



The Timor-Leste Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education Pilot Project

A Strategic Evaluation



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List of Abbreviations

DTA: Double Track Approach
ECCD: Early Childhood Care and Development
NGO: Non-government Organisation
L1: Mother Tongue/Home language/First language
L2: Second language
L3: Third language - and so on
ME: Ministry of Education
MTB-MLE: Mother tongue-based multilingual education
TLNCU: Timor-Leste National Commission for UNESCO
PPA: Pre-primary A
PPB: Pre-primary B - and so on
TPR: Total Physical Response
WVTL: World Vision Timor-Leste

Notes

- We wrote this report in English and therefore use English spelling to denote all languages except for the national languages of Timor-Leste and we followed English conventions for capital letters. We followed the Official Orthography of Tetun for all the national languages as well as for place names and the names of schools. We followed the guidelines in the spelling guides *Matadalan Ortográfiku ba Tetun-Prasa* and *Hakerek Tetun tuir Banati: Curso Ortografia Padronizada nian* published in 2002 by the National Institute of Linguistics/Instituto Nacional de Linguística.
- The MTB-MLE team refers to the MTB coordinator and team employed by the Timor-Leste National Commission for UNESCO to steer the MTB-MLE pilot.
- All photos by Jo Caffery, Gabriela Coronado and Kerry Taylor-Leech.

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Executive summary

The Mother tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) Policy guides the educational management of the diverse languages across the country by promoting teaching in the child's first language, also known as the mother tongue or L1, in their first years of schooling. The child's mother tongue is used as the means to develop early literacy to facilitate the further development of oral and literate competence in the co-official languages of Timor-Leste. In 2010, the Ministry of Education (ME) requested the Timor-Leste National Commission for UNESCO (TLNCU) to form a language-in-education working group to prepare language policy guidelines and planning strategies with a focus on pre-primary education and compulsory basic education. In consultation with international specialists, this working group produced the MTB-MLE policy for Timor-Leste. In 2013, the policy was implemented as a pilot for three language groups in 12 schools across three districts, Lautein, Manatutu and Oekusi.

An Australian research team was invited to conduct a strategic evaluation of the MTB-MLE pilot. The evaluation took place between 7 and 19 April, 2014. Working with support from the MTB-MLE pilot team in the TLNCU, the team conducted ethnographic research and classroom observations in the districts of Lautein and Manatutu, carried out in-depth discussions with a range of key stakeholders and re-examined the implications of the main demographic data, in addition to other relevant material. This report is based on the data collected and analysed by this team.

The team investigated four key questions. How well are the principles of the MTB-MLE policy working, as evidenced by the pilot? What are its benefits? Where can it be modified and improved? How can it be scaled up in Timor-Leste? The report below provides our answers to all four questions.

The MTB-MLE pilot has been running for one year and our evidence shows that it has been an outstanding success. Use of the mother tongue has produced confident, engaged and happy children, who are learning literacy and beginning to transfer their literacy skills to other languages. In addition, links between schools and communities are greatly enhanced to the benefit of both.

The report found some areas where the principles of the policy are not well understood by teachers, especially the principle of combining mother-tongue literacy with a staged progression to the co-official languages of Timor-Leste. Issues of training and resources still need to be better addressed. We stress that these are not problems with the policy but limitations in the uptake of these principles, both in the classroom and in central policy support. These limitations need to be corrected before any extension of the policy takes place. However, they are the kind of early problems that a pilot is meant to identify and highlight.

The team believes that this pilot is not only successful in its own terms but it is also an exemplary instance of a mother tongue-based multilingual scheme, introduced successfully in spite of many adverse physical and economic conditions.

The report team found ten main lessons, and makes six main recommendations. The key lessons are discussed in more detail in Section 7 of this report.

Key lessons: Summary

1. The use of the mother tongue was highly successful in multiple ways wherever it was applied.
2. The MTB-MLE pilot has improved relations between communities, parents and the school, with many positive effects for all concerned.
3. The MTB-MLE pilot has had a positive effect on school attendance.
4. The child-centred approach was usually used with good effects but in practice it often clashed with traditional, teacher-centred approaches that at times cancel or undermine the policy.
5. Teachers in the pilot schools have performed very well in most respects in delivering a new pedagogy with little experience and still minimal training.
6. The additive multilingual principle promoted by the program does not seem to be well understood in the pilot schools and needs to be continuously emphasised and explicitly reiterated at all levels: in curriculum design, training and publicity.
7. The place of Portuguese in the curriculum in an additive multilingual framework is not well managed or well understood by many current teachers, especially given the continuing hold of values, practices and attitudes from earlier teaching modes.
8. One school withdrew from the scheme. The reasons for this need to be investigated in more depth.
9. The role of the TLNCU and other bodies is essential for the survival of the MTB-MLE pilot currently and in the future.
10. More resources of all kinds are vital for sustaining and extending this pilot.

Recommendations

1. The MTB-MLE pilot has done everything that could be hoped for from a pilot so plans should be prepared to scale it up.
2. A language mapping exercise needs to be undertaken as a matter of urgency to determine the situation of the mother tongues in schools and communities, as an essential basis for deciding on the implementation of the MTB-MLE policy for particular communities or schools.
3. The role of Tetun as a mother tongue needs to be carefully managed according to MTB-MLE principles, co-ordinated by the two policy branches of the ME, the Tetun curriculum group and the MTB-MLE team.
4. The additive multilingual principle needs to be more carefully explained and embedded in training and materials, especially as it involves the progressive introduction of oral and written forms and the transition to Portuguese as L3.
5. Resourcing and training needs should be budgeted for and factored in to plans to maintain and extend the MTB-MLE policy. Existing limitations of resources need to be recognised, and alternatives considered, such as those included in our suggestions.
6. Communication and advocacy need to be included in plans and budgets for this pilot because it is so innovative it may be misunderstood and because its success depends on the co-operative efforts of so many stakeholders, in schools and communities, in key decision making bodies in Timor-Leste and in the international community.

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1. Introduction

The following report provides a strategic evaluation of the Mother Tongue-based Multilingual Education Pilot (MTB-MLE) of the Timor-Leste Ministry of Education (ME) and its advisory body, the Timor-Leste National Commission for UNESCO (TLNCU). The pilot implemented the principles of the MTB-MLE policy, applied in the specific educational and sociolinguistic conditions of Timor-Leste. The evaluation was planned and conducted in collaboration with an evaluation headed by CARE International, overseen by Ms Francisca Soares, Co-ordinator of the MTB-MLE pilot in the TLNCU. The reference base for this report is the *Baseline Report: Mother tongue based Multilingual Education in Timor-Leste: Pilot Project* (CARE 2012). A midline report is planned to be produced by CARE concurrently with this one. The evaluation was carried out between 7 and 19 April, 2014.

Our evaluation is intended to provide a multidimensional picture of the conditions, problems, strategies and achievements of the MTB-MLE pilot in its first phase, 2013-2014. It synthesises quantitative and qualitative data in order to help improve the pilot over the rest of its life. It examines whether the MTB-MLE policy and principles are working well, what the benefits are, where it can be modified and improved and how it can be scaled up for Timor-Leste. This report evaluates the pilot for the successes it has achieved and the challenges it has faced in the circumstances in which it has had to work. It draws key strategic lessons and recommends changes for increased effectiveness and efficiency.

The research that led to this report was conducted by a team of Australian scholars, Dr Jo Caffery, University of Canberra, Dr Gabriela Coronado and Professor Bob Hodge, University of Western Sydney and Dr Kerry Taylor-Leech, Griffith University, Queensland, with funding support from the TLNCU. It is an independent report and all judgements, opinions and recommendations in it are the sole responsibility of its authors. The TLNCU commissioned the report but in addition it is written for a larger audience: for educators and policymakers in Timor-Leste, for NGOs working in this field in Timor-Leste and for international specialists in the fields of multilingual education. As we explain at greater length in the report itself, we believe that the Timor-Leste MTB-MLE pilot is in some ways a unique experiment in multilingual education that is of international interest for scholars and policymakers in this field.

2. Background

The MTB-MLE policy is part of a comprehensive strategy launched in 2011, which aimed at improving pre-school and primary education for the whole of Timor-Leste. It is one of a suite of programs introduced by the government under a national strategic development plan to address acute problems of education faced by the country. Our evaluation needs to recognise these links, which are beyond the immediate scope of the MTB-MLE pilot project. Literacy ranks high amongst the problems confronting Timor-Leste in its quest to be a vibrant, inclusive modern state. In 2009, a World Bank study found that by the end of Grade 1, East Timorese schoolchildren's literacy skills in the co-official languages were well below expected international levels for their age. Through the MTB-MLE and other programs the ME looks for ways to reduce drop-out and prevent grade repetition, to keep children in school and improve literacy.

Principles of MTB-MLE

In evaluating the MTB-MLE pilot it is important to recognise that the program is based on three principles. One of these principles is the use of a mother tongue for early education. The second is the additive multilingual principle, whereby the mother tongue provides a foundation of competencies which are transferred to additional languages (TLNCU 2010, p. 1). The third principle is child-centred pedagogy. These three principles are interlinked in MTB-MLE. MTB-MLE is part of an education sequence, available to and compulsory for all young people of Timor-Leste, which aims to ensure mastery of the co-official languages and enable the learning of a first foreign language (as stated in the Base Law of Education Article 12).

A mother tongue-based program for early education employs the first or home language (L1) for children who do not understand the languages of instruction. The mother tongue-based multilingual policy for Timor-Leste defines mother tongues as “the home languages of learners”. They are also known as ‘first languages’ or L1s (even where there are two or more home languages) because the pedagogical focus is on a language the learner knows best” (TLNCU 2010, p. 9). In this document we will follow this definition and we will refer to children’s home languages coterminously as L1s or mother tongue(s).

Although there has been some controversy over this principle in Timor-Leste and in other places, MTB-MLE supports children’s educational achievement. As the Baseline Survey reports, a version of this principle has long been part of teachers’ everyday educational practice. It is nothing new for teachers to use the mother tongue orally in the classroom to aid children’s understanding of curriculum content.

Many studies have demonstrated the relevance of the MTB principle (see UNESCO, 2008). It is therefore not the case that the pilot should be seen as testing whether MTB pedagogies are better than non-MTB pedagogies since that is not seriously in doubt. Our evaluation of the pilot and its lessons asks how this principle has been and can be best implemented in the specific linguistic, educational, political and economic conditions of Timor-Leste today.

Additive multilingual education

Crucial to MTB-MLE is the principle of additive multilingual education (TLNCU 2010, p. 6). According to this principle, learners begin with a base in their first language (L1) to learn literacy and curriculum content. They are then taught new second (L2) and third languages (L3), using their knowledge of letters, vocabulary and cognitive concepts in their L1 to transfer their knowledge to the new languages. There are two phases in this scheme: The L1 is to be developed in its own right, as a language in which children develop higher intellectual abilities. The transitions to L2 and then L3 are also essential and need to be planned for from the beginning as well.

Pedagogic principles

As a program involving preparation of materials and training of teachers, MTB-MLE uses certain pedagogic principles to underpin its practices. These pedagogic principles are part of the comprehensive language-in-education strategy promoted in the MTB-MLE Policy for Timor-Leste (TLNCU 2010). The MTB-MLE policy document states three related pedagogic principles: MTB-MLE builds on what learners know; it makes

learning relevant and enjoyable; and it promotes learner-centred methodologies (p. 3). East Timorese and international specialists have provided input into preparing materials and strategies along these lines. We were informed that two approaches to multilingual literacy were influential in the initial stages of the program: The Total Physical Response (TPR) approach (Asher 1996) incorporates gross body movements into language learning. The Double Track Approach (DTA) (Stringer 2000) combines top-down and bottom-up approaches to link stories and words.

The sociolinguistic situation

In evaluating the MTB-MLE pilot, it is important to recognise the scale of the language-in-education challenges facing Timor-Leste. The MTB-MLE policy addresses these challenges, and the MTB-MLE pilot must be evaluated in this context. It acknowledges and deals with these problems as part of a nation-building strategy. The National Constitution sets out the goal of a fully multilingual system. Tetun is both a national language and a co-official language with Portuguese; English and Indonesian are specified in the Constitution as working languages, while the other indigenous languages are designated as national languages to be protected and developed by the State. Timor-Leste is aiming to build a multilingual nation and teachers can help to support this aim, if the transitions from L1 to L2 and L3 are explicitly managed and supported in the curriculum.

Some factors affecting the pilot arise from the recent political and linguistic history of Timor-Leste. Until 1975 Timor-Leste was a Portuguese overseas territory in which Portuguese was the language of the colonial power and local elites. In 1975 Indonesia invaded and annexed Timor-Leste, imposing Indonesian as the official language and language of instruction, although in the 1990s the use of mother tongues was allowed in some primary schools. This situation remained until 1999 when the East Timorese voted to be independent from Indonesia. The withdrawal of the Indonesians led to massive destruction of educational infrastructure, including the burning of schools.

These upheavals and changes have left literacy in a state of flux, which has implications for language-education planning and MTB-MLE policy. The published census figures show that in 2004 the number of young people aged 15-24 years old who were literate in Tetun and Indonesian was roughly equal (68.1% and 66.8% respectively). Given that Indonesian had been the official language of instruction, the level of literacy in Tetun is impressive and points to the learner's capacity to transfer literacy between languages when there is competency in the spoken form.

According to the 2004 census, Portuguese and English literacy lagged well behind Tetun and Indonesian (17.2% and 10% respectively). In 2004 Portuguese was the official language of instruction so these figures suggest potential impacts on beginning education, with less than a fifth of the population literate in that language. Apart from problems of pupil comprehension, the majority of teachers at this time were not fully competent in Portuguese, the language in which they were expected to teach.

The situation in the 2010 census is hard to compare directly because of different definitions of literacy in the two censuses (Taylor-Leech 2013, p. 5) but the changes it reports are indicative. According to this census, Tetun literacy has risen by almost 10% from 68.1% to 77.8% while Indonesian literacy has dropped by a similar amount from 66.8% to 55.6%. Meanwhile, literacy levels in both Portuguese and English have more than doubled (Portuguese rising from 17.2% to 39.3% and English from 10% to 22.3%).

This changing linguistic ecology has implications for MTB-MLE policies. Tetun is ready to play its role as L2 and main language of instruction, though to do so it must be introduced in stages in the curriculum, as envisaged in the National Education Strategic Plan 2011-2030 and the MTB-MLE policy. From all available data, it is clear that Portuguese is not yet ready to play a structural role as a language of instruction in early education. The role of Portuguese as the co-official language is a different matter to its optimal role in early education.

Competence in Portuguese is less common than in Tetun and it is not used in most East Timorese homes. Based on international best practice it is likely that competence in Portuguese will be best achieved by using mother tongues and Tetun as languages of instruction in an MTB-MLE framework. Our observations did not include stages in the curriculum where Portuguese should have been included in the curriculum but our research collected data on this theme.

There are other contextual factors that need to be born in mind when assessing the MTB-MLE pilot. Timor-Leste has only been fully independent since 2002 when UN forces withdrew and left government fully in the hands of the East Timorese people. This is a very short time to devise and implement any policy, especially given the devastation of the education system in the wake of the Indonesian withdrawal. The timeframe for the introduction of a mother tongue-based program is even shorter. Until 2008 there was no provision for mother-tongue teaching. Portuguese was the designated language of instruction and the only written language from Grade 4 (Taylor-Leech 2013, p. 9). The Baseline Report stated (CARE 2012, p. 2) that most teachers adopted the unofficial ('clandestine') practice of communicating with early primary pupils in their mother tongue. They welcomed the MTB-MLE approach because it legitimated and built on their experience and practices.

History of the MTB-MLE program

The Basic Education Act of 2008 (ME 2008) introduced a major structural change to the system, acknowledging the role of mother tongues as languages of teaching and learning, and of Tetun as a second language of instruction.

Following this, the ME mandated the TLNCU to develop a language-in-education policy based on international best practice. The MTB-MLE National Policy was launched along with an implementation plan covering the first 3 years, 2011-2013. At the same time curriculum and materials for teaching Tetun as a language were being developed by the ME. This fits with the additive approach of the MTB-MLE but in practice the coordination of the two needs to be carefully and tightly coordinated, as we discuss below. Arising from this policy work, a pilot version of the proposal was launched in 12 schools in the districts of Lautein, Manatutu and Oekusi. It is this pilot which we report on.

Monitoring and evaluating the program

Every educational policy and program benefits from monitoring and feedback, and this applies to the MTB-MLE program. Indeed, the present evaluation and the evaluations managed by CARE aim to do this. The pilot study was intended to provide guidance to policy makers regarding the value of MTB – and it has done so. However, it is important not to see the pilot as a test of the mother-tongue principle in early education and literacy programs in Timor-Leste. The value of the mother tongue principle is not in serious

doubt. It does not need the pilot program to show what is unanimously supported by international research. It is supported by teaching practices in Timor-Leste, where teachers have already been using mother tongues (both Tetun and other national languages) as a resource in the classroom. The pilot program has only been operating for a year, too short a time to show conclusive results. However, even in that short time it has proved a great success and shown how it can be best used in Timor-Leste.

With so short a time for the pilot, which is concentrating on the early years of schooling, there is also a danger that outcomes will be expected which should not happen until later school years. This expectation could especially affect the role of Portuguese which, given its status as a prestige language, may be used as a criterion for literacy before it is appropriate or has been taught. Our own observations found some evidence for this tendency. Achieving sound oral and literate proficiency in Portuguese is one aim of MTB-MLE but it is only one aim and it cannot be tested for some years. Since it is only proposed to include teaching of oral Portuguese in the curriculum from Grade 2 and literacy in Grade 4, the results of an MTB-MLE program on Portuguese literacy will not be visible after at least Grade 4, i.e., in 2018 if the full MTB-MLE program is introduced in 2015.

This evaluation is intended to be of value to the ME as it plans the development of language policy in Timor-Leste, so the policy framework of the ME guided our observations. Our own research agrees with international studies in support of the ME policy on mother tongue-based literacy and our findings provide strong support for that policy.

We understand that the ME is planning to scale up the MTB-MLE policy from the pilot schools in the three districts. We looked objectively at the data from the schools we studied, taking into account the opportunities and challenges these and other schools might face in putting MTB-MLE into practice on a larger scale. Our evaluation sees many merits in scaling up while identifying problems that may arise if and when MTB-MLE is extended to many more districts and schools over the coming years. Further research is needed on these important issues.

3. Methodology and Limitations

The limitations of this study should be dealt with from the outset. The project team carried out desk-based research prior to visiting Timor-Leste but its primary data comes mainly from classroom observations between 7 and 19 April 2014, and from conversations with key stakeholders. No member of the evaluation team is fluent in Tetun or understands any of the mother tongues used in the pilot schools so we depended on others to translate for us. Members of the MTB-MLE team accompanied us to coordinate the activities and often assisted us in understanding the language used in the classroom and in meetings. There are three project districts but for logistic reasons the team was not able to visit Oekusi. Even so, we studied 60% of the study schools and observed over half the teachers and children in action.

Our main research approach was ethnographic, complemented by qualitative and quantitative data. Ethnographic observation allows researchers to see how a policy is actually implemented, including aspects that participants may not be aware of or may not want to reveal in surveys. At the same time, it explores the values and attitudes that drive behaviour which affect how a policy will be implemented in practice. Finally, it gives a

vivid picture of the reality of a situation observed so that policymakers can be assured that the picture presented corresponds to daily realities of the pilot. We use photographs to help communicate this sense.

The Baseline Report (CARE 2012) investigated the schools in the three pilot districts, gathering quantitative and qualitative data. Since this data was collected prior to the implementation of MTB-MLE pilot, it gives an overview of the broad conditions in those schools and districts. Our team used the Baseline Report as a basis for our analysis and we complemented it with data from other public sources.

Although it would be desirable to measure differences between the Baseline Report and the present study, the differences would not be valid. Students currently in pre-primary classes will be different from those in previous pre-primary classes so the data will mainly reflect conditions and competencies close to the point of entry and not the effects of teaching in the MTB-MLE pilot, as did the original survey. Pupils who might be expected to show benefits of the MTB-MLE from pre-primary classes may now have moved up to primary levels but they are still a minority alongside pupils who did not attend pre-primary class and pupils (according to CARE 2012, roughly 20%) who are over age and may be repeating the year.

We use this data as a broad picture of the initial conditions in the pilot schools in the three districts over a year. We use it as a context to explain major differences between districts, not as evidence for the level of literacy during this short time, since L1 was not used previously as a language of instruction.

We take three points from the Baseline Report:

1. Twenty percent of children in classes across the three districts are overage, showing evidence of delayed progress through their schooling. Estimates show that one-third of current primary school students are older than the official primary school age of 6-11 years, with 34% of primary students aged between 13 and 22 years. Primary school completion rates in Timor-Leste increased from 73% in 2009 to 83% in 2012 (Census Atlas 2013). This figure is commendable but leaves room for improvement, to which the MTB-MLE pilot aims to contribute.
2. The attendance of boys and girls in the MTB-MLE schools is roughly equal. As gender equity is a major concern for education in rural areas, this is an encouraging finding which is consistent with the increase in the gender parity index for Timor-Leste between 2009 and 2012 (Census Atlas 2013).
3. Results from Lautein are markedly different from those from Oekusi and Manatutu. They are so different that it becomes reasonable for us to ask why this is so. Rather than average the results out over the three communities, the Baseline Report suggests that the differences may conceal the existence of two extremes. Our research investigated only the two districts of Lautein and Manatutu but these are well chosen to reflect the extreme positions according to the Baseline Report data. In our study design, therefore, we kept the data from the two districts separate to see what we could learn about the different nature of the two districts before we put the data together into a composite picture.

4. School Ethnographies, Lautein and Manatutu: Observations and analysis

Our ethnographic observations for this report took place in three pilot schools from two districts across seven different classes: three Pre-primary A (PPA), mostly consisting of children with no prior schooling in any language; four Pre-primary B (PPB), mostly consisting of children with at least one year of schooling in their mother tongue; and one Grade 1 class. Not all children in Grade 1 had undertaken pre-primary school in any language. As a basis for comparison, we also observed five schools that were not in the MTB-MLE pilot from the two districts.

In this report, the term ‘community members’ includes parents, grandparents and other community members participating in discussions. Similarly, ‘school staff members’ includes principals, teachers, teacher assistants, language coordinators and district coordinators. Observations covered students, teachers, teacher assistants and other school staff participating in the classroom at the time of observation. However, it was not possible to collect the same information for all schools visited.

As observations and discussions differed in each school and class, they are provided below separately to give a sense of the rich diversity across this small sample. A brief overview of the background, geographical and other relevant information relating to the schools is provided. A general discussion at the end of the section highlights the differences and strengths of each school. Throughout this and later sections of this report we include suggestions for consideration or action in italics.

The following section provides an overview of our observations and discussions with community and school members in the three MTB-MLE project schools: Pre-eskola Futuru and Eskola Maina in the Lautein District and Eskola Rembor in Manatutu District. It should be noted that Eskola Obrato, another MTB-MLE school in Manatutu District, withdrew from the MTB-MLE project earlier in the pilot. However, we were able to collect some information about this school and learn some of the reasons for its withdrawal from the pilot.

School and district backgrounds

For our evaluation we were particularly interested in the implications of the MTB-MLE Baseline Report (CARE 2012), which indicated a low initial literacy level for the two Manatutu pilot schools (Obrato and Rembor) and a higher initial literacy level for the Lautein schools. These results are indicative of the educational environment in which the pilot is operating.

Both Eskola Rembor in Manatutu and Pre-eskola Futuru in Lautein are located in small, isolated rural communities on very rough terrain far from a main town. During the wet season these schools can become inaccessible due to the rise of the rivers and crossings, which affects the ability of the MTB-MLE team to deliver training and other support. In addition, around the Pre-eskola Futuru walking in wet weather can be so difficult that parents and children sometimes cannot get to the school. In contrast, Eskola Maina to the west of Lospalos, is more easily accessible via a main highway.

In both Lautein MTB-MLE pilot schools, Fataluku is the L1 and the only language spoken in the school community. Fataluku has high vitality; according to the 2010 Census, 30,195 people speak Fataluku in Lautein (Census Atlas 2013, p. 5) and its speakers have great pride in the language. This may be a factor in the degree of acceptance and effectiveness of the MTB-MLE pilot in this district.

Manatutu is a large, thinly populated district with its capital close to Dili. There were originally two MTB-MLE pilot schools in Manatutu Sub-district. One was in Obrato in Suco Sau but this school withdrew before the project commenced. The other school was in Rembor in Suco Aiteas. According to the Census Atlas (2013, p. 5), in the sub-district of Manatutu Galolen is registered as the L1 for 54.32% of people, followed by Tetun (21.09%), Habun (11.71%) and Idaté (7.66%). These figures show that each MTB-MLE school meets the needs of the majority of its inhabitants but at the same time linguistic diversity brings challenges to address.

Census figures are important for planning. However, it needs to be recognised that statistical estimates at a district level are not necessarily representative of the mother-tongue education needs at suco and village level. *Further sociolinguistic research is needed, at local levels and in schools themselves, in order to achieve the optimum match between schools and their communities.*

Classroom observations

Lautein District

In both the PPA and PPB classes the teacher and assistant teacher worked together as a team; they knew their roles so well they complemented one another. The teacher instructed and led the class while the assistant teacher welcomed and settled the children as they arrived and assisted the teacher in handing out activities and making sure students were on track. This successful team-teaching may have been a result of them undertaking the MTB-MLE teacher-training program at the same time. All communication and resources used in these classes during the observations were in the mother tongue, Fataluku.

Pre-eskola Futuru

The Pre-eskola Futuru is located a short distance from the main community, amongst fields of crops. Children and parents/grandparents from the outer villages walk considerable distances to attend the school. Some of these parents/grandparents stay until the end of the school day as they would not have time to walk home and back, particularly for the PPA class, which only runs for two hours a day.

A new school was built for the MTB-MLE pilot, funded by an Australian group and the local community donated the land on which the school was built. The school contains two classrooms, one long resource room/office behind the classrooms and one toilet separate to the building. Consistent with the MTB policy, the principal and district coordinator stated that since the implementation of the MTB-MLE pilot, student attendance has doubled and more parents are involved in the school than ever before. The community supports the school in many ways, including building a fence around the school (but they want a more solid one to keep the pigs and other smaller animals out) and maintaining the grounds and buildings.



Photo 1: New Pre-eskola Futuru, Muapitine



Photo 2: Old community school/Principal's house

Prior to the new school building, the school operated from the principal's home with volunteer teachers. There were no resources and teachers were not paid. As classes were held in the principal's home and they had to be organised in rotating classes. Student attendance was very poor. However, this situation has dramatically changed since the implementation of the MTB-MLE pilot. Teachers are now paid at least the minimum wage and the principal is moving to permanent employment with the ME. School attendance has doubled and the school now has an enrolment of 88 children, who attend regularly.

In addition, the teachers stated they now have most of the teaching resources needed to teach the children, though they still sometimes run out of basic resources when teaching. All six teachers said that their work environment and conditions have dramatically improved since implementation of the MTB-MLE pilot. Indirectly, this has also had a positive impact on their personal lives and on the community.

All teachers at the school at the time of observation had taught in the community school for six years prior to the MLE pilot. The unofficial language of instruction was Fataluku as the children did not speak Tetun well enough to understand lessons. In addition, several teachers considered they did not speak Tetun well enough to use it for instruction. *Improving Tetun language competence of teachers needs to be considered, where relevant, as part of training sessions.*

Pre-primary A

As the PPA class was observed towards the end of the normal daily two-hour session, only a short session was observed. Thirty-three children attended the class that day, 18 boys and 15 girls. As this observation occurred towards the end of the session just after the children had had a break and something to eat, they were tired, rather unsettled and noisy. The teachers needed to calm them, which was achieved by setting a drawing activity.

The drawing was done in response to a traditional story the teacher told the children before the break. Drawing is a pre-writing activity to teach pencil control. Most children were able to draw a picture without any assistance. The children then happily took their drawings to their teacher, who provided positive and encouraging feedback. *Providing such positive feedback creates a learner-friendly environment.*

In the final activity for the day, the children sang a song in their mother tongue and made the movements with the teachers. This kind of activity is known as Total Physical Response (TPR). It is a tried and trusted method for teaching basic, beginner-level language that involves the full physical engagement of the learner. Judging from the children's enthusiasm, they appeared to have a happy and productive relationship with their teacher. The literacy materials in this classroom were written in Fataluku and included a poster of the Kuadru Alfabetu as well as many examples of children's written work.

Pre-primary B

In keeping with the MTB-MLE teacher-training manual, the teacher started this three-hour PPB class by reviewing the previous day's lessons. The children were attentive and responded quickly and together to the teacher when required. Thirty PPB children attended the class that day, including 19 boys and 15 girls.

The children were very involved in the lessons and were not distracted by the presence of other adults (including parents, visitors and the principal) in the classroom. This lesson also included traditional storytelling, followed by related guided activities including the pre-literacy work of writing their first name (copied from the name tag they were wearing) and drawing. Most children copied their names and drew pictures without assistance. The children's focus on the lesson and attention to the teacher was impressive. A contributing factor was the teacher's positive and engaging classroom manner. It was obvious from the children's engagement and visible happiness that they liked and respected her, which helped to create a learner-friendly classroom and enhance learning.

A reading session was also observed. The children read individually either to the teacher or the teacher assistant. These reading sessions indicated that the children knew their Fataluku letters and could identify them correctly when the teacher or teacher assistant pointed to them.

Pre-eskola Maina

Observations at this school only included the PPB class, as the PPA class had finished for the day by the time we arrived. At the time of observation, the small classroom held 33 PPB students (16 males and 14 females), two male teachers and two female parents. Classroom resources included the same Kuadru Alfabetu and Fataluku readers. *It was obvious that a larger classroom was needed.*

Prior to the MTB-MLE pilot, children from Maina attended a school where the language of instruction was Tetun. According to community members, this was not successful because the children did not know Tetun and could not learn and use the alphabet. Since learning in their L1 they can read in the Fataluku alphabet. Community members stated that the students are now more directed and engaged in their lessons. The teacher now has access to a teacher assistant and teacher training, which were not available before the MTB-MLE pilot.

The community is very involved in the MTB-MLE pilot school and expects good results from it, as they have invested a lot of work in the school. To run the MTB-MLE pilot, the community had to put a roof on an old building in the government school grounds but the wind blew it off. After much discussion and delay, the government provided some roofing materials and the community repaired the building so the project could start. *Whilst the building has a roof it is very old and too small for the number of children enrolled in the classes.*

In one observation, the students carried out an activity from the Fataluku teaching manual. Each student was directed in turn to walk to the blackboard where letters were written out, point to a letter and read it aloud. Each child read the required letters accurately indicating that they knew the Fataluku alphabet.



Photo 3: Activity from the teaching manual

During our observation, the teacher did not provide any verbal or physical feedback to any of the children observed. At no time were they praised or applauded. The classroom was very quiet and the children did not seem to be paying much attention to the task unless it was their turn at the blackboard. Our presence might have impacted on their behaviour. We were informed that this teacher was regarded as highly effective, though normally such learning environments do not foster children's confidence or good learning.

In both Lautein schools the MTB-MLE project team encourages the teachers to allow the children to take storybooks home so the children can read with the parents and siblings. However, some teachers expressed concerns about the risk of losing materials that support their teaching and they do not want to let the children to take the books home in case they get damaged or lost. The MTB-MLE policy clearly states that it supports weekend loans but these teachers' concerns are also realistic. Since this aspect of the project is so important, *we suggest that teachers are further encouraged to allow children to take books home as in doing so they will extend and deepen their literacy skills.* This also encourages closer ties between the home and the school. At the same time there needs to be a policy to regularly replace lost or damaged reading materials.

Overall, the observations in Lautein left no doubt that the students, the teachers and the community members are very happy and committed to the school. Whilst we did not directly assess the children's literacy skills, we noted that the 2012 Baseline Report found higher initial levels of literacy in the Lautein communities than in Manatutu. This finding implies that a community with high levels of commitment to their mother tongue may have higher levels of literacy before MTB-MLE commences and will then be more ready to benefit from it, compared to communities with less commitment to mother tongue education in the first place.

Manatutu district

Eskola Rembor

Administratively, Eskola Rembor, where the MTB-MLE pilot is located, is a sister school to another school in the Manatutu urban area. This other school belongs to the mainstream education system, thus creating potential conflict in administering the specific goals of the MTB-MLE curriculum. The implications of this will be discussed later, in particular regarding Grade 1.



Photo 4: Rembor Primary School



Photo 5: Classroom Pre-primary A

Pre-primary A

PPA is held in a small one-room building with walls made from sagu palm tree branches and a tin roof. This school was built by the local NGO Morris Foun when the community donated the land to them, highlighting the community's commitment to the MTB-MLE pilot and their pride in participating in it. It has a small adjacent playground. The building itself had fewer materials on display inside than any other school we visited. However, we were told that children were happy with it because it

reminded them of home. Whether for this or for other reasons, this class was the most relaxed one we observed. It also helped that it was a small class (13 children, 8 girls and 5 boys) with two teachers, a man and a woman working well as a team. From the number of chairs left empty we inferred that there was only 50% attendance. This rate was surprisingly low given that the parents we met were evidently very happy with the MTB-MLE pilot and the class went well.

Five lessons over three days were observed in this class. The following description covers one lesson that is representative of the principles followed in all lessons. The observation covered one complete lesson between the children returning from their break in the playground to the end of the school day. The lesson fell into a number of small segments, with a good flow between them. There was an organising theme, *Pascua*, Easter. This was a well-designed lesson, integrating literacy skills into a religious cultural activity. The teacher only spoke in Galolen. The activity built on the previous day where the activity was to join the dashes of the letter 'P'. This was connected to the word '*Pascua*' written on the blackboard. We note here that the written form of this word did not follow the orthographic conventions of either Tetun or Galolen. The next day children drew the letter P with their fingers in a basket of sand.

The class included continuous explanations in Galolen, with children repeating words after the teacher. Then, two girls and a boy came confidently to the front and repeated the word. All this was accompanied by physical enactments by the teacher and children, such as extending their arms to form a cross. This can be seen as a form of the TPR pedagogy recommended by the MTL-MLE pilot. There were also explicit versions of this pedagogy in this class, where children followed instructions to mark the number one and turn around in a circle. The children clearly enjoyed these learning activities.

In the next activity, the teacher told a story in Galolen, including the word '*Pascua*'. This can be seen as a version of Stringer's double track method used flexibly and effectively. Afterwards, each child coloured in a cross that the teachers had drawn in advance, following verbal instructions and demonstrations by the teacher on the blackboard. We observed that the children had different capacities in this activity. Some were able to do the task very quickly while one did not do it at all.

These pre-writing activities involved attributes and skills appropriate for this level. For instance, all children held their crayons with a comfortable and correct posture, which will transfer easily to writing. We did not ask any teacher if this had been taught but we were struck by how many children were able to do this. We did not observe any free drawing in this class. It seems that most activities are designed and controlled by the teachers. The only exception observed was one drawing in which a child had drawn some circles on the white space of the page instead of colouring in the drawing provided by the teachers. Although these schools have limited availability of paper for those activities, creative activities are so important for developing writing skills that we recommend more support from the program to encourage children to communicate in multiple modes. *Teachers could encourage free drawing using available resources for children of this age to create meaning, as a valuable way to prepare them for writing* (Kress 1997).

This was an impressive class from the point of view of the MTB-MLE curriculum. The main pedagogic principles were skillfully put into practice by the teacher and the teacher assistant. These teachers worked well together in the classroom. They spoke

only Galolen and encouraged and received responses from the children in Galolen. The children clearly enjoyed the class and were well behaved even though they were so young. Admittedly, it was a small class with two teachers but it successfully combined MTB-MLE principles in action, producing excellent results.

Pre-primary B

The PPB room was larger and better equipped than the PPA room. There were 19 children present (11 girls and 8 boys). Some wooden chairs which had been donated by an aid organisation but were too large for these children were stacked at the back of the room and the children used smaller, less lavish but more appropriate plastic chairs. We observed three lessons over three days. The following description of one lesson is representative of the other lessons. From the MTB-MLE teacher's manual it appeared that the period before we arrived, from 8.15 to 9.15, was meant to be '*pre-literaria*', and the class we observed was '*pre-numero*'. However, in this class as in PPA the teachers did not follow the curriculum closely, instead introducing a number of themes to maintain the pace and flow of the lessons.

As in the other class, work produced by the children was hanging from a line across the room. In this case, it was a more creative activity, controlled by the teachers using local available resources. Teachers had drawn a flower stem and children added petals by gluing on pencil shavings. The classroom had written materials in Tetun, Portuguese and Galolen, including readers in Galolen provided by the TLNCU.

In this school each child had a simple plastic folder in which to take a reading book home for the weekend, with a system of stamps to record what they had read. It was recommended that this activity be done with the parents, although we did not find out whether children actually do this or whether the parents are literate and in what languages. *Reading in their mother tongue with their children might have an influence on promoting multilingual adult literacy as a side effect.* However, we were unable to observe whether this was happening in this community.

The lesson we observed began with the teacher assistant using a picture to explain the difference between traditional and modern materials. The image depicted the building of a house made of local materials, including a thatched roof. The picture connects with the MTB-MLE emphasis on the importance of using familiar objects and meanings.



Photo 6: Learning the difference between traditional and modern

During the teacher assistant's explanation she pointed to the actual classroom ceiling, which is made of tin, and made a contrast bringing in the words "*tradicional*" and "*modernu*" in spoken form. These are Portuguese loanwords, from an abstract register, which also appear in Tetun, although they are spelt differently. *The teacher moved freely through an interlingual system, taking the children along with her. What she did was advanced conceptually and linguistically; yet she grounded the lesson in familiar concrete experience.* When the teacher had finished, she asked some children to come to the front to repeat the explanation. All this was done in Galolen and the easy use of L1 was clearly essential to the confident participation of students and the success of the class.

In the next activity, each child received one book to read individually. There was a text in Galolen on the left and a related image on the right. The teacher read the sentence and showed the image to the children. Then she had the children find the specific page and look at it while she repeated the sentence. This activity explicitly addressed the aim of the MTB-MLE policy, to introduce literacy in L1 in that the children were learning how to manage a book physically. They did this adequately, although some children found it difficult to find the correct page and turn the pages, needing help from the teachers to do so.

One boy seemed to be using his thumb to follow the reading but when we checked on the video recording later, we saw that he was actually marking a blank page. For this boy, the teacher's reading pace did not match his level of ability and he seemed to be only pretending to read. This problem was also seen in the next activity. At the end of reading time, some children came to the front to repeat the story. The children held a book and might be thought to be 'reading'. However, from our visual recordings it was evident that the children did not look at the writing, but only at the images. Although we were not able to follow the children's Galolen, it seemed that they were using the picture as a cue to remember the teacher's story and were not trying to connect this with the written text. On the one hand, reading would have been beyond them at this level, so it is no surprise that they were not able to do so. On the other hand, *it is concerning that they were pushed beyond their ability, to appear more advanced in their capacities for literacy than they were or should have been at this stage.*

Grade 1

Grade 1 in Eskola Rembor demands a special place in our study. We were planning to observe lessons but as it turned out, this class like all others in that school was undergoing a week of formal examinations. Initially, we thought that we could not include it in our observations since it is not valid to compare examinations with ordinary lessons. However, we believe our observations have important implications for the future of the MTB-MLE pilot.

Physically, Grade 1 is on the same piece of land as the pre-primary school with a larger room and more students than pre-primary classes but in the same school building as the other grades (not included in the MTB-MLE pilot). There were 43 students enrolled though only 24 attended that day, equating to 56%, which is much lower than PPB but similar to PPA. We did not have information on the reasons for this but it seemed to be a worryingly low attendance rate.

We note this was an examination, when one might expect students to make a special effort to attend unless they already feared failure. This class may be a special case for other reasons. We were told that only about half of the students enrolled had completed pre-primary school. The other half had only completed three months of education at this point in their school career. For these reasons, it is likely to be a very mixed class with variable educational backgrounds, including mother tongue education.

The room contained more materials than the pre-primary classes. Taped onto a blackboard at the back of the room were the Galolen, Tetun and Portuguese alphabets. There were also booklets in Galolen and Tetun, as in the pre-primary classes. Although we were not able to observe a literacy lesson in Galolen or in any other language, work displayed by the children showed that they had some ability to write in the L1.

In this Grade 1 class, Portuguese was given more prominence than in the other classrooms. There were some visuals drawn by the teachers showing the Portuguese alphabet and associated words with drawings representing the meanings (e.g. “a” for *ananas*, “b” for *banana*): There was a *cantinho da lingua Portuguesa*, although Portuguese is not meant to be a language of instruction at this stage. There were also Portuguese Mathematics books. In short, there was more material through which they could have learnt Portuguese – if it had been on the curriculum.

A six-week lesson plan on the wall broke content units down into 15-minute blocks. Oral Tetun was included but neither oral nor written Portuguese. From the children’s answer books we learnt that Grade 1 exams for this class for this week included Mathematics, Portuguese, Tetun, Religion and Morals and Environmental Studies.

The MTB-MLE curriculum does not include formal examinations at this level so this class should not have participated in them and, if they did, Portuguese should not have been included but rather oral Tetun only. It would seem that either these pupils had no preparation for that examination or that it was wrongly introduced into the regular curriculum. The examination we observed was in Tetun, which would have been outside the curriculum but not so far outside it as Portuguese. In either case, examinations in written Portuguese and Tetun were setting up pupils to fail.

The lesson framework for the class was written carefully on the blackboard in blue chalk in Portuguese: *Disciplina, Data, Duração, Nome completo*. We suggest that this choice of language reflected the former status of Portuguese as the language of instruction, indicating the status Portuguese still has for these teachers even though neither they nor their pupils knew it well. This indicated to us that the teacher was not following the principles of MTB-MLE since Portuguese is L3 and should not be introduced into the curriculum plan at this grade.

Throughout the lesson the teacher attempted to explain the questions written in Tetun on the blackboard but most of the children did not seem to understand. She stayed at the front of the class the whole time while the teacher assistant went round the room trying to show the children what to do. This is not the role of the teacher assistant according to the MTB-MLE policy guidelines. We observed that the children all had great difficulty with this task. None of them looked happy; in fact they looked hot and blank and some showed signs of frustration and even distress.

After 20 minutes or so, the majority of children (15) stood up in a group and handed in their exercise books. Nine students remained, still trying their best to complete the task

but hardly writing anything. Six children left one by one over the next 10 minutes, leaving a small group of three who continued to struggle for about another 40 minutes. These three children then left as a group. Two handed in their exercise books and one left her exercise book open on the desk.

We examined the exercise books later and found that many children had not written anything in spite of the length of time they had spent on the task. In the *completive* (completion) exercise at best only one in five sentences was completed by the children. The last three children to finish were no better or worse than the others. The main difference seemed to be that they had spent more time and experienced more anguish in failing than their classmates.

This class directly demonstrates the merits of mother tongue based literacy by showing just how badly these children needed it and how counter-productive the traditional non MTB-MLE curriculum is in its own terms. Paradoxically, the use of Galolen saved this class from complete failure. Without the oral medium of instruction in the mother tongue by the teacher, the children would not have known what to do in the exam.

There was considerable help by teachers and children, which in other contexts might be called cheating. Teachers coached the children, and the more confident children helped others, sometimes using an eraser to remove wrong (or right) answers, all through the medium of Galolen. Without the use of oral Galolen, this most traditional of classroom formats could not have taken place.

From later conversations, we discovered that examinations play a structural role in all primary grades in this school, as in many in the district and the country. In this school all classes from Year 1 on have examinations, which play a major role in deciding whether children are promoted to the next grade level. If the examination component is as invalid as we believe, then any influence it has on students' destination and their readiness to move to the next grade level should be deplored. As noted in the Baseline Report (2012, p. 4), 21% of the students in the project schools are over-age. These figures are signs that the curriculum in these schools needs to be improved. MTB-MLE principles stand to improve this situation but they cannot do so if they are undermined.

Systemically, this problem arose from an unmediated clash of systems – the traditional system cancelling out the new – combined with the collapse of the different levels of the curriculum as prescribed in the MTB-MLE curriculum document. Pedagogically speaking, the most damaging aspect of the class was that the children were set up to fail and fail they did. From our observations, this experience was painful for everyone and more painful still for those who tried their hardest. It is likely that in addition to not having learned or understood anything, these children would have been demoralised by the experience.

A shining jewel

In our observations we were sometimes struck by small incidents that were so full of meaning and so inspiring that we called them 'jewels'. The following jewel was discovered while observing the Grade class 1 at Eskola Rembor, which we had seen as the least successful class in all the pilot schools.

While we were looking at the visual resources hanging on the classroom walls while children were playing outside during their break, we noticed a boy enter the room and go to the blackboard. In a corner where there was some clean space, he began to write his name. He wrote fluently and confidently with large letters correctly formed. He concentrated very hard and after writing his name he began to erase other parts of the blackboard so that he could continue his writing. When he noticed that he had erased some parts of the words written by the teacher, he immediately stopped and rewrote the parts of the word he had deleted. He continued erasing other parts of the blackboard to continue with his writing. Then, when he noticed we were photographing him, he turned around, gave us a big smile and returned to his self-allocated task. He looked so happy!

This little incident is highly meaningful since it demonstrates not just his capacity to write what he has learned in this first three months of class but his enjoyment in doing so in his own time instead of playing outside. Especially worthy of note is his respectful action of restoring the teacher's words, writing them correctly. His whole performance shows skills and attitudes to language and literacy which would not have been recognised in the terms of the formal examination. He must have learned these somewhere, in the MTB-MLE pre-primary or in class he is attending now.

Observations in other schools

As a complementary basis for comparison we visited a small number of other schools. We did not visit Obrato, in Manatutu district, because it had withdrawn from the pilot scheme. However, we collected a range of perspectives on this school, in order to put this episode and its reasons onto the agenda for further research. We also visited several urban schools in each district: three in the Lautein District and two in Manatutu town. Each school was only briefly visited so an informed comparison cannot be provided in this report. However, basic observations are provided below.

Obrato

We believe that Eskola Obrato's withdrawal from the pilot was a significant act. We consider this case as indicative of a broader trend where there is linguistic diversity in a school. We were not in a position to carry out direct investigation but we talked to a range of key informants to find out more about the withdrawal. Their information is consistent with what was provided by "A Brief Progress Report on Activities Conducted January–May 2012" by the MTB-MLE pilot team. This school is located closer to the district centre and although children who attend it are predominantly L1 Galolen speakers, they have developed more linguistic capacity in Tetun as L2. In addition, some children at this school have Tetun as the dominant home language. Another factor was that some teachers do not speak Galolen. For these reasons, we were told, the school administration decided not to participate in the pilot.

It was also suggested to us that for some the term 'pilot' caused concern since it did not seem to guarantee the continuity of the mother tongue education program. Reinforcing this doubt was a concern with what was seen as a division of authority between the TLNCU and the ME, giving rise to a sense that the government did not endorse it as part of the normal education system. For people holding this view, it was more important to follow the directives of the government, understood as not fully committed to MTB-MLE in the long term.

From this case we draw attention to the fact that the reasons for withdrawal point to existing difficulties that the MTB-MLE might encounter in other regions where the local mother tongue is a dominant language but in a multilingual environment. *Careful strategies need to be developed in such cases.*

Play-to-learn pre-schools

In the Lautein District we visited two ‘Play-to-Learn’ preschools, funded by the NGO Plan International. The ‘play-to-learn schools’ teach children through play. Children learn gross motor skills and other vital learning skills by playing with blocks, jigsaws and various other toys and games. The children learn the Tetun alphabet through playing with blocks and puzzles. The language of instruction is the mother tongue. The school has been supported by the MTB-MLE project, which also donated some Fataluku readers. Both schools use the children’s L1 so they exemplify the merits of mother tongue education for different levels, although in a different framework.

The PPA class in one of these schools had 18 children and one teacher. The children seemed attentive and patient and responded positively to the teacher whilst drawing or playing with toys (individually) at a large table. The large classroom included many games, jigsaws and books. There were children’s drawings on the walls and hanging from the ceiling and there was also a quiet rest area. The PPB class, located in the same school, had approximately 30 children. These children played in small groups on the floor or at tables. They played with blocks and many other types of games. Activities in this class seemed unstructured and the children appeared restless and unfocused compared to children we observed in MTB-MLE schools.

The second ‘Play-to-Learn’ school visited included children at the pre-primary level, aged 2 -3 years. There appeared to be three teachers and 11 children. Three parents were also present in classroom. The language of instruction was Fataluku but the song the children were singing was in Indonesian. The children were very young but appeared content and happy and they followed instructions easily when they were in their mother tongue.

Government non-MTB-MLE schools

The one government school we briefly observed in Lautein included one PPA and one PPB class. Most time was spent in the PPB class, where the language of instruction at the time of observation was Portuguese. The lesson was a literacy lesson where children were writing in Portuguese. All children were sitting in rows doing what they were told and they seemed to be concentrating on the task in hand. The classroom walls were covered in posters and student work but we were told that it was the work of the teacher not the children. It would have been highly desirable to assess the quality of learning taking place in this classroom since it represents a traditional learning format.

We were not able to observe any classroom activities in Manatutu District. In one school, Eskola Muki, we were able to see the PPB classroom setting and materials. The materials were in Tetun with some textbooks and educational aids in Portuguese and English. Although this school had the same furniture as the Grade 1 classroom in the MTB-MLE class we visited in Eskola Rembor (both provided by the government), from our quick inspection it appeared that the Eskola Muki had more resources. It had more teaching aids, which were more diverse and attractive with glossy paper in more colours.

We were informed that the higher level of support for this school was due to additional funding provided by the NGO Child Fund. It would have been interesting to find out what the effects of this higher level of resourcing were having on outcomes and children's self-confidence.

Discussion, Lautein and Manatutu: Similarities and differences

In this section we highlight nine significant points from across our classroom observations to bring out major ways schools in the two districts were significantly similar or different.

1. Language of instruction

The L1 of the children, teachers and teacher assistants was the language of instruction in all classes observed. Teachers communicated in their mother tongue using a variety of registers that directly enabled the children to participate in a range of ways in their L1. The availability of the mother tongue played a decisive role in their engagement in the class, and their capacity to learn.

The L1 of the children, school staff and the local community in the Lautein District is Fataluku. The teachers make every effort to relate the children's learning to their home, community and cultural environment. They believe this enhances the knowledge that the children bring to school and helps to bridge children's learning from L1 to L2 and L3. Education programs where the mother tongue is the medium of instruction is based on the principle of building on what the children already know, and on breaking down the tasks into more manageable ones.

In multiliteracy programs children are taught to read and write in their mother tongue before developing literacy in their L2 or L3. Children only need to work with one major task at a time instead of having to simultaneously learn a second or third language. When children learn to read in their mother tongue what they read makes sense. Then they can transfer their basic reading skills to the L2 or L3 much more easily (Benson, 2004, 2005; Cummins, 1981, 1991, 1999). The children also gain a sense of satisfaction, (Caffery, 2010; Crawford, 1997; Dutcher, 1995; Liddicoat, 2008). The transfer principle is reinforced in the MTB-MLE pilot and in the pilot's teacher-training program.

2. Engagement of parents and the community

In our personal communications with parents, teaching staff and other community members in the two districts it was clear that the MTB-MLE pilot has significantly enhanced community involvement in the education of their children in both districts. Although parents spoke their mother tongue and Tetun, Fataluku and Galolen respectively are the main languages spoken at home and in the community. They chose to send their children to the MTB-MLE school in the belief that it is good for bridging between the first and second languages. Another strong argument put forward by the community members was that it is important to them to maintain the mother tongue.

Parents in both districts felt more involved in their children's education because they talked more about school at home, as well as helping in the classrooms and in maintaining

the schools. Parents also felt that school was important for the children's future. Lautein parents said that they often reminded the children that it is important to come to school so they can have a good future. These parents expressed the view that they would like their children to attend an L1 school for all the primary years. Unfortunately, low attendance seems to indicate that this view is not as strongly held by parents in Rembor. Some Rembor parents are strongly involved in the school while others do not seem to be interested and do not regard schooling for their children as a priority.

Parents and community members in all schools observed that prior to the MTB-MLE project the community children attended schools where the language of instruction was Tetun but this was not successful because the children did not know the language. This was a common observation among the parents included in discussions for this report. These parents were pleased that their children can now read the Fataluku or Galolen alphabet. Community members in both districts stated that the students are now more directed and attentive in class. In addition, the schools have more resources, the teacher has a teacher assistant and there is teacher training, none of which were available before the MTB-MLE pilot.

Parents and community members from both districts claimed that the children learned their lessons quicker in their L1 compared to when they tried to learn them in Tetun. In Maina, community members told us they were very proud that some of their students had represented the school at a major national event where they used their mother tongue.

Parents and other community members in both districts are involved in the MTB-MLE schools and expect good results of the pilot, as they have invested a lot of work in the school, including building a new classrooms or repairing old buildings. In addition, it was not uncommon for parents to say that when they brought their children to the school they stayed to help and support the teacher. They said that this helped the children feel settled and secure.

According to the Lautein community members we spoke to, there is good attendance in the MTB-MLE classes every day. This was felt to be partly because the lessons reflect the students' home culture; many parents stated that "it is based on reality. As a result, parents talk about school and school-related activities at home, bringing the home and school closer together and enhancing the school's effectiveness by developing a deeper connection between the two. When the mother tongue is seen to be valued at school, children and their parents are more likely to feel positive about learning the dominant language. Research suggests that decisions on education that involve the communities concerned are more likely to lead to long-term success (UNESCO, 2003).

3. Student attendance

At the time of observation there were fewer children in the classes than were enrolled. Whilst enrolment figures were not recorded for all classes, this section provides a discussion on observations and figures provided by the schools. In the Eskola Rembor Grade 1 class student attendance was compared with the number of students on the roll, equating to 56% of students being present in class. This is considerably lower than the 71.3% net attendance ratio at Primary level in the 2010 Census for Manatutu District, which is lower still than the 76.5% reported for Lautein District. The slight differences between the two districts are also reflected in the higher attendance in the classes observed in the Lautein schools (see figure 1).

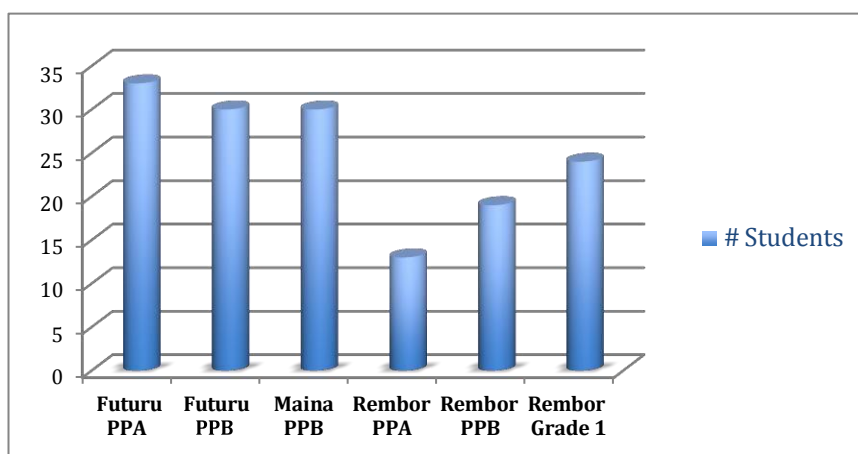


Figure 1: Class attendance during observation by school and grade level

Some of the reasons given by parents for the lack of attendance included cultural celebrations or culturally defined roles for children in family activities. As our classroom observations took place in the week prior to the schools Easter Holy Week break, children may have left school early for the holidays or were engaged in family customary practices. Nonetheless, from our conversations with teachers and education officers, we found that low attendance is a matter for concern in Rembor. From their knowledge of the community, they consider that these absences reflect parents' lack of understanding of the value of education.

Poor attendance is a broader problem in rural areas across Timor-Leste and around the world. According to the Education Monograph (NSD & UNFPA 2012) "Non-attendance is more of an issue in rural than urban areas, with only 68.2% of rural children aged 6-11 attending primary school" (p. 15). Therefore, low attendance cannot be specifically linked to the MTB-MLE pilot. Nonetheless, attendance is treated as a concern by the MTB-MLE team and they have undertaken advocacy activities to engage children who are not attending. These activities include promoting parent involvement in school activities and holding parent meetings to promote education, and specifically the value of the MTB-MLE pilot. We were told that the last parent meeting in Rembor attracted 50% of local parents but these were mostly parents who already understood the importance of education. On the other hand, it is now not unusual for parents and grandparents to sit inside or outside the classroom during school time or participate in classroom activities, a sign of positive community engagement.

4. Teachers and teaching style

All classes included a teacher and a teacher assistant, who worked as a team with continuous interaction and collaboration. In one class, at times it seemed as if the teacher was mentoring the teacher assistant. Although this reduced the engagement of the two teachers with children, this practice can be seen as beneficial for the development of less experienced teachers (TLNCU 2010). *The MTL-MLE practice of having teaching assistants is likely to improve the quality of education.*

Both Eskola Futuru classes we observed included a female teacher and female teacher assistant. In Eskola Maina both were male. In each of these classes there was a clear distinction between their roles. The teachers were in charge of instructing and directing the class while the teacher assistant acted in a supporting role. In both Eskola Rembor pre-primary classes, the teaching staff included both a male and a female. In these cases

the gender mix appeared to work very well with a balance of authority and care performed by both staff members. In the case of the Grade 1, both the teacher and teacher assistant were female, with one having the assistant role.

The MTB-MLE team provide regular teacher training in the districts and in Dili. Teachers and teacher assistants in each of the observed schools have undertaken two MTB-MLE training programs, which they believe have enhanced their teaching and provided consistency in managing the classrooms and using the teaching materials. It is also regarded as very important to learn new activities for engaging the children. As teachers and teacher assistants have undertaken the same training, teacher assistants can act as teachers if the teacher is away.

Both pre-primary classes in each district showed instances of the two pedagogic methods that have been introduced to teachers in the MTB-MLE pilot: the TPR and DTA (see section 2). TPR gave children the opportunity to be physically active and the use of stories in the DTA always appeared to engage the children. However, we found a number of instances where teachers should be encouraged to use more learner-friendly techniques. *A more relaxed atmosphere can develop a love of learning.*



Photo 7: Engaging TPR activities

The MTB-MLE pilot includes lessons using traditional storytelling. This includes stories used by the teachers as part of the DTA or to relate to other content lessons. There is also participation by members of the community, who come every week to tell stories to the children. Such activities ensure that lessons are child-centred as well as encouraging closer ties with the local community and linking children's learning to their home, community and cultural environment. We were told that when a community member is not present to tell a story, the teacher will do so. In three classes in Pre-eskola Futuru and Eskola Rembor we saw either the teacher or a parent telling such a story. *Story-telling is valuable and productive, a successful feature of MTB-MLE practice.*

We saw two classes where the teacher told a traditional story using actions and a lot of facial and verbal expression. The children listened closely, repeating sections of the story and smiling and laughing. After the story, the children sang a related song with actions (TPR). In the Pre-eskola Futuru PPB class, the story was followed by a writing/drawing activity. Firstly, the children wrote their name at the top of a piece of paper and then they drew pictures of animals from the teacher's story (pigs, goats and chickens). In Eskola Rembor, both individually and in small groups, the children enthusiastically retold each other sections of the story. Such activities successfully meet the national priorities of education by providing a learner-friendly environment (NSD & UNFPA 2012).

Overall, in all of the classes observed children frequently displayed signs of enjoyment, greater in some classes and activities than in others. Generally, they enjoyed singing and movement more than other activities but we observed them smiling and participating in response to teachers' explanations. Many stayed after class had ended to finish activities such as finger painting, lined up patiently for the reading books or raised their hands to come to the front – all indications of happiness at school

5. Classroom interactions

Most classes had small groups of desks, designed for children to work in groups, although some classrooms were not big enough for this use. In all interactions we observed, the teacher stood at the front and addressed the whole class. This was generally done skillfully, with a range of well-paced activities (including TPR and DTA and stories) so that children did not lose interest.

However, we noted that use of the mother tongue was as essential for the success of traditional teaching style as for the more interactive style recommended for the pilot. *Although interactive pedagogy is built into the MTB-MLE pilot, the value of its pedagogical approach is likely to be as useful for mainstream education.*



Photo 8 Teaching Style

6. Classroom management

Observations in most classes indicate smooth classroom management on the part of the teachers. As can be expected at this young age, the children often became restless after finishing an activity and the teachers needed to settle them. Usually this involved some intervention to separate children who were pushing and pulling each other and quick movement to the next activity. One teacher told us that saying a prayer at the end of the class was a good way to settle the children down.

The smooth management of the classes was only occasionally disrupted. For example, on one day in PPB Eskola Rembor, a bird flew into the room and an insect crawled across the floor, both incidents causing the children to become excited. The teachers reacted immediately to ensure the children were calm and returned to their seats. In the same class on another day, we observed an incident in which a girl was crying. We were told that a boy had hit her but we did not see any action taken by the teachers other than separating the children. *It is important that teachers take action when such incidents occur, to ensure gender parity and to instil a culture that does not support physical violence.*

Something that concerned us was the presence in both the Pre-eskola Futuru classes of a large stick or ruler that was occasionally shown to children. It was not clear why the teacher or teacher assistant did this, as there did not appear to be any misbehaviour on the part of the children. We were later informed that it was just to remind children to behave. The MTB-MLE team is trying to reduce the use of the ruler as a punishment threat. They believe it has been a part of classroom practice for a long time so it will take a while to stop the practice. However, it has been substantially reduced since the MTB-MLE pilot was implemented. We encourage the MTB-MLE team to continue to advise teachers not to use this threatening style of discipline as it does not enhance learning.

In our observations, the most extreme example of the presence of competing systems was the formal examination in Primary Grade 1, Eskola Rembor. Examinations do not have a place in the MTB-MLE curriculum so their presence in Eskola Rembor Grade 1 indicates the co-existence of the two conflicting educational principles. It was clear in this example that teacher behaviour was affected by conflict between the MTB-MLE ethos and a more traditional ethos, with a common belief that the ME supports the traditional ethos, even though the ME publically supports the MTB-MLE initiative. Many of the teachers have been trained in traditional teaching methods. They have absorbed this traditional ideology and need clearer signals from authorities in support of MTB-MLE practices. *These conflicting understandings should be directly and repeatedly discussed in teacher training.*

7. Literacy materials

There were literacy materials in all classrooms in the children's mother tongue. In the Lautein district, classroom materials displayed were only in Fataluku. The teachers have been trained by the MTB-MLE team to clear the walls at the beginning of the year so that they can hang students' work as it is developed for further learning. In both districts all classroom walls also included a large poster of the Kuadru Alfabetu.



Photo 9: Kuadru Alfabetu

In Eskola Rembor, literacy materials on display included some Tetun. Among them there were cards with the numbers and their names in both Galolen and Tetun. Children's work was pegged on a line for encouragement and future use and regularly replaced with new work. However, in the pre-primary classes they were not located in a place that was visible for the children while sitting at their desks. *This was not an efficient use of the materials as learning aids to familiarise the children with the written words.*

In general other materials on walls were hung too high for children's use. However, in this and similar cases we saw other functions they might have. Hanging above the children's heads, they made unintended statements about L1, L2 and L3. The message they were sending is ambiguous: either all three languages are fully legitimate in the new multilingual society in which these children will be citizens or Tetun and Portuguese remain the destination of real learning in these schools.

In relation to the aim of multilingual literacy expected at the end of basic education in Timor-Leste, we felt the use of common words present in the three languages in pre-primary classes in Eskola Rembor was an innovative strategy. It can be interpreted as a targeted multilingual literacy strategy (L1 leading to L2 and L3) which makes children aware of the linguistic diversity of their society while not pushing them beyond their capacities. *It would be interesting to explore its potential further, as an explicit strategy for future literacy transference between languages.*

All classrooms included small bookshelves of L1 readers provided by the MTB-MLE pilot. The children in all classes had access to these readers and were encouraged to use them. The classrooms also used local resources brought in by the teachers, such as plastic bottle tops, sticks and stones, used for counting. The children's familiarity with these objects and their connection with their everyday lives helped make mathematical principles familiar. The Eskola Rembor Grade 1 class also included some reading materials in Tetun provided by the Mary MacKillop Institute in East Timor.

Other classroom resources included a freestanding blackboard, plastic tables and chairs at child's height. In the Pre-Eskola Futuru PPB class, the blackboard was hazardous as it leaned out from the wall near a doorway, making it easy for children and teachers to trip over. Similar conditions were observed in Eskola Rembor pre-primary classrooms, where blackboards were old and unpainted and teachers not always skilled in using them. *We suggest that the boards be fixed to the wall to avoid danger to children and teachers, and kept painted. The effective use of blackboards should also be included in teacher training.*

Classroom resources are minimal and there are sometimes insufficient basic resources for all children. For example, while we were observing the Pre-primary B class in the Pre-eskola Futuru, the teachers were handing out loose pages of A4 paper and pencils for an activity when they ran out of pencils. This caused great concern for the teacher, teacher assistant and the principal. The principal rushed to the next room to get more pencils. When she came back, she handed out what she had but there still were not enough for all the children, raising yet more concern. Fortunately, our observation team had brought pencils as part of a thank-you gift to each class, so we quickly gave a box of pencils to the teacher. We later observed that the same pencils were then used in the Pre-primary A class for a similar activity. *The schools are in need of more basic resources and these should be readily available for teachers.*

8. Gender

Educational disadvantage for girls is one of the concerns that drive many education projects, especially in rural areas since girls and women typically find fewer opportunities to learn dominant languages outside their communities and tend to fall behind in classrooms where they do not understand the language of instruction (Simpson, Caffery & McConvell 2009). We noted earlier that Timor-Leste has a high Gender

Parity Index score (-4.5: 51% M/49% F) (NSD & UNFPA 2012). We also noted that girls and boys were performing equally well in the Baseline Report (CARE 2012). They took equally prominent roles in classroom activities at the time of our visit. The data from the Baseline Report suggests that Timor-Leste is relatively progressive in terms of gender opportunities in education.

It was interesting to note that four of the six classes observed included more girls than boys (see Figure 2). Even though the difference was marginal, there were more girls than boys in the Rembor and Maina classes but the reverse in the two Muapitine classes. Overall, the number of boys attending the three Lautein MTB-MLE classes in Lautein district was slightly higher. Of the 93 children attending the two Lautein district schools, 53 were male and 40 female. Of the 56 children attending the Manatutu district MTB-MLE classes, 23 were male and 33 female. In total across both districts, of the 149 children in attendance at the time of observation there were 76 males and 73 females; a minor difference in gender parity (NSD & UNFPA 2012).

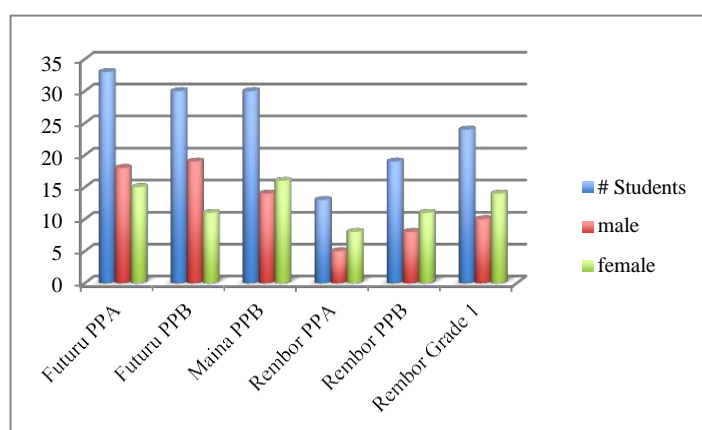


Figure 2: Student gender parity: Lautein and Manatutu Districts

Our observations of girls' participation in class led us to conclude that *an MTB-MLE environment is favourable to the educational development of girls.*

9. Additive learning

Additive learning is a major principle of Timor-Leste MTB-MLE National Policy (TLNCU, 2010). We also found that it is the aspect of the policy that is least well understood, leading to many problems with the pilot in practice. Child learners are meant to use mother tongue literacy as a springboard into literacy in a staggered set of languages, Tetun (L2), and Portuguese (L3). English (L4) is then introduced as the first foreign language and Indonesian (L5) is an elective subject for higher grades. Awareness of this principle might seem hard to detect at the pre-primary level of the curriculum because the children are only beginning to learn literacy skills and to be introduced to spoken Tetun in Grade 1. Literacy in Portuguese, as L3, is not to be taught until later in the curriculum.

However, in Manatutu District we found many instances where literacy in Tetun and Portuguese was introduced too early. This may be due to the value previously placed on these languages as languages of instruction. In evaluating the success or failure of the MTB-MLE pedagogy, it is essential to recognise the damaging potential effects of premature introduction of L2 and L3. This may then produce the poor literacy outcomes of the old mainstream pedagogy, in which the main language of instruction was

Portuguese, used with students who did not understand it. The MTB- MLE program might then be blamed for the deficiencies of the old system.

A key aspect of this problem is the place of Portuguese at different levels in the additive step-wise program. In MTB-MLE, oral L1 should prepare the way for literacy in L1, with the two then the basis for oral and written Tetun; and Tetun the basis for oral and written Portuguese, from Primary Grade 1 to Grade 6 according to the current curriculum. Yet, as the formal examination in Eskola Rembor showed, Portuguese is so highly valued that it is introduced far too early, before pupils are ready for it and so valued that the whole curriculum is geared towards it.

Note that the issue raised by the examination event is not the value of Portuguese and Tetun as against mother tongues. The aim of the additive principle is not to avoid or weaken Tetun or Portuguese but to enable learners to transfer literacy and knowledge from the familiar language to the new language(s) (TLNCU 2010), to produce more speakers of both Tetun and Portuguese as the National Constitution stipulates. But the additive principle is hard to grasp, in theory as in practice, and some teachers are unintentionally collapsing the carefully sequenced additive stepwise approach of MTB-MLE by a premature introduction of the L2 and L3. *This issue is so complex and important that it needs attention not only in the curriculum but also in advocacy and communication with all users and stakeholders in Timor-Leste.*

5. Resources, Training and Materials

Resources and teacher training for this project are vital to MLE success. We were able to see the materials in use and also see the processes in place for producing and circulating materials and resources of all kinds. This section looks at the processes in place in Dili to complement our observations in schools. It also assesses the teaching materials used for the MTB-MLE teacher-training program.

Literacy Resources

Early grade readers are being produced in local languages by a number of different organisations both in Timor-Leste and abroad, including:

- The Mary Mackillop Institute in East Timor (Tetun readers)
- The Alola Foundation (mother tongue readers)
- The Research Unit for Multilingualism and Cross-Cultural Communication (RUMACCC) at the University of Melbourne (mother tongue readers)
- Livru Timor <http://www.livrutimor.org/index.html> (downloadable books in Tetun and the national languages, illustrated by the Gembel and Arte Moris groups in Dili).

High quality story books and drawings reflecting East Timorese realities are being contributed to the TLNCU for use in schools by East Timorese university students, local artists and various other individuals.



Photo 10: Hand-drawn teaching visual - Occupations

Activity books of pre-literacy activities have also been produced. There are plenty of potential sources of more contributors. For example, a story-writing workshop was organised by an English Club at the National University of Timor-Leste (UNTL) with guidance and input from visiting international advisors. Twenty-four students attended this workshop and contributed stories in Tetun. There are also some excellent examples of children's own writing in www.kidsownpublishing.com. The UNTL story-writing workshop provides a model that could easily be extended to other language groups. The story-writing workshop model could be extended to other higher education institutions.

Series of readers designed specifically in the mother tongues and illustrated to reflect local cultural realities for each pilot school district are very much in evidence in the MTB-MLE pilot schools. It is encouraging to note that they are also being used in mainstream schools. Locally designed and produced visual materials, mother tongue readers and big books reflecting East Timorese cultural and everyday realities are in high demand in the MTB-MLE classrooms. It is also clear that students and teachers enjoy using them even if there are some problems with literacy pedagogy that need to be addressed, as identified in the classroom observation sections in this report.



Photo 11: Readers in use in the classroom

The literacy materials and stories are mostly of high quality; teachers are making use of them and they are highly valued by the children. However, our classroom observations and

conversations with stakeholders indicate that teachers need more guidance in learning how to make the most of these materials. Individual classrooms were not well equipped and teaching resources are in short supply. However, in each classroom we found a small toy corner and a numeracy corner including some aids and materials for counting, evidencing teachers' growing understanding of creating child friendly classrooms and fostering learning through play.



Photo 12: Numeracy corner

Classroom blackboards were generally in poor condition and in need of paint. The children cannot easily see the teachers' writing on the blackboard. Teachers would also benefit from training in board work and the use of clear, large and consistent lower case script when writing on the blackboard.

As MTB-MLE expands, it will become important to think about the sustainability of materials production. Glossy, colour materials printed on high quality paper are beautiful but can be expensive to continuously reproduce on a large scale. RUMACC based at the University of Melbourne already provides a good example of *how readers can be produced easily and at low to no cost* (see <http://rumaccc.unimelb.edu.au/readers/east-timorese-languages>).

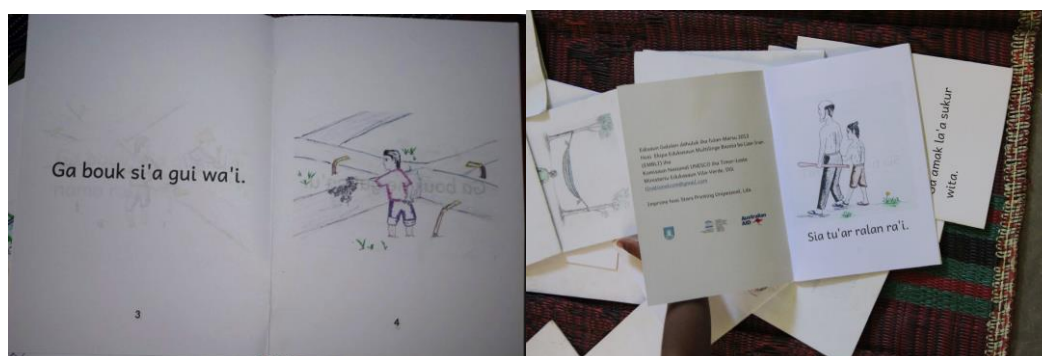


Photo 13: Galolen readers

Shell books are another potential source of materials that teachers and language councils could explore together in the future. Shell books have been used to good effect in Papua New Guinea, India and elsewhere. A documentary and further information about World Vision Shell Books is available at <http://www.screencast.com/t/7htVy7rC4yo>. We understand that the MTB-MLE team has already looked at this option but believes that locally-generated materials should have priority in early stages.

Teacher training and education

In addition to the challenges of specific teaching of literacy in L1, L2 and L3, MTB-MLE involves new principles of pedagogy and new ways of teaching. We heard some criticisms of the preparation of teachers from more senior people in the system, as though the teachers were at fault. As described below, *the provision of teacher training is not sufficient and this is something that needs to be improved*. However, we were deeply impressed by the competence, dedication and enthusiasm of all the teachers, both regular and assistant, and how well they were implementing the principles of the MTB-MLE policy with so little training. We understood that prior to the MTB-MLE program some teachers in Manatutu were teaching or had taught for lengthy periods of time without being paid. While we are aware that budgetary conditions are difficult in Timor-Leste, *we believe that these dedicated teachers should be fully supported financially*.

As reported by the MTB-MLE team, training was important for the process of introducing the pilot. Four training sessions have been provided to help the group of trainers understand MTB-MLE principles and to produce a Teaching Activity Guide. Training has been offered both in Dili and in the school communities. In addition, the trainers attended training in Melbourne, Australia. The MTB-MLE project has recently employed a full-time consultant to build and enhance the training program.

These training sessions are reported as being well received and in our classroom observations we were greatly impressed with these teachers. It was also good that the trainers went out into the districts instead of requiring teachers to come to Dili. However, even though this training schedule did everything that could have been hoped for within its limitations, we believe that this amount of training is insufficient.

Teacher-Training

Although we did not observe any training sessions, we assessed the training materials and had discussions with participating teachers. As reported by the MTB-MLE team, training was an important part of the process of introducing the pilot.

Specialised staff within the MTB-MLE team conduct teacher training in the districts. Teachers from different schools in the district are all trained together, which provides teachers with the opportunity to develop support networks and design relevant teaching materials and activities. Most teachers told us that their teaching skills had greatly improved as a result of this training. However, not all teachers take advantage of these opportunities.

Detailed teaching materials have been developed to support teachers and teaching assistants with daily and weekly planning. The teaching materials include a weekly plan for each teaching week of the year. Each lesson builds on the previous lesson. Lessons focus on building students' content knowledge in each of the teaching areas.

Teachers all have a Teaching Activity Guide which is linked to the daily and weekly timetable with all activities and learning outcomes outlined. While the guide is detailed, it is also flexible enough for the teachers to focus on their students' specific environment and interests. The activities are clearly culturally appropriate and relevant to each year level, regardless of district.

Complete sets of teaching materials including a full year daily/weekly timetable have been developed in Tetun for PPA, PPB and Grade 1 teachers. An English version is also available. The MTB-MLE team is currently developing Grade 2 teaching materials and will commence training Grade 2 teachers in 2015.

The teaching materials clearly meet Principle 2 of the MTB-MLE policy in demonstrating “recognition of the importance of [...] linguistic diversity [and] cultural identity” (TLNCU 2010, p. 3). In preparation for scaling up the MTB-MLE pilot, these materials are currently being translated into other national languages.

When MTB-MLE is scaled up, there will be a demand for many more teachers. Indeed, there will be this kind of demand in the rest of the education system as Timor-Leste strives to meet the Millennium Development Goal of Education for All. One idea we were told of for meeting this urgent need was to use foreign volunteers as mentors. This is a good idea, although it has some disadvantages. Mentors from outside the country are not always familiar with the local culture. They are unlikely to speak the local languages, especially in rural areas and they may have assumptions and attitudes about language and education that differ from ME policy. As MTB-MLE depends heavily on input and material drawn from local culture, it is important to find ways to draw on the human linguistic and cultural resources in local communities (community volunteers). *It must be stressed that all mentors should be professionally experienced and adequately trained in the principles of MTB-MLE. They should also fully understand MTB-MLE Policy for Timor-Leste.*

Future research could investigate how other low-income nations have called upon their own citizens’ cultural resources and mobilised popular support for teacher-mentoring. There are models already available in Timor-Leste. For example, lessons could be drawn from the national adult literacy campaign of 2006-7 when monitors were recruited and trained from every one of the country’s 442 *sucos*, along with coordinators for the 65 sub-districts and 13 districts. Final year students from the National University also volunteered to join the program (see <http://artsonline.monash.edu.au/mai/files/2012/07/bobboughton.pdf>).

To give another example, in the *Kha Ri Gude* literacy campaign in South Africa, a cascade model operates whereby one coordinator cares for twenty supervisors, one supervisor trains ten volunteers and every volunteer is expected to recruit fifteen learners. In this case, the church and other community structures are also used in selecting the educators (see <http://www.kharigude.co.za/> and <http://www.education.gov.za/Home/KhaRiGudeWorkshop/tabid/857/Default.aspx>). *These models demonstrate that the creative use of existing social structures could provide a rich source of local teaching mentors in Timor-Leste. However, all these processes need to give locally based personnel a decisive say.*

NGO partners

One major source of resources for the pilot is its relationship with international NGOs. The pilot relies on external sources to be viable. As one indication of this, the total budget for the pilot, according to the MTB-MLE Policy document (2010), was \$US13,500 for the 12 schools – just over \$1000 per school. We do not know whether the actual budget was smaller or larger and it did not include personnel. But whatever the exact figure, the point is clear. *Substantial assistance is needed at this stage.*

One of the ways the MTB-MLE pilot has shown itself to be exemplary is in the commitment and dedication of its supporters. Support is not only monetary but also technical. In addition to support from the ME, TLNCU, World Bank and DFAT (formerly AusAid), support comes from organisations including the Mary MacKillop Institute, Care International, Plan International, SIL International, World Vision, Child Fund, Belun and the Alola Foundation (note: this list is not inclusive). REPETE 13 is a network of organisations that support the pilot. Repete 13 (*Redeba Promosuan Edukasuan Multilingue*) is a multilingual education promotion network comprising the former members of the Language in Education Working Group and NGO partners. Repete 13 also is responsible for advocacy, monitoring and evaluation of the pilot. Two instances of this productive relationship can be seen in the work of CARE and World Vision. We use them here as examples of the kind of support that can be provided at relatively low cost.

CARE and World Vision are high-profile organisations with excellent track records of successful social and educational projects in Timor-Leste. From conversations with representatives of these NGOs, we learned about the positive value of this relationship with MTB-MLE, and its great potential to assist in mainstreaming MTB-MLE. *Two initiatives have special promise:*

1. *Lafaek ba Komunidade*, launched in 2010, is a community magazine written in Tetun for adults in rural areas. The magazine is supported by five 45-minute radio programs a year. *Lafaek ba Komunidade* has strong credibility with readers as a result of its success in an earlier format as a popular children's magazine, also enjoyed by adults. Today, *Lafaek ba Komunidade* is achieving the same success as its predecessors. Its impact in low-literate communities has been significant. An evaluation in 2013 showed that of recipient households, 90% could recall material they had learned from the magazine; 71% had implemented ideas from the magazine in their everyday lives; 85% had children who read the magazine; and 81% read the magazine to an illiterate family member (<http://www.aid.govt.nz/media-and-publications/development-stories/september-2013/magazine-achieving-results-timor-leste>).

In the context of MTB-MLE, the magazine has great potential as a community literacy resource. *Lafaek ba Komunidade* includes an eight-page section for children and this section could be very easily extended to include a mother tongue based section. Different sections could be produced in different languages and distributed to the districts and sub-districts where these languages are used. This kind of initiative would give legitimacy and coverage to MTB-MLE via a highly popular medium.

2. World Vision Timor-Leste (WVTL) has a focus on Early Childhood Care and Development, (ECCD) with a focus on children under five. WVTL is also involved in educating parents, seeking to encourage them to get more involved in their children's schooling. WVTL supports the MTB-MLE pilot because it sees that MTB-MLE empowers parents to actively support their children in school. Part of their work in the Baucau, Aileu and Bobonaro districts (districts not currently involved with the MTB-MLE pilot) includes a program to help communities preserve their own stories. Stories, myths and legends are collected from communities in their languages using community volunteers. The long-term plan is to write these stories down and share them in the co-official languages. This project has great potential to be extended by sharing and integrating stories with

MTB-MLE. In this way, local cultural narratives can be integrated into the curriculum using local resources, and reproduced in both the mother tongue and in the co-official languages at later stages of schooling.

NGOs and other donors have long recognised that literacy helps promote community development and enhances parents' capacity to play an active role in their children's education. *Lafaek ba Komunidade's* stories and educational content provide opportunities for lifelong learning and present a perfect opportunity to promote out-of-school literacy in the mother tongues, thus endorsing MTB-MLE in an accessible way. With its focus on ECCD, the WVTL story-collecting program could be a valuable potential resource for MTB-MLE. *If the two programs were integrated, community stories could be shared and used in reading materials that culturally enrich the curriculum.*

MTB-MLE helps disseminate knowledge and understanding about early childhood and thus supports the goals of WVTL. WVTL supports MTB-MLE pilot because it can see that the aims of MTB-MLE fit well with their goals of enhancing the wellbeing of young children and families and maximising community resources for economic and cultural development. The benefits are two-way and mutual. *One important way that NGOs and donors agencies can advocate for MTB-MLE is by making it clear how and why MTB-MLE supports their goals and therefore why they support MTB-MLE.*

6. Stakeholder Perspectives

The success and future of the MTB-MLE pilot depends substantially on how well it is understood and supported by senior staff, the key stakeholders charged with planning, management and implementation of the pilot now and in the future. In order to assess views from this level we conducted semi-formal, open-ended conversations with nine key personnel. Some of these were from the ME in Dili and from one district, some from the TLNCU and some from high-profile international NGOs based in Dili. The following summaries draw on these conversations but all were personal and confidential so we have taken care that no individual can be identified.

Perceptions of the pilot

MTB-MLE today receives the full support of the ME from the very top, as evidenced in the statement: "the Ministry of Education fully supports the use of the mother tongue to serve as a bridge and facilitate the students during the initial years [...], notably at the pre-school and basic education levels, thereby establishing a solid foundation for the children to pursue their studies at a higher level" (<http://embaixadoraeducasaun.blogspot.com.au/p/lingua-materna-mother-tongue-lianin.html>).

In this ministerial statement the support for the mother-tongue principle is strong and unequivocal. Our conversations with stakeholders indicate that they endorse this broad policy position and they are moving towards implementing it in pre-schools.

Benefits of MTB-MLE identified by stakeholders

Pedagogical value

There was a common view among the stakeholders that MTB-MLE is interesting and motivating, it helps children to be active learners and promotes child-centred learning.

The stakeholders also identified a range of educational benefits that flow from MTB-MLE.

All stakeholders observed that MTB-MLE has led to significant improvements in pedagogical practice and educational quality. One stakeholder commented that in MTB-MLE pilot schools teaching and learning have become more interactive. Teachers now understand much better the value of making time to visit the families and meet the parents, especially those of non-attending children. Another stakeholder commented that in MTB-MLE pilot schools there is good communication between teachers and families. Parents also feel more empowered and aware of what is happening at school. One stakeholder observed that the use of mother tongue encourages children to feel comfortable and at home in the classroom and they are more willing to engage with the teachers, ask questions and participate in lessons.

Children's increased confidence may also reflect two other improvements noticed by stakeholders. Teachers are now much more patient with the children and they collaborate with each other much more than before with lesson planning. These changes for the better in teacher's everyday practice could account for children's deeper engagement with school and learning. A further benefit for children noted by several stakeholders is that children in MTB-MLE pilot schools have access to materials and resources that reflect their everyday lives and cultural practices, which makes reading more enjoyable, meaningful and motivating.

This stakeholder group recognises that MTB-MLE enhances children's educational experience in school and improves pedagogical practice. They recognise that child-centred learning and materials are promoted by MTB-MLE. They understand that teachers need to be educated in effective MTB-MLE methods and that they should also know why they are being asked to teach in the local languages. They believe that continued strong advocacy work will play a critical role in persuading teachers of the value of MTB-MLE.

Communication between schools and communities

The language councils for each district provide a vital link between schools and communities. These councils consist of individuals who have a deep knowledge of their mother tongue and a strong commitment to preserving their languages through literacy development. Our conversations drew our attention to the importance of these councils and their co-ordinators. Language councillors know their local communities well and understand their needs. In turn, they are known and trusted by their local communities. The language councils have first-hand knowledge of the situation on the ground. They understand the teachers' problems and concerns. They work quietly but tirelessly in their local communities to help make MTB-ML successful.

In addition, language councillors play a vital role in promoting language maintenance, supporting teachers with language development work and disseminating MTB-MLE principles. *Continued active support for the language councils will contribute greatly to the success of MTB-MLE.*

The stakeholders have seen many instances where the MTB-MLE has enhanced teachers' relationships with children and their families, and improved communication between parents and the school. At the same time they recognise the continuing need to raise parents' awareness of the value of education and literacy. *The TLNCU MTB-MLE team is developing good local knowledge, and they should be part of the processes for deciding which schools to include in any expansion of the pilot.*

ME functionaries and teachers should be made fully aware that the MTB-MLE pilot schools run a differentiated curriculum, and that teachers do not have to organise assessment for children in Primary Grade One and Grade Two.

Challenges of MTB-MLE identified by stakeholders

This group of stakeholders also commented on several significant challenges in the MTB-MLE pilot schools that need to be addressed. One problem is that some teachers still follow the requirements of the mainstream curriculum, even when it goes against the principles of MTB-MLE; for example, in setting formal examinations. Some stakeholders suggested that teachers are hesitant to adopt MTB-MLE because the pilot is currently directed by the TLNCU rather than the ME and is therefore possibly not regarded as being completely official. These stakeholders expressed the view that teachers will be more likely to accept MTB-MLE when they see that it is fully owned and directed by the ME and clear guidelines are given by the Ministry that it is the official policy in pre-schools and primary schools. For this reason, *some stakeholders thought it was important that teachers to be officially informed that the MTB-MLE pilot is ready to be scaled up and they should go ahead with the roll-out.*

One stakeholder commented that although teachers are working hard to collaborate with families, many parents are not literate or have not completed high school themselves and do not see the value of education. It was therefore suggested that there should be greater investment in persuading parents of the value in sending their children to school.

Another stakeholder concern was that teachers lack the capacity to make the most of the mother tongue teaching resources and reading materials. A priority identified by all stakeholders *is to develop teachers' pedagogical skills and help them understand how to use the MTB-MLE resources more effectively.*

Scaling up MTB-MLE

The decision about how and when to scale up the MTB-MLE pilot is ultimately for the Timor-Leste government to make. Our report is meant to provide useful background and information for the bodies charged with making and implementing this decision. In this section we review the views of our representative stakeholders as on key issues relating to this decision.

Choice of schools

Our own data suggest that MTB-MLE needs to be adapted to the specific circumstances of schools. When we asked about the process for deciding which mother tongue would be used in which schools, reference was made to a language mapping exercise to be carried out, possibly in 2014 by the World Bank. It is at present unclear precisely when this exercise will take place. In any case, as our stakeholders realise, it would be unrealistic to go from 12 pilot schools to a program covering the whole of Timor-Leste. *Our study shows there are problems to address before implementing a full roll-out.*

The role of Tetun

We understood from the stakeholders that they are advocating a gradual roll-out. They recommend delivering MTB-MLE only to schools that are deemed to need it. The ME is currently considering implementing the use of mother tongue in pre-schools. According to Early Childhood Development pre-school policy, all children that need mother tongue instruction will be able to commence schooling in their mother tongue.

We were told that currently the ME is defining Tetun as the mother tongue for all children in Dili and that MTB-MLE will be only implemented in rural schools, at least in the first instance. It makes good practical sense to define Tetun as a mother tongue in Dili District since, according to the 2010 census, Tetun is spoken as L1 in over 97.53% of homes in the district overall. In the Dili sub-district of Cristo Rei, Tetun is spoken by 90.51%; in the sub-district of Dom Aleixo it is spoken by 92.87%; in the sub-district of Na'in Feto by 85.43% and in the sub-district of Vera Cruz by 93.12%. However, in the sub-district of Metinaro 50% of people speak Mambae as a mother tongue and in the sub-district of Atauro, Raklungu is spoken by just over 25% (Census Atlas, 2013, p. 5). These are sizable linguistic minorities. *These demographics point to a need for a careful analysis of the languages spoken in all school communities, including those in Dili District, and they emphasise the importance and urgency of the language mapping exercise.*

We draw attention to two implications of this situation:

- i) *There is a need for strategies to cover situations where more than one L1 co-exists in such proportions that a decision for any one L1 will disenfranchise a substantial proportion of children.*
- ii) *The MTB-MLE pilot is particularly devised for situations where there is a single dominant language spoken in a school catchment that is different from Tetun and Portuguese. However, even where Tetun is the majority language and acts as the mother tongue, the literacy strategies of MTB-MLE will still be superior to current methods of teaching literacy. If this opportunity is to be translated into mainstream practice, then curriculum development in Tetun needs to be informed by the MTB-MLE team, working in close collaboration with the Tetun curriculum team in the ME.*

Advocacy

Stakeholders are all aware that advocacy of different kinds can play a crucial role in winning understanding and support for the MTB-MLE initiatives because they are relatively new and not well understood. REPETE 13 network members already play a key advocacy role. *They could be asked to consider providing further funding for a media campaign to raise the profile of MTB-MLE. This campaign could be linked with the WVTL story-collecting project, and integrated with the introduction of MTB-MLE in all pre-schools.*

*As and when MTB-MLE expands into pre-schools, ways could be considered to recognise good MTB-MLE teachers. There could be four awards a year. The winning teachers could be interviewed on the radio about what they do or a story about the teachers and the schools could be published in a quarterly issue of *Lafaek ba Komunitade* magazine or in a sympathetic newspaper. Formal recognition can help teachers feel rewarded for their efforts, improve their motivation, bring good publicity to the school and act as positive reinforcement for MTB-MLE.*

7. Key Lessons and Recommendations

There are many conclusions arising from the data throughout this document, and suggestions for further action. In this section we gather together ten key lessons from the evaluation and six main recommendations for actions to learn from the pilot and move on to the next stage of policy.

Key lessons

1. The use of the mother tongue was highly successful in multiple ways wherever it was applied. All pilot schools used it extensively as the primary medium of instruction. The mother tongue was successfully used to achieve literacy in the mother tongue as well as for teaching curriculum content. The use of the mother tongue helped to foster happy and effective classrooms and improved relations between schools and communities.
2. The MTB-MLE policy has improved relations between communities, parents and the school with many positive effects for all parties. These positive relationships have had beneficial effects on children's learning as on community understanding and support for education.
3. MTB-MLE policy has had a positive effect on school attendance, which is a general problem for education in Timor-Leste especially in rural areas. However, there are many other contextual factors needed to raise rates of attendance not just MTB-MLE.
4. The child-centred approach was used in many instances, usually with good effects but it often co-existed with traditional, teacher-centred approaches, which at times cancel or undermine the policy. This clash needs to be recognised and dealt with. Although the policy emphasises a child-centred pedagogy, it is only to be expected

that traditional models will continue to be strong and extensive training will be needed to influence traditionally trained teachers. However, the study found that a mother tongue-based approach is as helpful for traditional ways of teaching as it is for child-centred teaching.

5. Teachers in the pilot schools have performed extremely well in delivering a new pedagogy with little training. However, more systematic and well-resourced training that is better integrated with the national system is needed for the pilot to be sustainable. This training needs to include support for increasing competence in all languages of instruction.
6. There is ample evidence that the additive multilingual principle is not well understood in the pilot schools and needs to be clearly and explicitly addressed in curriculum design, training and publicity. The additive multilingual approach will only come into full force at later stages in the curriculum but it already affects aspects of the early curriculum. This aspect of the MTB-MLE policy is crucial since it directly answers many concerns expressed against the policy.
7. The place of Portuguese in the curriculum in an additive multilingual framework is not well managed or well understood by many current teachers, especially given the continuing hold of values, practices and attitudes from earlier teaching modes.
8. One school withdrew from the scheme. The reasons for this need to be investigated in more depth; it is important to ascertain whether the school did not fully understand the MTB-MLE policy or whether there were some aspects of the policy that did not fit the school's needs. Whatever proves to be the case, policymakers need to continue to learn from this case as well as from the majority of successful pilot schools, and design careful strategies to deal with similar cases.
9. The role of the TLNCU and other bodies is essential for the survival of the MTB-MLE pilot currently and in the future. This evaluation found that this relationship is working well in this case. NGOs provide appropriate aid in a respectful relationship with Timor-Leste bodies and personnel; and the pilot makes excellent use of these resources. However, the evaluation saw ways in which this set of partnerships could be even stronger and more productive.
10. Resources of all kinds are vital for sustaining and extending the pilot. Although some shortfalls are only to be expected from local and external sources, resourcing remains a critical area for the viability of the policy. In this process the ME carries the ultimate responsibility.

Recommendations

1. The MTB-MLE pilot has done everything that could be hoped for from a pilot so plans should be prepared to scale it up.
2. A language mapping exercise needs to be undertaken as a matter of urgency to determine the situation of the mother tongues in schools and communities. Accurate language mapping will provide an essential basis for deciding on the implementation of the MTB-MLE policy for particular communities or schools.
3. The role of Tetun as a mother tongue needs to be carefully managed according to MTB-MLE principles, co-ordinated by the Tetun curriculum group and the MTB-MLE team.
4. The additive multilingual principle needs to be more carefully explained and embedded in training and materials, especially as it involves the progressive introduction of oral and written forms, and the transition to Portuguese as L3.
5. Resourcing and training needs should be budgeted for and factored in to plans to maintain and extend the MTB-MLE policy. Existing limitations of resources need to be recognised, and alternatives considered, such as those included in our suggestions.
6. Communication and advocacy needs to be included in plans and budgets for this pilot. Communication and advocacy are important because MTB-MLE is so innovative it may be misunderstood and because its success depends on the co-operative efforts of so many stakeholders, in schools and communities, in key decision making bodies in Timor-Leste and in the international community.

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