. Due to COVID-19, teachers and administrators are now much more comfortable using a variety of digital teaching tools.

Most schools in Mae Hong Son have DLTV satellite dishes that would enable mother tongue lessons to be broadcast over a wide area. Android-based applications such as the Bloom Reader (SIL and FAL), Learn Big (UNESCO) and Let’s Read (Asia Foundation) already contain some e-books and talking books in Thailand’s ethnic minority languages; mother tongue teachers could determine the best sequence in which to introduce these books to children. Testing on the Thai-script version of SIL International’s award-winning Alphabet Tiles literacy scaffolding app is currently underway in Chiang Mai.

In September 2021, Chiang Mai Rajabhat University (CMRU) launched a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) to deliver MTB-MLE and TSL training to kindergarten 2 teachers; MOOCs for kindergarten 3 and grade 1 teachers are now ready. The wide-spread use of Line, What’s App, and Facebook Messenger would enable new MTB-MLE teachers to record videos of their teaching to send to their mentor/coaches for input and accountability.

By harnessing the power of technology, Mae Hong Son could expand the reach of MTB-MLE programs in exciting ways that could set an example for other Thai provinces as well as neighboring countries.
CLOSING THE LEARNING GAP IN MAE HONG SON
The Case for Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education

Figure 15  Chiang Mai Rajabhat University MTB-MLE teacher training MOOC (2021) (CRRU, used by permission)

D-MTB-MLE-TT

Figure 16  The Alpha Tiles android app supports minority language literacy in multiple scripts (SIL International, used by permission)
Financing MTB-MLE in Mae Hong Son

Starting an MTB-MLE programme in Mae Hong Son would of course require a financial investment, but it would not be as expensive as some might fear.

Research in Latin America, Africa and certain areas of Europe have found that MTB-MLE programmes can save government budget over the long-term, because of reduced drop-out and grade repetition rates. Initial expenses related to the production of mother tongue teaching and learning materials were soon recouped. Indeed, a World Bank analysis found that a shift to bilingual education in Guatemala would save the government $5,000,000 annually. Thus, MTB-MLE can generate a positive return on the government’s investment.

Budgets are indicative of priorities and Mae Hong Son’s 2019 to 2022 provincial education budget reflects concern for the problems mentioned earlier in this document. The budget allocates a total of 366,646,800 THB ($11,743,000) into 36 budget categories. Of the top five budget items, three relate directly to the provinces’ most disadvantaged students (marked with an asterisk (*) in the table below) with additional funds earmarked for professional development for teachers and administrators in “special regions.” Together, the starred items in Table 1 comprise one-third of the total provincial budget. Of course, many other line items would also benefit students and teachers in disadvantaged situations.

<table>
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<td>*Improving quality of small schools</td>
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<td>4.3</td>
<td>Staff development for STEM teaching and learning</td>
<td>40</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>*Improving distance learning (DLTV + DLIT)</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>*Literacy skills development</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4.3</td>
<td>*Staff development in special regions</td>
<td>8</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

58 Patrinos and Velez, 2009.
59 Excluding teacher salaries and other expenses shouldered by the Ministry of Education and other government agencies.
Much of the 2019 to 2022 budget has already been allocated to specific projects and programmes, although discussions could be held on whether any leftover funds could be allocated to MTB-MLE as well as the inclusion of MTB-MLE in future budget cycles—either separate from or included in some of the line items cited above. For example, staff development is already a priority; MTB-MLE and TSL teacher training workshops would have an immediate impact. Distance learning is already a priority; educational videos and e-books in student mother tongues could help make this goal a reality. Literacy skills development is already a priority; MTB-MLE and TSL have been proven as highly effective tools for dramatically improving literacy.

But how much would this cost?

Beginning in 2019, provincial education officials in Chiang Mai cooperated with FAL to develop MTB-MLE programmes in 16 remote schools as part of the Education Sandbox Innovation Zone project. The initial budget for the first year of this programme was approximately 1.5 million THB, which included seven training workshops, school visits by FAL trainers, materials production (in four minority languages plus Thai), etc.60

The costs of starting an MTB-MLE programme in Mae Hong Son would be comparable to the Chiang Mai case, although additional travel funds might be required. Still, the costs of MTB-MLE would represent less than one per cent of the provincial education budget and yield a high return on investment in terms of student performance and teacher professional development.

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60 See Annex B for a breakdown of first year cost estimates.
Conclusion

The disadvantaged children of Mae Hong Son actually have many advantages! They are blessed with an awe-inspiring natural environment, the opportunity to grow up in close-knit communities where people care for one another, and the chance to build bridges between the traditional lifestyle that has sustained their people for generations and the “modern” world. Their educational needs are attended to by a large group of dedicated teachers, school directors and government officials.

Nonetheless, they suffer from a large learning gap, due in part to the language gap. Yet this gap can be closed by seeing mother tongues as resources instead of obstacles, empowering local teachers to fully realize their professional potential and focusing the educational budget on proven “made in Thailand” models of MTB-MLE and TSL that align with the new National Language Policy’s focus on mother tongue-based education.

To operationalize this vision, action should be taken along three lines:

**M** MATERIALS: Evaluate MTB-MLE materials (both print and digital) already being used in Chiang Rai and Chiang Mai Provinces, adapt them for Mae Hong Son, train teachers to produce new materials, and pioneer the use of educational technology for MTB-MLE.

**H** HUMAN RESOURCES: Recruit more local teachers who share the same mother tongue as their students; train current and future government certified and local contract teachers in MTB-MLE; develop a plan to meaningfully engage parents and community members in all aspects of school life, including as linguistic and cultural resource persons for the MTB-MLE program.

**S** STRATEGIC ONGOING RESEARCH: map the mother tongues used in each school of Mae Hong Son and correlate this data to student achievement; collect baseline literacy and numeracy data for students in MTB-MLE schools; develop culturally appropriate systems for evaluation and monitoring; conduct a systems analysis of education in Mae Hong Son Province to identify barriers to student success (including budgetary and personnel constraints) and entry points for reform.

Now is the time to address the language-in-education issue in Mae Hong Son. Now is the time to train both government certified and local contract teachers in modern methods of mother tongue and Thai language teaching. Now is the time to produce child-centered, child-accessible digital and print learning materials in ethnic languages. Political will and commitment to the idea that problems are meant to be solved will make this possible, uplifting Mae Hong Son’s children and working toward a more united, prosperous, equitable Thailand.
Annex A: Toward sustainable teacher recruitment, training and deployment in Mae Hong Son

Teachers are crucial to sustainable, equitable education. So, what can be done at the systems level to make teachers serving disadvantaged children in Mae Hong Son maximally effective?

Many teachers in Mae Hong Son are incredibly dedicated and feel a great deal of love for their students. Nonetheless, many new certified government teachers from other provinces who are compelled to work in isolated areas of Mae Hong Son resign or seek transfers as soon as possible. Weeks may pass before replacements arrive. Constant teacher attrition has a negative effect on students and adds to the burden of school directors and teachers who stay.

For these reasons, ethnic minority children are almost twice as likely as children nationwide to experience teacher absences.61

Teacher attrition is also an economic drain on the provincial education system (i.e., a lack of return on training, cost of new hires). Teacher attrition results in economic losses as well, as government certified teachers who intend to transfer as soon as possible are unlikely to make significant purchases in Mae Hong Son, preferring to invest in their home areas.

Small schools in Thailand’s western borderlands thus depend on local contract teachers (LCTs) to compensate for a shortage of government teachers. LCTs are hired on annual contracts, with low salaries (typically less than one-third of a new government teacher’s income), no benefits and few professional development opportunities. In the past, many LCTs had only high school degrees; today, most are university faculty of education graduates.

LCTs often share the same mother tongue as their students and are thus assigned to teach younger children with limited Thai abilities. In this way LCTs make a vital contribution to school readiness. As one district official in neighbouring Tak Province commented, “Without LCTs, education here would stop.”

Nonetheless no provincial or ESAO records exist as to how many LCTs are hired each year, as LCTs are hired directly by local schools.

Thailand is not alone in relying on LCTs. LCTs make up a significant percentage of the teacher workforce in many African and Asian nations, as well as in innovative education situations in Western countries (including charter schools in the United States).

LCT performance in many parts of the world is comparable to that of certified teachers, at least with younger children. Indeed, UNICEF research found that certified and LCT teachers had an equal impact on student access and survival.62 Because they are local, LCTs often have strong community connections, which facilitate greater parental engagement as well as teacher accountability. In times of natural or man-made disasters, LCTs are more likely to remain in the community, carrying on their teaching duties—an important sustainability factor in the COVID-19 era.63

Most LCTs interviewed for this document would like to become certified government teachers, and many have sat for the highly competitive government teacher qualification exam several times. Most fail, probably because of their inequitable academic backgrounds and limited grasp of academic Thai. The few who succeed are inevitably assigned to schools elsewhere in the country, where their linguistic and cultural knowledge is wasted. This contributes to Mae Hong Son’s constant brain drain.

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Government teachers value the work of their LCT colleagues. When asked what one thing they would most like to see change in their schools, government teachers in a participatory roundtable discussion facilitated by this consultant wrote, “Equitable pay for LCTs.” Certified teachers see the LCTs’ linguistic and cultural knowledge as crucial to engaging ethnic minority children and their parents. While LCTs are typically assigned to work with pre-primary or early primary students, certified teachers often ask them to help explain difficult concepts in the mother tongue to upper primary pupils.

LCTs do not have access to the same professional development funds and opportunities available to government teachers. This is itself inequitable, as it denies advancement opportunities to less-qualified teachers while more-qualified teachers can continually add to their qualifications.

More attention should thus be given to developing specialized pre-service and in-service training for LCTs serving in Mae Hong Son. This training should include theoretical and practical information on mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE), Teaching Thai-as-a-Second-Language (TSL) and how to use the local culture as a tool for learning. A particular emphasis should be placed on using ethno-arts for children’s social-emotional learning and as a form of psycho-social support for the teachers.

In addition, OBEC, EEF and provincial education officials should develop more equitable models for LCT compensation, as well as a streamlined certification pathway and guarantee of home area work assignment for experienced LCTs.

Instituted in 2019, EEF’s Homegrown Teacher Programme will help young people from remote areas become certified teachers by providing university scholarships, mentoring and guaranteed job placement in their home area. The genius of EEF’s approach lies in working through existing government systems to bring more disadvantaged youth into the teacher workforce. Nonetheless, the Homegrown Teachers will only be replacing retiring staff in their home villages. Thus many understaffed small schools will continue to rely on LCTs.

64 Wongsing, 2020.
Annex B: Breakdown of estimated first year costs for MTB-MLE in Mae Hong Son

Developing Quality MTB-MLE Programming for 11 Primary Schools in Mae Hong Son Province
First Year Activities and Budget

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity 1: Workshop to build understanding of MTB-MLE among project schools and visit model schools</th>
<th>Itemized Costs</th>
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<tr>
<td>Housing (4 days * 600 Baht * 20 Rooms)</td>
<td></td>
<td>48,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food (4 days * 350 baht * 300 persons)</td>
<td></td>
<td>42,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel (Rent car 1,800 baht * petro cost 2,500 baht * 4 cars)</td>
<td></td>
<td>19,200</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultant fee (20,000/team * 2 days)</td>
<td></td>
<td>40,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>149,200</strong></td>
<td><strong>10%</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity 2: MTB-MLE materials development and teacher training workshops (2 workshops)</th>
<th>Itemized Costs</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% of Budget</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housing (6 days * 600 Baht * 20 Rooms * 2 times)</td>
<td></td>
<td>144,000</td>
<td><strong>52%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food (6 days * 500 baht * 30 persons * 2 times)</td>
<td></td>
<td>180,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel (3,000 baht * 11 schools * 2 times)</td>
<td></td>
<td>66,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultant fee (20,000/team * 5 days * 2 times)</td>
<td></td>
<td>200,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials (10,000 baht * 10 schools * 2 times)</td>
<td></td>
<td>200,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>790,000</strong></td>
<td><strong>52%</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity 3: Supervisory workshop and school visits</th>
<th>Itemized Costs</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% of Budget</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14.01 Training of Trainers (TOT) workshop</td>
<td></td>
<td>154,000</td>
<td><strong>27%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing (3 days * 600 Baht * 20 Rooms)</td>
<td></td>
<td>36,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food (3 days * 500 baht * 30 persons)</td>
<td></td>
<td>45,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel (3,000 baht * 11 schools)</td>
<td></td>
<td>33,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultant fee (20,000/team * 2 days)</td>
<td></td>
<td>40,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.02 School visits for teacher observation and follow-up</td>
<td></td>
<td>412,800</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing (4 days * 600 Baht * 5 Rooms * 4 times)</td>
<td></td>
<td>48,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food (4 days * 500 baht * 5 persons * 4 times)</td>
<td></td>
<td>40,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel (1,800 baht * 4 days * petro cost 3,500 * 1 cars * 4 times)</td>
<td></td>
<td>84,800</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultant fee (20,000/team * 3 days * 4 times)</td>
<td></td>
<td>240,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>412,800</strong></td>
<td><strong>27%</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity 4: Building a network of core schools (and core teachers) + evaluation, review of work, and school exchanges</th>
<th>Itemized Costs</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% of Budget</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housing (3 days * 600 Baht * 20 Rooms)</td>
<td></td>
<td>36,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food (3 days * 500 baht * 30 persons)</td>
<td></td>
<td>45,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel (3,000 baht * 11 schools)</td>
<td></td>
<td>33,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultant fee (20,000/team * 2 days)</td>
<td></td>
<td>40,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>154,000</strong></td>
<td><strong>10%</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL PROJECT COSTS (THB)** 1,506,000
Annex C: Developing a school language map

The effective utilization of mother tongue materials and deployment of teachers speaking ethnic minority languages will not be possible without enhanced data collection.

As mentioned earlier, Mae Hong Son is Thailand’s most ethnically diverse province, with an estimated 60 per cent of the population speaking one of roughly a dozen minority languages. Nonetheless, information on which language is spoken where is very difficult to obtain. Provincial education officials interviewed for this project reported that student records do not contain information on ethnicity or mother tongue. EEF’s highly impressive iSee school database likewise does not contain information on languages spoken in a school (although it does indicate whether a school hosts students from Singapore, India, PRC-China, Japan, Myanmar or Lao PDR).

Figure 17 EEF’s iSee database contains extensive information about individual schools and students, but not data on language or ethnicity

A school language map would be an important tool for understanding local level challenges. Such a project could be modeled on Mahidol University’s Ethnolinguistic Maps of Thailand (Premsrirat, 2004), which drew from data provided by school directors that was later verified by Thai linguists, as well as school language mapping projects carried out by UNICEF in Vietnam and Timor-Leste, as well as a new cloud-based approach being used in the Philippines. Such data could enrich the EEF database and provide information on the school-based responses needed. It would also give researchers an important tool to determine how well the learning gap is being closed and whether certain ethnic groups are more challenged than others in that regard (and thus require additional attention or specialized approaches).
Figure 18  Ethnolinguistic Maps of Thailand (Premsrirat 2004, used by permission)

Figure 19  Lao Cai school language map (UNICEF Vietnam, used by permission)
However, language data should not be collected only for mapping purposes. A student’s ethnicity and mother tongue should be listed in school records, as this would enable researchers to determine whether certain groups of children are especially disadvantaged. For example, preliminary research into the primary grade National Reading and Writing Screening Assessment shows that children from the Shan ethnic group perform better than Hmong children.65 Both UNICEF and UNESCO encourage disaggregating education data based on language/ethnicity. Such data could inform Thailand’s Sustainable Development Goal 4 reporting for the following thematic indicators:

4.5.2: per cent in primary education whose first or home language is the language of instruction
4.5.3: resource allocation to disadvantaged populations
4.6.2: youth/adult literacy rate
4.6.3: participation rate of illiterate youth/adults in literacy programmes

EEF should cooperate with linguists from Mahidol University and other relevant experts and government agencies to add linguistic/ethnic data to the iSee database. This could be piloted in 15 to 20 schools, before scaling up to include all of Mae Hong Son (and portions of other ethnically diverse provinces such as Tak, Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Nan, Pattani, Kanchanaburi, etc.). The lessons learned from such a mapping project should then inform provincial education officials’ efforts to include language/ethnicity in student records, to obtain disaggregated data providing deeper insight into the needs of the province’s most vulnerable children.

Annex D: The Bangkok Statement on Language and Inclusion

The Bangkok Statement on Language and Inclusion

Output of the High-level Policy Forum on Multilingual Education convened in parallel to
The Inclusion, Mobility and Multilingual Education Conference: Exploring the Role of
Languages for Education and Development

25 September 2019, Bangkok, Thailand
Section 1: Preamble

1. We, the ministers and designated ministerial representatives of sixteen countries in Asia and the Pacific; representatives of United Nations agencies, development partners and civil society organizations; and members of research and teaching communities, gathered in Bangkok, Thailand, from 24 to 26 September 2019, to explore the role of languages for education and development.

2. We acknowledge that the importance of language(s)-in-education policies, and multilingual education in particular, has been discussed in previous high-level meetings on education, as reflected in but not limited to the Jomtien World Declaration on Education for All (1990), the Suzhou Conclusions (2014), the Asia-Pacific Statement on Education Beyond 2015 (2014), the Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action (2015), and the United Nations General Assembly’s challenge to “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” (SDG 4).

3. Further, we recognize the clear progress made in the development of multilingual education policies and practices throughout the region, including research validating this approach in Asia-Pacific and elsewhere, as reported in previous Asia-Pacific multilingual education conferences (2003, 2008, 2010, 2013, 2016), and in policy forums convened co-currently with those conferences, beginning in 2008 and including this present gathering.

Section 2: Towards Evidence-based Policies

4. Asia-Pacific is linguistically diverse. Our region is home to 3,615 languages (more than half of the world’s 7,105 languages). People from all languages and cultures are valued citizens of our respective nations, in order to “Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development” (SDG 16).

5. Multilingualism is a reality, as well as an asset that should be fostered to benefit all. Throughout Asia-Pacific, citizens are exposed to a variety of languages—local, regional, national, international. Proficiency in more than one language is prerequisite to decent work for the individual, and economic growth for the nation (SDG 8).

6. Language and learning are linked. Research demonstrates that the learning of children, youth and adults can be severely limited when they lack understanding of the language used by teachers, textbooks, and digital learning resources (SDGs 4.4, 4.6). This language gap contributes to higher dropout rates among vulnerable populations. School language policies can thus act as barriers preventing access to inclusive and equitable quality education (SDG 4), thus exacerbating social inequality (SDG 10).

7. Policies related to language(s) of instruction impact learners at several key junctures, including early childhood education and school readiness (SDG 4.2), the transition to primary education (SDG 4.1), and carry-through into secondary, tertiary, vocational, and lifelong education of various forms (SDG 4.4). Language policies at each level play an important role in creating a positive learning environment, while fostering enduring peace (SDG 16), gender equality (SDG 4.5), and sustainable development (SDG 4.7).

8. The main language of pre-primary and primary classrooms should be the one the children understand best. In cases where children no longer actively speak the “heritage language” of older generations, the “heritage language” can be taught as a subject, with the language understood best by the children used as the main language of instruction. Parents should encourage children to maintain their home language and culture, even as they study other languages and cultures.
9. **Multilingual education does not distract from the study in and of national and international languages, but rather makes the learning of all languages more efficient.** This is supported by longitudinal research conducted in several Asia-Pacific countries and elsewhere, which has found better learning outcomes in all subjects, including the national language and international languages such as English, among children in strong multilingual education programs which included the systematic introduction of additional languages at developmentally appropriate times.

10. **Language(s)-in-education policies and practices are most effective when based on evidence.** Twenty-first century realities demand that our citizens master more knowledge and develop new skills more quickly than any previous generation. Therefore, decisions on which language to introduce when, and how each language should be taught, should be based on scientific evidence and a clear understanding of local sociolinguistic realities. This is of particular importance to learners from disadvantaged language communities, including ethnolinguistic minority and migrant populations, as well as to better-resourced learners who may be prematurely compelled into learning academic content communicated exclusively in an international language they have not yet mastered.

### Section 3: Action Plan for Language(s)-in-Education Policies and Practices

11. **We hereby declare our commitment to the realization of “inclusive and equitable quality education” (SDG 4) in relation to the language needs of all learners, while respecting and enhancing current policies in each country, by:**

   i. **Highlighting language(s)-of-instruction issues**, including relevant research, policies and practices, in the national education discourse.

   ii. **Fostering investment for quality multilingual education** by strengthening financial systems to focus on effective practices, prioritizing the systematic expansion of successful multilingual education pilot programs.

   iii. **Enhancing the quality of multilingual education** by developing clear policies, strategies and guidelines, including monitoring systems and action plans, particularly for pre-primary and primary, with the option for continued first language maintenance support through secondary, and tertiary studies, as well as adult education, even as other languages (national, international) are introduced.

   iv. **Diversifying the teacher workforce and building teacher capacity** through clear policies, strategies and guidelines, including action plans for the recruitment and deployment of teachers who are native speakers of local languages, acknowledging that the identification of such individuals may need to begin while they are in secondary school, and that additional mentorship and support will be necessary through the teacher preparation process.

   v. **Gathering data disaggregated by home or first language**, correlated to the school attendance and learning outcomes of primary-aged children (SDG thematic indicator 4.5.2).

   vi. **Strengthening partnerships with relevant stakeholders and partners**, including parents, local communities, non-state actors, academics, the Asia Pacific Multilingual Education Working Group, and international development organizations, to develop pedagogically sound multilingual education programs, supported by well-trained teachers and quality learning materials in all relevant languages.

   vii. **Preparing national progress reports** for future Asia-Pacific Multilingual Education Working Group conferences, to be held every three years throughout the 2030 agenda. Additionally, we will encourage our respective governments to track developments in language(s)-in-education issues, including progress on thematic indicator 4.5.2, in future Voluntary National Reports and regional ministerial-level meetings.
Annex E: Thailand’s New National Language Policy Action Plan

Today (29 June 2021) at 9:00 a.m., General Prayut Chan-o-cha, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Thailand, presided over a cabinet meeting via video conference system at the PMOC room, 2nd floor, Thai Khu Fah Building, Government House. The following is a summary of the major points discussed:


The cabinet adopted the proposal of the Office of the Royal Society (ORST) for the national language policy action plan for 2021-2022 (B.E. 2564-2565) by accepting the agencies’ recommendations to consider implementing and expediting the draft plan in order to achieve the outcome results as soon as reasonably practicable.

**Gist**

ORST reported that:

1. ORST has prepared (drafted) the National Language Policy Action Plan (2018-2021) and submitted it to the Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council (NESDC) for consideration in accordance with the Cabinet resolutions on 4 December 2017, 15 December 2020 and 27 December 2021, respectively. The following is a synopsis of previous implementation efforts and progress:

   1.1 At the meeting of the ORST No. 2/2020 dated 11 March 2020, the (draft) National Language Policy Strategy 2018 – 2021 (B.E. 2561-2564) was approved.

   1.2 ORST has proposed the (draft) National Language Policy Strategy 2018 – 2021 (B.E. 2561-2564) to the NESDC, which convened a meeting No. 10/2563 dated 7 October 2020. The members of the NESDC meeting considered and approved the (draft) National Language Policy Strategy 2018 – 2021 (B.E. 2561-2564) with recommendations to ORST to further improve various issues, including

      (1) The determination of the vision of the National Language Policy should be clear as to whether Thailand will be developed into a bilingual country

      (2) The title of the document should be adjusted to (draft) Action Plan on … and the duration of the Action Plan to end in the year 2022 in accordance with the timeline of the Thailand’s Master Plans under the 20-Year National Strategy

      (3) There should be an additional focus on the issue of improving Thai language proficiency across multiple dimensions, with a focus on functional literacy rather than general literacy.

      (4) It is recommended that the Thai language be able to adapt to the rapidly changing context by adding definitions of modern terminology.

      (5) Guidelines for learning Thai and local languages should be flexible in accordance with the local context and the needs of the learners.

      (6) The conservation and knowledge of local languages, along with pride in local languages, should be promoted through a variety of media such as films, dramas, television programs, etc.
1.3 ORST adjusted the document title to (draft) National Language Policy Action Plan 2021 – 2022 (B.E. 2564-2565) and amended the content following the recommendations of NESDC. The amended document was submitted to the National Economic and Social Development Council for approval at its meeting No. 12/2020 on 2 December 2020. The committee made additional recommendations suggesting that ORST revise the Action Plan further to ensure its completion, including:

(1) To advance Thailand toward becoming a bilingual country, the development path should be clearly outlined in the plan, including a clear direction for which foreign language should be chosen as the country's second language. By the end of 2021, such guidelines should be created and implemented in a concrete manner.

(2) The use of mother-tongue language should be balanced with Thai and local languages. In this regard, the NESDC recommended that the Action Plan be submitted to the Cabinet for review and approval in accordance with applicable processes.

2. The (Draft) National Language Policy Action Plan 2021 – 2022 (B.E. 2564-2565) core substance can be summarized as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Key concepts</td>
<td>The Action Plan’s primary conceptual framework is “Language for Sustainable Peace,” which is based on three major principles:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Language for the survival of community identity and national reconciliation.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Language for increasing awareness, comprehension, and access to fundamental rights.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Language for economic development</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The critical aspect in developing this conceptual framework is to use the mother-tongue language as the foundation for learning Thai the official language. This would serve as a foundation for foreign language learning since it is congruent with the nature of human language development while also allowing for the use of local languages and languages of disadvantaged populations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision</td>
<td>“Comprehend how to use – recognize how to preserve the Thai language, be receptive to language rights, develop international language skills to create a more sustainable and peaceful society.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectives</td>
<td>• To foster an appreciation for and awareness of the value of language as it expresses life and cultural identities in a variety of ways</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• To safeguard the Thai language in its capacity as the national language in order to ensure its preservation and to foster Thailand’s unity.</td>
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<td>• To promote and improve Thai language knowledge and abilities for Thais from all walks of life in order to facilitate effective communication and mutual understanding.</td>
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<td>• To encourage the use and development of local languages as educational tools, as well as to pass on indigenous knowledge to children and youth</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• To enhance the translation profession, simultaneous interpreters and sign language interpreters to meet the industry standards.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• To promote and develop Thai people's ability to use foreign languages and neighboring countries’ languages.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Thai society recognizes the significance of language, recognizes and accepts the value of diversity in language and social culture. Additionally, Thais are capable of accepting, cohabiting, and being members of the Thai community sustainably, as well as being a global citizens on the basis of peace and sustainability, with the following goals:

- The Thai language has been extensively and continuously maintained and developed.
- All groups of people in Thai society can use the Thai language to communicate effectively.
- Local people use their local languages more in a wide variety of settings while promoting the use of local languages alongside the Thai language in education.
- Translators and interpreters have professional standards; increase in the number of quality sign language interpreters.
- Increase in the number of Thai people able to effectively use foreign and neighboring languages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Targets</th>
<th>Details</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Issues</td>
<td>Thai society recognizes the significance of language, recognizes and accepts the value of diversity in language and social culture. Additionally, Thais are capable of accepting, cohabiting, and being members of the Thai community sustainably, as well as being a global citizens on the basis of peace and sustainability, with the following goals:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- The Thai language has been extensively and continuously maintained and developed.</td>
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<td>- All groups of people in Thai society can use the Thai language to communicate effectively.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Local people use their local languages more in a wide variety of settings while promoting the use of local languages alongside the Thai language in education.</td>
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<td>- Translators and interpreters have professional standards; increase in the number of quality sign language interpreters.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Increase in the number of Thai people able to effectively use foreign and neighboring languages.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There are 12 indicators including:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Number of projects/activities showing the acceptance of language and cultural diversity is increased.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- The literacy rate and ability of the Thai population to communicate in Thai have increased.</td>
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<td>- The average scores in Thai language subject in the National Test (O-NET) of pupils in grades 6 (Prathom 6) and pupils in grade 12 (Mathayom 6) are above 50%.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Number of academic research publications devoted to Thai language and literature is increased.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Number of Thai language courses and Thai language training events are increased.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Percentage of educational institutions using local language along with the Thai language as a medium of instruction is increased.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Percentage of projects that promote the use, learning, preservation, and development of local languages.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Establishment of professional qualification standards for the language translators, and simultaneous interpreters.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Establishment of a professional association of translators and interpreters.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Percentage of registered sign language interpreters earn a qualification certificate (target at 70 per cent).</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Number of classes or training sessions in international languages and neighboring countries’ languages is increased.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Number of programs in various media channels that incorporate international and neighboring country languages has increased.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issues</td>
<td>Details</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic issues</td>
<td>There are 6 strategic issues including:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|  | • **Moving Thai society towards acceptance of social pluralism and promoting peaceful and sustainable coexistence within the country and between other countries.**  
  **Main responsible organizations:** Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation, Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Education.  
  **Other relevant organizations:** Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, Ministry of Culture, and Ministry of Labour.  
|  | • **Build the learning potentials of people in the country through a variety of language learning opportunities.**  
  **Main responsible organization:** Ministry of Education  
  **Other relevant organizations:** Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Culture.  
|  | • **Promote the use of Thai as the national language and adapt Thai language learning pedagogy to the nature of human language acquisition.**  
  **Main responsible organizations:** Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation, Ministry of Education, and the Office of the Royal Society  
  **Other relevant organizations:** Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Culture, and the Government Public Relations Department.  
|  | • **Preserve and pass down the use of the local languages or mother tongues in everyday life and in education**  
  **Main responsible organizations:** Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Culture, and Ministry of Education.  
  **Other relevant organizations:** Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, the Office of the Royal Society, and the Office of the National Broadcasting and Telecommunication Commission.  
|  | • **Improve language skills and competencies to drive economic growth.**  
  **Other relevant organizations:** Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Digital Economy and Society, Ministry of Labour, Thailand Professional Qualification Institute (Public Organization), the Translator and Interpreter Association of Thailand, and Thai Sign Interpreter Association.  
|  | • **Promote the development of skills in using the Thai language and media for communication and livelihoods, and maintain the basic rights of disadvantaged groups.**  
  **Main responsible organizations:** Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, and Ministry of Labour.  
  **Other relevant organizations:** Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Culture, and Ministry of Education. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues</th>
<th>Details</th>
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</table>
| Guidelines for implementing the Action Plan | • Raise awareness and foster understanding across all sectors so that they recognize the vital significance of the National Language Policy Action Plan and are prepared to contribute to its implementation.  
• Strengthen stakeholders’ roles and their participation in the development of action and operational plans at various levels that are integrated with the National Language Policy Action Plan.  
• Establish a linkage between the Action Plan on National Language Policy, Thailand’s 20-Year National Strategy, the National Economic and Social Development Plan, the National Security Policy and Plan, and the strategic plans of other relevant agencies.  
• Develop a budget allocation plan that stimulates a participatory approach from all stakeholders and use the budget plan as a tool for prioritizing the missions of relevant agencies in accordance with the Action Plan.  
• Creating an enabling environment that supports the implementation of the Action Plans by all stakeholders.  
• Monitor and evaluate the National Language Policy Action Plan and its implementation plan with a particular emphasis on monitoring the progress, and routinely examining the key success and impact on overall developmental results. |
| Expected outcomes | For example:  
1) All Thai people can learn and utilize the Thai language effectively.  
2) All Thai people maintain, promote, and support languages, literature, and local wisdom.  
3) Persons with disabilities have access to information and government services.  
4) All citizens are capable of communicating in international languages as well as the languages of neighbouring countries.  
5) Persons seeking employment in Thailand can use the Thai language for day-to-day communication. |
| Expenditure | Expenses incurred in organizing meetings to facilitate the implementation of the Action Plan as well as monitoring and evaluation of the Action Plan will be covered by the annual budget of the Office of the Royal Society. |
Works cited


Thansettakij. (2021, January 8). กระทรวงศึกษาธิการ ประกาศนโยบายทดสอบ O-NET นักเรียน ป.6 และ ม.3 ให้เป็นไปตามความสมัครใจตั้งแต่ปีการศึกษา 2563 เป็นต้นไป. ‘Ministry of Education Announcement of O-NET Testing Policy for Grade 6 and High School Students to be Voluntarily from Academic Year 2020 Onwards.’ Retrieved February 11, 2022, from https://www.thansettakij.com/general-news/463535


Acknowledgments

The author would like to express appreciation to the following individuals for their contributions to this report (with apologies to any persons inadvertently left out):

**UNICEF Thailand Country Office:** Aarti Saihjee, Hugh Delaney, Rangsun Wiboonuppatum, Rubkwan Thammmapornphila, and Napa Jeewan.

**UNESCO Bangkok:** Ichiro Miyazawa, Kyungah Kristy Bang, Sowirin Chuanprapun, and Pyawan Suwattanathum.

**Equitable Education Fund:** Kraisys Patrawart and Udom Wongsing.

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**Pestalozzi Children’s Foundation:** Su Suriyamonton.

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**Graphic Design (Thai and English Versions):** Tanat Supichaayangkul

**Author:** Kirk R. Person

**Editor:** Pushkar Sharma

**Translator (Thai Version):** Tanaporn Perapate