



# First language-based education for non-dominant language speakers: Issues and challenges

*A presentation at a public forum "Next Steps in Advocating for  
Indigenous Language in Education" at Charles Darwin  
University, 27 October, 2009.*

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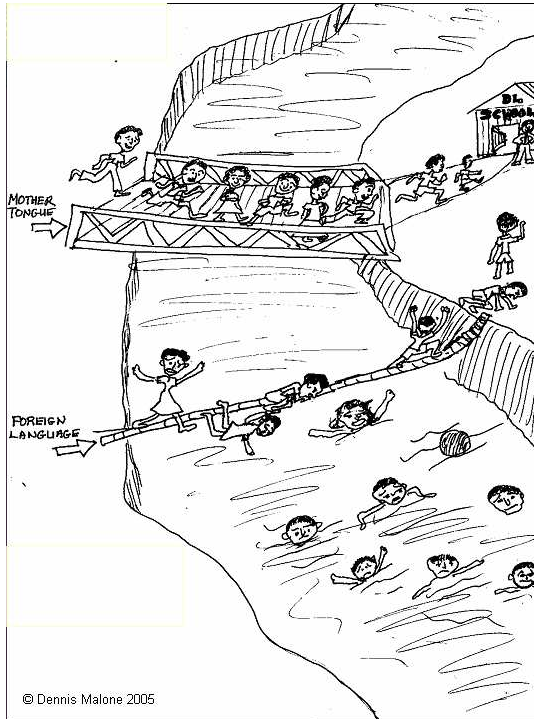
## First Language (L1)

Mother tongue, Home language,  
Community language

A language:

- ✓ that one has learnt first;
- ✓ one identifies with or is identified as a native speaker of by others;
- ✓ one knows best; and/or
- ✓ one uses most.

(UNESCO 2003, Education in Multilingual World, p. 15)



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*Learners whose home language is the language of instruction and the language of literacy.*

*Minority language learners who do **not** speak the language used when they enter school or an education programme*

Source: Kosonen, Malone, Young (2007)

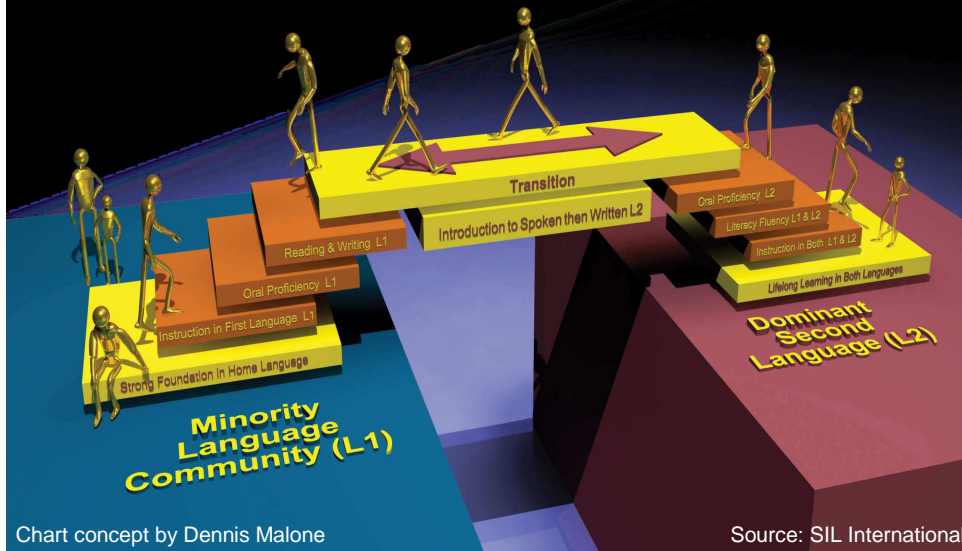


## **Multilingual Education (MLE)**

***Using more than one language as:***

- Language (or medium) of instruction (Lol)
- Language of literacy (initial and recurrent)
- Subject of study

# Multilingual Education for building a strong foundation and good bridge



A strong foundation in the L1 and good bridge to the L2 build successful, life-long learners in both languages



## First Language-based MLE

- Learning starts in a language the learner already speaks (L1) (known -> unknown)
- Initial literacy in the first language (L1)
- Other languages (e.g. L2, L3) learned as ‘second’ languages with appropriate methods
- Later both L1 and L2 used as the languages instruction and languages of literacy
- Both L1 and L2 are studied as school subjects
- New languages can be added later
- L1 & L2 remain means for lifelong learning

### ‘Ideal’ model of first language-based multilingual education (Early Childhood and Primary Education levels)

Primary Level	G6	L1 (Lol + subject)	L2 (Lol + subject)
	G5	L1 (Lol + subject)	L2 (Lol + subject)
	G4	L1 (Lol + subject)	L2 (Lol) + L2SL
	G3	L1 (Lol)	L2SL
	G2	L1 (Lol)	L2SL (oral + written)
	G1	L1 (Lol, literacy)	L2SL (oral)
Pre-primary level	KG2	L1 (Lol, literacy)	L2SL (oral)
	KG1	L1 (Lol)	

## How Can Multilingual Education Benefit Learners?

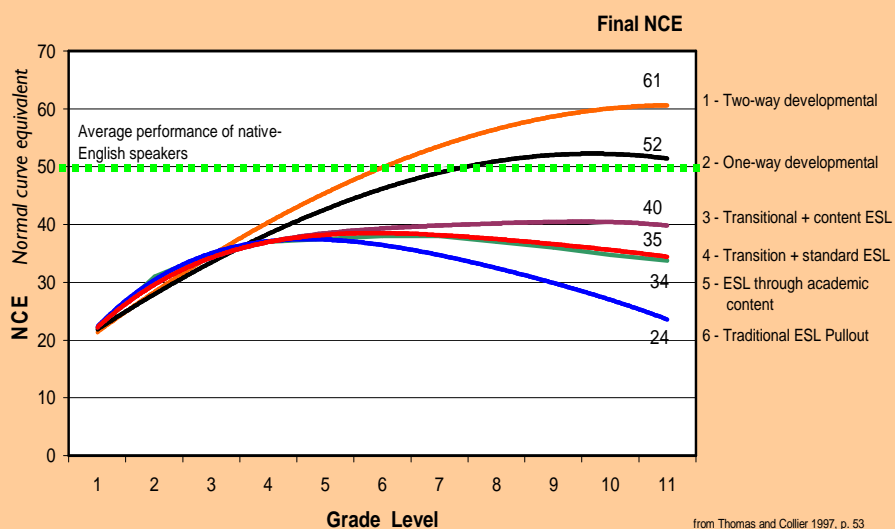
### The use of the first language (L1) helps learning

- Learning in **L1** doesn't hinder, but helps learning of L2 (e.g. official, national or foreign language) and L3, L4 etc.,
- Learning to read in **L1** is easier and faster,
- What is learned in **L1** transfers to **L2** (and vice versa),
- **L1** allows students to learn curriculum content from the first day in school,
- Strong L1 helps students perform better in L2 academic work,

## The use of mother tongue (L1) helps learning

- L1 allows parents to participate more in their children's education,
- Multilingual education (in L1, L2, L3 etc.) improves thinking skills, creativity and flexibility of the learners
- L1 helps teachers in identifying what students have learned,
- Long-term use of relevant learning strategies support students to become multilingual and multiliterate.

### Bilingual Programs - Comparison of Achievement on Standardized Tests



Results of study of 42,000 learners over 11 years: the US



## **Strong Foundation in L1 and Good Bridge to L2 essential:**

*“The most powerful factor in predicting educational success for minority learners is the amount of formal schooling they received in their L1.”*

*“Only those language minority students who had 5-6 years of strong cognitive and academic development through their L1— as well as through [L2]—did well in Grade 11 assessments”*

(Thomas and Collier, 1997, 2004)



## **Rationale for Supporting Non-dominant Languages in Education:**

- Educational efficiency and quality
- Human rights
- Social, political, and economic participation
- Social equality & equity
- Multilingualism, pluralism
- Language endangerment, maintenance, and revitalization



## Benefits of MLE to the society (1)

- MLE helps linguistically marginalized communities bridge to the broader society (better acquisition of the national language)
- MLE → education of better quality → well-educated citizens, including ethnolinguistic minorities, contribute to and benefit from the national development (also economy),
- Multilingual people are an important resource to the society
- Cultural pluralism and multilingualism can be resources and opportunities rather than problems for a nation



## Benefits of MLE to the society (2)

- People whose cultures and languages are respected and supported are likely more 'loyal citizens' than those denied this right,
- Government messages (e.g. rights and responsibilities) can reach linguistic minority communities best in a language they understand,
- Essential and life-saving information on HIV-AIDS, H1N1 flu and malaria, for example, reach linguistic minorities best in a language they understand



## Keskeinen kysymys

- **Voimmeko tosissamme edes puhua koulutuksen hyödyistä oppijoille, jos he eivät ymmärrä opetuskieltä?**
- **Confused?**
- **Hundreds of millions of learners face this same challenge (an alien language of education or communication) every day**



## A Key Question

- **Can education really benefit learners, if they don't understand the language of education?**



## Trends in L1-based education

- Major positive attitudinal changes since late 1990s in many countries
- International MLE Conferences
- National seminars – symposia (2003 →)
  - Laos, Vietnam, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Thailand, Malaysia, Timor Leste, the Philippines
- Language an agenda item in regional education meetings (UNESCO, UNICEF, SEAMEO, WB, INGOs)
- Support for MLE pilots and action-research (UNESCO, UNICEF, SIL International, Save the Children, Care International, Bilateral donors)
- Advocacy materials
- Policy changes: Malaysia, the Philippines



## Challenges 1 – Language-in-education policies

### ***Rationale (excuses) given for monolingual and elitist policies:***

- **Economic factors**
  - Multilingual education is too costly
- **National unity**
  - Using many languages in education disintegrates the nation
- **Power issues**
  - Distribution of power, decentralization
  - Elites' vested interests?



## Challenges 2 – Language-in-education policies

### ***Rationale (excuses) given for monolingual and elitist policies:***

- **Misunderstanding of language & education issues and multilingualism**
  - Using several media of instruction confuses students,
  - Using non-dominant languages will delay the learning of dominant (national) languages,
  - Parents want the national/international language only, as they don't understand multilingual approaches



## Challenges 3 – Language-in-education policies

### ***Rationale (excuses) given for monolingual and elitist policies:***

- **Technical and 'logistical' challenges**
  - Non-dominant languages: no orthographies, 'modern' terminology & standard form
  - No literature and learning materials
  - No teachers speaking non-dominant languages
  - Multilingual classrooms / linguistic diversity in schools
  - Minority communities not interested (or this is what the decision-makers think)
  - MLE not seen as high priority by donors / program implementers



## Challenges 4 – Language-in-education policies

### ***Rationale (excuses) given for monolingual and elitist policies:***

- **Policies vs. implementation**
  - Supportive policies exist in documents, but policies not implemented
- **Colonial “legacy” and example**
  - Colonialists supported elitist and dominant language only-policies
  - Major issue in Africa and Latin America, less so in parts of Asia

***Thank you!***

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