

Guidelines for Organizing Bi-Multilingual Learning Experiences Using the Mother Tongue-Based in Early Childhood Development Centers within Diverse Social Contexts

Worawan Hemchayart¹⁾

Chulalongkorn University

Abstract

The objective of this research is to develop comprehensive guidelines for bilingual and multilingual education, specifically emphasizing the integration of students' native languages as foundational elements. Targeting kindergarten teachers, data was gathered from 306 participants during the second semester of the 2022 academic year. Additional information was collected from teachers, school administrators, and parents of ethnically diverse students in top-scoring schools within each region, involving 25 individuals and 10 experts. Research tools included questionnaires and interviews. SPSS was used for questionnaire data analysis, providing frequency distributions and percentages. Interview data underwent content analysis to identify themes, validated through expert review. The research identified four essential domains for organizing multilingual learning experiences: (1) Design and organization of language-related activities, (2) Utilization of media and conducive learning environments, (3) Assessment of child development and learning, and (4) Fostering collaboration with parents involves coordinating cooperation between the school and parents and encouraging family involvement in student development. The findings contribute valuable insights into promoting effective multilingual education experiences integrating the mother tongue as a foundational element, offering a comprehensive framework for educators and relevant stakeholders.

Keywords : bi-multilingual learning experiences, mother tongue-based, kindergarten teachers, ethnic children

¹⁾Corresponding author, ¹⁾ worawan.h@chula.ac.th

Introduction

Thailand is a country with plentiful fertile landscapes, located at the heart of Southeast Asia. It has been a melting pot of various ethnic groups for many years. Over time, people from diverse races, religions, languages, and cultures have migrated to Thailand, both temporarily and permanently. This phenomenon is a result of globalization, which has erased borders and encouraged people to move from their country of origin to other destination countries. These groups of people have brought cultural diversity to the destination society. Thailand is one such destination, attracting foreigners who come to work in agencies or international organizations, travel, conduct business in the private sector, or even manual laborers in search of employment opportunities. Consequently, Thai society is characterized by a "plural society" where people need to change themselves to fit in with membership in such a society. Communication is an essential aspect of this change, and developing one's language skills to communicate effectively with the global society is crucial. However, it is equally important to maintain one's linguistic identity while embracing diversity.

Thailand is a diverse country with more than 70 indigenous languages spoken throughout its regions. Unfortunately, many of these languages currently face severe challenges due to a variety of reasons. One key contributing reason is the growing necessity to use standard Thai or international languages like English or Chinese for professional purposes, together with the requirement to employ standard Thai when accessing government services. This linguistic shift has had an impact on indigenous languages. The increasing growth of information media and the internet has further levelled up the demand for proficiency in Thai and English.

Additionally, inter-ethnic marriages have played a role in the declining use of indigenous languages, as standard Thai becomes the primary mode of communication in mixed households. The use of standard Thai as the primary medium of instruction and in public media has reduced the influence of mother tongues. As a result, children, youth, and even family members nowadays fail to recognize the importance of preserving and using their mother tongue. Furthermore, the community lacks the necessary strength to preserve and transmit these languages, focusing instead on the use of standard Thai. This shift has led to

some language groups being at risk of extinction, which directly affects the collapse of knowledge and local wisdom within these ethnic communities.

For approximately four decades, from the 1920s to the 1960s, a prevailing belief held by educators and linguists was that children growing up in multilingual and multicultural environments possessed lower intellectual abilities compared to their counterparts in monocultural settings who exclusively used a single language. This belief extended to children who had migrated from other regions but lacked proficiency in the native language of their host country, rendering them unable to communicate effectively. Consequently, it was believed that such children exhibited delayed language development in both their native language and the language of their host country, leading to limited vocabulary knowledge and an impaired understanding of language structure, semantic relationships, and vocabulary. Additionally, these linguistic challenges were often accompanied by variations in personality expression, diverging from the cultural norms of their home culture. This belief has continued to influence contemporary educational practices, particularly in many developing countries, thereby shaping the attitudes and pedagogical approaches of present-day educators.

A seven-year research conducted by Elizabeth Peal and Wallace Lambert, funded by McGill University in Canada in 1962 marked a significant turning point in reshaping our perceptions of children learning a second language while utilizing their mother tongue. This research contributed to a profound shift in perspective regarding the value of children's mother tongues. The mother tongue was no longer undervalued, as it had been in the past. Instead, it came to be recognized as a language that not only supports but also facilitates the acquisition of other languages. Furthermore, it became apparent that proficiency in the mother tongue plays a crucial role in increasing a deeper understanding and competence in the use of multiple languages. The child's mother tongue, defined as the language to which the child is exposed from birth and employs fluently with family members, emerged as a central component of their identity, shaping social and cultural affiliations. This newfound perspective highlights the essential role of the mother tongue in the broader context of language acquisition and cultural integration.

Subsequent research has validated the advantages and significance of preserving children's mother tongue in multilingual and multicultural environments, contributing to

their development in four key dimensions:

1) “Personal Development”: This facet encompasses the cultivation of a strong self-identity and a sense of belonging with fellow speakers of each language. Proficiency in the mother tongue allows for swift access to diverse and extensive resources, encouraging an openness to differing ideas and appreciation for other cultures, thereby enriching one's perspectives and experiences.

2) “Intellectual Growth”: The intellectual dimension embraces a wide array of cognitive benefits, including enhanced intellectual flexibility marked by proficiency in understanding written language, deciphering the relationships between sounds and symbols, and sensitivity to both verbal and nonverbal forms of communication. The ability to fluently transition between two languages without loss of meaning not only supports but also refines analytical and conceptual thinking, fostering creativity and cognitive development.

3) “Academic Competence”: This pertains to the capacity to delve deeply into the content of written materials, strengthened by proficient listening and memory skills. A rich and extensive vocabulary, which naturally arises from a strong command of one's mother tongue, significantly aids effective communication. Furthermore, it cultivates a positive attitude and an open-minded perspective towards multilingual communication.

4) “Social Contribution”: In terms of social development, children's proficiency in their mother tongue and their ability to navigate various cultures in multilingual settings position them as effective "Coordinators" within the global market. They are invaluable assets to society, contributing to multicultural richness and cooperation on a global scale. This role enhances their societal significance and underscores their role in promoting intercultural harmony and understanding.

To achieve national development and strengthen human resource potential under the goals of the 20-year national strategy (2018 - 2037), particularly focusing on improving communication skills in English, a third language, and preserving the local language of the Thai people, government agencies and relevant stakeholders must increasingly recognize the importance of nurturing communication competencies from an early age. This emphasis is founded on the understanding that language development begins during the prenatal phase, where children begin to perceive and distinguish sounds, initiate vocalization, progress to word formation, construct sentences, articulate thoughts through spoken

language, and ultimately advance their linguistic abilities into more intricate and systematic forms. This formative linguistic process occurs within the initial six years of a child's life. As a result, promoting language and communication development in young children and providing experiences that facilitate the simultaneous acquisition of a second and/or third language become crucial concepts that significantly influence their learning potential and future career prospects. To achieve this, initiatives aimed at enhancing language development in children must be rooted in contemporary knowledge, informed by a global perspective, and intricately conformed to the social dynamics and contextual nuances within Thailand.

The management of educational institutions by local administrative bodies is a public service that has a major impact on the development of children from the pre-primary level throughout the country. Since the National Education Act of 1999 was established, there have been many school transfers from other government educational agencies. Education decentralization has taken place at all levels based on preparedness, appropriateness, and local needs. This large agency is close to communities or groups of people with diverse home languages and cultures in each province across the country. As a result, the researcher is interested in examining the conditions and providing guidelines for organizing bilingual and multilingual learning experiences for young children, using their mother tongue as a foundational element, to provide academic benefits to the agency and those involved. From the policy level to the practical level, this research aims to provide insights into the optimal management of early childhood education.

R e s e a r c h O b j e c t i v e

To provide guidelines for organizing early childhood development centers using the mother tongue-based in bi-multilingual learning experiences across varying social contexts.

Research Procedure

Firstly, the research process for investigating the state of multilingual-multimodal learning experiences using the mother tongue-based as a foundational element in various

diverse social contexts for early childhood development involves the following steps:

Documentary Research

The researcher conducted a thorough review of academic articles, research papers, documents, and textbooks related to the topics of multiculturalism, socio-cultural theories, and the principles and theories associated with multilingual-multimodal learning. The review also includes relevant studies and research conducted both nationally and internationally. The purpose of this literature review is to synthesis and establish a comprehensive conceptual framework for the research and develop the necessary research instruments.

Table 1. *Research Framework*

Studied variable	Primary issues	Sub issues
The State of Bilingual-Multilingual Learning Experiences Using the Mother Tongue as a Foundational Element	1. Language Activity Planning	1.1 Setting Language Learning Objectives
		1.2 Language Teaching in Classroom
	2. Utilizing Media and Creating a Learning Environment	2.1 Searching for Media Facilitating Learning in Diverse Cultural Contexts
		2.2 Organizing Learning Environments in Diverse Cultural Contexts
	3. Learning and Development Evaluation	3.1 Implementing various evaluation methods
		3.2 Utilizing Evaluation Results
	4. Seeking Collaboration with Parents	4.1 Having Participation in Organizing Learning Activities
		4.2 Student's Learning and Development Evaluation

Survey Research

The researcher formulated a questionnaire designed to assess the status of bilingual-multilingual learning experiences based on the use of the mother tongue as a foundational element. The questionnaire content was reviewed and validated by qualified experts and was subsequently refined based on their recommendations. Following this, a

pilot test was executed to further refine the questionnaire. After the adjustments, the questionnaire was distributed to the designated target group. The target group comprised kindergarten teachers in schools under the local administrative organization, Ministry of Interior in various regions. Data were collected through the on-line during the second semester of the 2022 academic year. A total of 306 sets of questionnaires were returned. Data collected were analysed using computer programs, incorporating frequency distribution and percentage calculation.

I n - d e p t h i n t e r v i e w

The purpose of these interviews was to gain a comprehensive understanding of the bilingual-multilingual learning experiences, based on the use of the mother tongue as a foundational element in diverse social contexts. The researchers developed a set of protocols for in-depth interviews and conducted them via both face-to-face and Zoom interviews. The interviewees were chosen based on their high average scores in responding to the questionnaire in each region. For each school, five individuals were selected, including an educational institution administrator, two kindergarten teachers, and two parents of ethnic children, resulting in a total of 25 individuals. Data were collected in an interview form and analysed by content analysis.

O n - s i t e i n v e s t i g a t i o n

The purpose was to observe classroom environments and assess the characteristics of non-participatory physical support. The researchers conducted on-site visits to five schools that received the highest average performance scores in responding to the questionnaire in each region. Data were collected through observation, field note and photography. The content analysis was applied to data collected.

Secondly, the research process for developing comprehensive guidelines for organizing bilingual-multilingual learning experiences using the mother tongue as a fundamental element in early childhood development centers in various social contexts involves the following steps:

1. The initial draft of the guidelines for organizing bilingual-multilingual learning

experiences using the mother tongue as a fundamental element, was developed through the consolidation of data from various sources including quantitative data derived from a survey conducted among kindergarten teachers, qualitative insights from interviews with administrators, kindergarten teachers, and parents of children from various ethnic backgrounds. Additionally, information collected during on-site visits to schools and the synthesis of relevant documents contributed to the formulation of these guidelines.

2. To assess the practicality of the guidelines for structuring bilingual-multilingual learning experiences using the mother tongue as a fundamental element, the researcher conducted focus group discussions with experts both face-to-face and via Zoom. The selected target group comprised ten individuals, encompassing two tertiary-level educators, one early childhood education specialist, one local education administration office administrator, one educational supervisor, one school director, and four kindergarten teachers. Subsequently, an extensive analysis of all datasets was conducted, leading to the comprehensive development of guidelines that are ready for implementation.

Results

The researcher presents the research findings in two distinct parts: Part 1 focuses on the conceptual aspects, while Part 2 includes the specific guidelines.

Part 1: The Concept of Structuring Bilingual-Multilingual Learning Experiences Using the Mother Tongue as a Fundamental Element

Educational management within the framework of bilingualism and multilingualism, with the mother tongue as a fundamental element, constitutes a multidisciplinary field that places significant emphasis on recognizing the individual variations among learners, as well as the influence of personal emotional factors like motivation and attitude. In the context of multilingual learning, particularly in the Asian context, this approach involves the integration of four key languages: the child's mother tongue, the regional language, the national language, and a foreign language (Malone, 2007). The organization of multilingual

learning experiences with the mother tongue as a fundamental element refers to educational strategies designed for children who may initially struggle to comprehend or communicate effectively in the Thai language within a school setting. With this approach, children initially embark on learning their mother tongue and employ it as a medium of instruction. This serves as a stepping stone to achieving proficiency in the Thai language, thereby empowering them to effectively utilize both their mother tongue and the Thai language in more advanced educational settings. This educational strategy is advantageous as it nurtures bilingual and bicultural capabilities in children, enabling them to actively engage in high-quality learning experiences (UNESCO, 2018; Applied Linguistics Foundation, 2021). This approach aligns with the findings of Wright et al. (2015), who advocate for the use of two or more languages in educational settings. They propose creating programs and curricula that allow children to improve their literacy and knowledge while following curriculum standards. This method involves using two or more languages, with the primary language usually being the mother tongue or regional language spoken at home, as the medium of instruction. The secondary language is typically a language widely used in the community or the target language of the learning.

Why Should Learning Experiences Be Organized Following a Bilingual-Multilingual Approach with the Mother Tongue as a Foundation?

Thailand officially recognizes Standard Thai as its national language. However, the country is characterized by linguistic diversity, including various regional dialects such as those from the north, Isaan, and the south, alongside ethnic languages like Patani Malay, Khmer Thai dialect, Karen, Hmong, Bisu, and Kwong. These languages are spoken by communities residing along Thailand's border regions. Consequently, there is a substantial population of children whose mother tongue is not Thai, leading to early childhood and basic education challenges rooted in the language barrier they must overcome.

Children are at best in their learning when they can utilize their mother tongue. Establishing a strong foundation in a child's mother tongue contributes to their aptitude for acquiring proficiency in other languages (UNESCO, 1953, as cited in Ball, 2010). Consequently, promoting bilingual-multilingual education with the mother tongue as a

fundamental element in regions of the country where local children do not speak Thai as their mother tongue can significantly enhance the quality of national education and the academic performance of students in Thailand (UNICEF Thailand, 2018). Supported by various state policies advocating multilingualism among children, initiatives aimed at students in the southern border provinces of Thailand, predominantly populated by Muslims, and efforts to facilitate the teaching of Islamic studies within state schools, seek to create opportunities for cross-border students to enrol in schools. This approach encourages the use of languages other than Thai within educational institutions and advocates bilingual examinations. The effective implementation of these policies also necessitates the development and adjustment of certain aspects for more impactful outcomes (Aphatanantanon, 2019).

The success in preserving the mother tongue of bilingual-multilingual children is a preliminary step towards success in school. Several related factors must be equally prioritized in educational management, including (1) the children's health and nutrition status, (2) the family's social and economic status, (3) the attitudes and behaviors of parents and the community, (4) the attitudes and behaviors of teachers towards the children's mother tongue, (5) the societal inclusion needs, encompassing employment, agriculture, childcare facilities, (6) personal and social aspects that influence language proficiency, (7) school access opportunities, (8) family involvement in education, (9) the children's mother tongue status, whether it belongs to a larger or smaller linguistic group, (10) the teaching quality of teachers, (11) the urban and economic environment, such as conflicts, crises, and stability, and (12) social adjustment and peer relationships (Ball, 2011).

What is the learning nature of bilingual-multilingual children?

To facilitate effective reading and writing of the Thai language for this group of children, educators, and other relevant agents in early childhood and lower primary education should incorporate learning experiences that utilize the mother tongue as a fundamental component. This approach aims to alleviate stress and feelings of being different when interacting with teachers, peers in the classroom, and other school staff. Additionally, it helps mitigate obstacles to children's learning stemming from language comprehension

d i f f i c u l t i e s .

Naturally, children aged 3 to 6 years who are bilingual are still in the process of developing their mother tongue, even as they concurrently acquire a second language. During this phase, children are engaged in refining their native language, which encompasses mastering complex syntactic structures, semantic systems, high-level inferential comprehension, and the ability to understand non-literal expressions, including language usage. Therefore, bilingual children are those who are learning a second language while continuing to develop their mother tongue. These children come from diverse linguistic backgrounds, and the quantity and quality of language exposure in both the mother tongue and the second language can vary significantly based on the language practices of parents at home and in everyday life. For instance, parents may use Thai as a second language to varying degrees, ranging from minimal proficiency to fluency. Some parents may have a limited vocabulary in Thai, while others can use the language appropriately in various situations. Therefore, the concept of bilingualism primarily depends on one's perspective regarding linguistic differences.

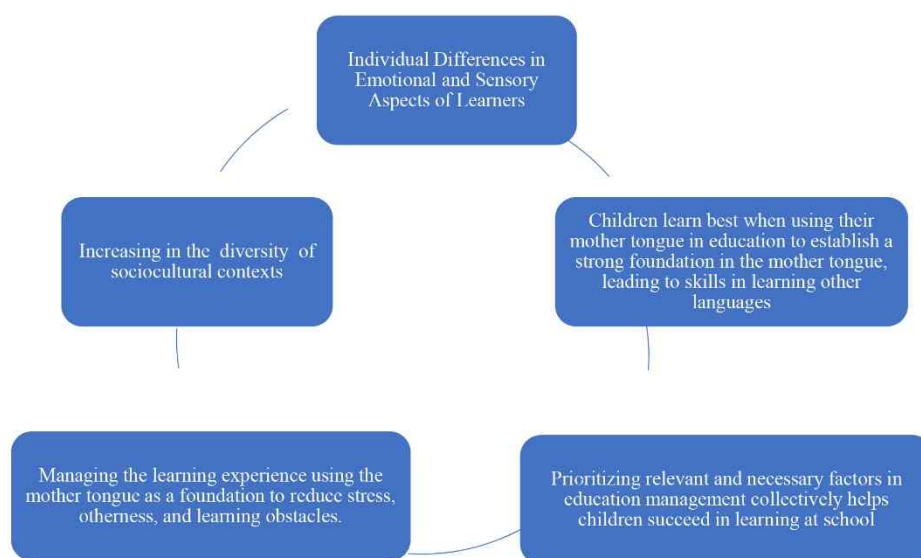


Figure 1. The conceptual framework for organizing bilingual-multilingual learning experiences using the mother tongue as a foundational element.

The increasing diversity in sociocultural contexts has led to the development of various language acquisition patterns and learning strategies. This complexity becomes even more pronounced when individuals become proficient in three or more languages, categorizing them as multilingual. These individuals are capable of speaking or comprehending multiple languages, and in some cases, some individuals achieve fluency in several languages. The intricacy and distinctive characteristics of multilingual development pose significant challenges to research. This is because the observed outcomes are often associated with factors such as cognitive abilities, language transfer, vocabulary depth in each language, emotional influences, motivations, and differing attitudes towards the use of their mother tongue, the Thai language, and other languages. Being a bilingual-multilingual child thus reflects the interplay between their language learning and language use.

Part 2: Guidelines for Structuring Bilingual-Multilingual Learning Experiences Using the Mother Tongue as a Fundamental Element

The research results are categorized based on the four main topics studied. The general overview can be summarized as follows.

Design and organization of learning experiences

The Design Guidelines

When designing guidelines for language education, it is important to consider the following three factors, (1) the duration of time that a student has been using their mother tongue, (2) their proficiency in the Thai language, and (3) the continuity of a student's use of their mother tongue. Schools should aim to develop a bilingual or multilingual curriculum, with clear goals and steps for learning. Beginning in Kindergarten 2 and continuing through Grade 3, the amount of instruction given in the student's mother tongue should decrease proportionally as they progress through the grades. It is also important to create a child-centered curriculum that emphasizes each student's individual aptitudes, interests, knowledge, and previous experiences, which they bring with them from their families and communities. This curriculum can be integrated into their daily lives so that it

can be implemented along with their learning. Language learning experiences should be organized systematically and in an orderly manner. If the child's mother tongue has a written language, they should first learn to read and write in their mother tongue. They can also learn about their way of life, traditions, and culture through teaching media integrated with various learning units at the kindergarten level, or organizing learning activities in various subjects when they are at the lower primary school level. It is important for schools to support multilingualism by taking the following measures:

- 1) Openly specifying the value of multilingualism in their mission/vision to raise awareness.
- 2) Creating an understanding among teachers about the use of children's mother tongue as the foundation for organizing learning experiences in the classroom.
- 3) Arranging for teachers to learn and practice the children's native language in the classroom.
- 4) Promoting the use of the mother tongue in learning in a systematic and step-by-step manner.
- 5) Promoting holistic learning development is designed to allow children to develop knowledge, intelligence, emotions, and social skills through language use.
- 6) Promoting meaningful experiences by allowing sharing and learning about the children's culture.
- 7) Promoting learning by using both the Thai language and the children's mother tongue through singing, reciting poetry, rhyming, and playing with finger puppets.
- 8) Preparing lessons by teaching Thai vocabulary that is appropriate for children's development by demonstrating them in the mother tongue before organizing activities in Thai.
- 9) Determining learning content by translating it into the child's mother tongue.
- 10) Supporting, strengthening, and expanding the learning of both the Thai language and the child's mother tongue by allowing children to use both Thai and their mother tongue interchangeably.
- 11) Planning to facilitate children when studying in large groups.
- 12) Planning activities that share similarities of sounds in both the Thai language and the native language to support language learning.

Guidelines for Organizing Experiences

The appropriate format and proportion for using mother tongue and Thai in activities should be determined to develop language skills and reduce language disparity in children's culture and society. Teachers should design activities considering the children's age and nature, using both the mother tongue and the Thai language. It is important to focus on the language that children are familiar with. Below are some guidelines for using the mother tongue in organizing learning experiences: 1) use the child's mother tongue to communicate with children who speak their mother tongue at home before joining the school. In case teachers cannot communicate in the child's native language, there should be a language informant/teller available. This can be achieved by requesting cooperation from parents or communities that speak the child's mother tongue; 2) organize group activities to encourage social interaction among children in the classroom; 3) choose to use language switching or have a language informant/teller when teaching and learning; and 4) arrange the learning sequence of mother tongue and Thai according to the classroom context.

Using media and organizing the learning environment

Guidelines for structuring the learning environments

This includes the following: 1) create a positive environment that facilitates language and cultural learning, grounded in children's language and cultural competencies; 2) utilize media in children's native language within the classroom and allow them to use it; 3) regularly update and rotate diagrams and various forms of visual media for teaching and learning purposes; 4) incorporate information resources, learning materials, textbooks, technological tools, and familiar items from the children's culture and community; 5) encourage children to express themselves in their mother tongue or Thai as a second language through writing or reading activities.

Guidelines for creating and utilizing media in learning management

This includes 1) selecting audio-visual media in multiple languages for teaching vocabulary; 2) using songs and stories in the children's mother tongue and printing the

studied words on signs placed around the classroom at the children's eye level for regular rehearsal; 3) recording ethnic stories or fables in the children's mother tongue and seeking their assistance in translating them back to the second language; and 4) developing picture boards to assist children in expressing their needs and emotions.

Assessment of Development and Learning

Preparation Guidelines for Assessment

The guideline consists of 1) clearly defining the assessment objectives; 2) integrating teaching with assessment; and 3) using diverse assessment tools.

Assessment Guidelines

This includes 1) paying attention to both the process and outcomes; 2) focusing on the progress and development of children during learning experiences; 3) implementing various forms of assessment; and 4) evaluating in various contexts.

Building cooperation with parents

Guidelines for School-Parent Coordination:

1) School administrators, teachers, and relevant education agents should gather information about families of children who do not speak Thai as their mother tongue. This information can be used to design diverse projects or activities that strengthen the relationship between the school and home. Such initiatives should include enhancing interactions between school personnel, children's families, and the community, with parents serving as valuable informants for the children's well-being. This information can also guide the design of various learning activities in schools.

2) Administrators and educational staff should have two-way communication with children's families and collaborate closely to preserve the children's mother tongue both in the classroom and the home environment.

3) Children's parents should be encouraged to use their children's mother tongue while promoting its use at school. This support is aimed at reducing language and cultural loss

and supporting a stronger use of the Thai language.

4) School administrators or curriculum administrators should collaborate with the children's families to create a home environment where the mother tongue is actively used for communication and in various activities, such as playing, singing, reading books, learning letters, and practicing vocabulary usage.

5) It is important to utilize the children's family as a source of learning about culture, applying the expertise of each family to support the use of the mother tongue during classroom teaching and learning.

6) Arranging appointments to present information and research supporting the concept of multilingualism to keep parents informed is suggested.

7) Ongoing opportunities and channels for discussing various issues with parents throughout the year are strongly recommended.

F a m i l y i n v o l v e m e n t i n s t u d e n t d e v e l o p m e n t

The following steps can improve children's education:

1) Providing teachers with information about the children to guide classroom activity design.

2) Using the mother tongue for communication at home and transforming homes into cultural learning hubs for families.

3) Collaborating with teachers to bridge the use of the mother tongue at home with its use in the classroom.

4) Engaging in activities with children at home through play, singing, reading, alphabet learning, and using vocabulary in the child's mother tongue.

5) Attending school meetings to keep track of information regarding multilingual educational management and continuously discussing various child-related issues.

Discussion

The research findings are categorized into the following themes for discussion:

Organizing language-switching learning experiences

Thailand, being a multilingual and multicultural society with 73 language groups, presents a unique challenge for educational management. One approach to address this linguistic diversity is by focusing on developing knowledge and understanding of cultural differences. The educational concept centers around providing equal learning opportunities for all children, regardless of their ethnic background. It emphasizes the importance of maintaining continuity in the educational process to effectively implement these ideas into practice.

According to the survey results, most teachers serve as role models by using Thai in Multilingual Education (MLE) classrooms to increase children's confidence. However, language switching, involving alternating between Thai and the children's mother tongue, is observed when children exhibit behavior indicating a lack of understanding. The exclusive use of the Thai language by teachers in the classroom reflects a misunderstanding in supporting students who are beginning their journey in multilingual education. The children's mother tongue is a valuable cultural asset and should be recognized and integrated into the classroom environment. Therefore, teachers' instructional strategies should ensure that no language is privileged over others. Teachers may need training to use children's native language in the classroom when the opportunity arises, to promote the development of all languages in the classroom (Morell & Medellin, 2018).

Regarding language switching, when teachers can use the child's native language, it aligns with Change et al. (2007, cited in Ballantyne et al., 2008), indicating that children who speak in their mother tongue tend to learn a second language quickly and have a better learning response, especially in language related to social conversation. Teachers who share the same mother tongue as the children in the classrooms are more likely to establish close and interactive relationships with this group of children. Consequently, conflicts and the likelihood of being a victim of bullying in the classroom are reduced. Furthermore, no correlation was found between an increased use of a child's native language and a decrease in the child's ability to learn a second language. Therefore, the teacher's use of the mother tongue does not impede the child's ability to learn a second language.

Media and Environment Interconnecting Relationships

The classroom environment plays a vital role in facilitating the engagement of children who are embarking on their journey in multilingual education, ensuring their active participation with comprehension. Beyond respecting the children's mother tongue, this extends to showing reverence for customs, traditions, and various elements that reflect the children's culture. Similarly, in the context of multilingual education using the mother tongue as the foundation, the Language Applied Foundation (2021) emphasizes that the primary objective of media is to foster higher-level thinking skills. This is achievable only when students have the opportunity to use their most proficient and comprehensible language. Furthermore, instructional media should arouse interest and align with students' `l i f e s t y l e s , a g e , a n d d e v e l o p m e n t .`

The research results reveal that most kindergarten teachers opt to use Thai vocabulary or texts for children to practice reading aloud repeatedly in the classroom, as well as having children memorize words, phrases, and sentences in Thai. Despite the availability of printed materials in Thai or the mother tongue, it was observed that the media used for teaching in the classroom lacked cultural connections with the children. Starting by building knowledge and understanding based on the children's previous experiences can make it easier to connect subsequent learning with new concepts in the target language. Recognizing and appreciating the cultural backgrounds of children, within the social context they live in, is an essential awareness for teachers (Au, 1993; Watson, 1989, as cited in Christie et al., 2014). This aligns with the recommendations of the New York Department of Education (2017) for teachers to enhance the media and classroom `e n v i r o n m e n t b y :`

1. Establishing a book corner with storybooks in various languages, periodically changing and rotating materials to ensure cultural relevance.
2. Displaying familiar objects from children's culture and community, such as tools, household items, clothes, and toys, to encourage discussions and usage.
3. Incorporating songs and stories in the child's native language.
4. Recording stories or fairy tales in the child's mother tongue.
5. Requesting the child to translate the stories back into the second language.

In the context of developing knowledge and language skills in the Thai language for children with diverse ethnic backgrounds, it is important to create an environment that fosters mutual communication and integrates narratives or cultural elements from the children's families and communities.

A s s e s s m e n t f o r S t r e n g t h E n h a n c e m e n t

When the classroom comprises diverse groups of children, the objective of assessment should focus on academic abilities as well as joyful coexistence under ethnic diversity. The objectives of the assessment should aim to understand the development of learners and serve as foundational information for planning to strengthen strengths and address educational gaps. The research findings indicate that kindergarten teachers employ diverse methods to assess the understanding of the Thai language that aligns with the learning of children from various ethnic groups. However, individualized observation and recording are not consistently implemented.

It has been found that assessment of non-verbal expressions, adherence to instructions, verbal interactions, storytelling, and the evaluation of artistic works such as drawings and writings in language-related activities are often overlooked. This illustrates a lack of knowledge and effective skills in assessing children from ethnic minority groups. The Curriculum Planning and Development Division (2021) outlines that assessment in mother tongue language programs should encompass both "assessment of learning" and "assessment for learning."

Kindergarten teachers should realize each child as an individual, utilize positive methods to enhance children's self-esteem, encourage positive discipline, and introduce diverse classroom activities. The key to effective assessment lies in having well-defined objectives, using varied assessment formats, and providing realistic assessments that offer a comprehensive understanding of the language development of ethnically diverse children. Hence, teachers play a crucial role in assessing the progress of children (Wixson, 1992, cited in Christie et al., 2014).

I n v o l v i n g P a r e n t s

Personal knowledge and cultural awareness represent fundamental insights that reflect the explanations and perceptions each individual gains from their family, and community. This knowledge serves as a determinant in shaping one's worldview and life plan. However, when children grow up amidst peers with similar or different personal knowledge in the classroom, this could be challenging for teachers to comprehend each child's unique experiences. It becomes essential to find supportive approaches that align with this diversity.

The research findings indicate that kindergarten teachers frequently collaborate with parents and the community to assist children, yet they do not consistently ask parents to act as translators or encourage the use of the mother tongue in the classroom. Furthermore, there is limited encouragement for parents to bring items familiar to the children from home to enhance language use and communication in class. These findings suggest that teachers may not have a comprehensive understanding of the concept of parental involvement in supporting children's development at home.

Typically, parents' collaboration in children's language development should be informally conducted. Pflepsen (2011) asserts that receiving support from parents in teaching the mother tongue is important. Parents should be aware of the benefits of teaching the target language using the mother tongue as a foundation. This involvement extends to participating in decision-making and sharing learning experiences both at home and in school. There is an opportunity to support classroom activities and school-related events. Creating meaningful experiences provides an opportunity to share and learn about each other's cultures (Espinosa & Crandell, 2020).

Bilingual-multilingual children in early childhood are still in the developmental phase of language acquisition, even as they engage with a second language. While going through this process, children are refining and adjusting their native language, involving complex syntactic structures, semantic systems, high-level inferential understanding, skills in understanding non-literal aspects, and the nuanced use of language. Children in this stage would benefit from collaboration with children's families and the community in meeting their evolving linguistic needs.

Policy proposals

The research results propose guidelines for organizing bilingual-multilingual learning experiences using the mother tongue as a foundational element in early childhood development centers within Diverse social contexts. These guidelines emphasize varied practical approaches, ensuring systematic action that can help those involved at all levels move in the same direction. Achieving the objectives depends on the coordination of relevant agents at all levels and requires policy alignment. The policy recommendations from this research can be categorized into three levels, presented as follows:

P o l i c y - L e v e l O r g a n i z a t i o n s

1. Relevant government agencies should establish educational policies focusing on creating new awareness in the community about cultural and educational safety in multicultural learning environments at schools. The goal of organizing multilingual learning experiences using the mother tongue as a foundational element is to enhance academic proficiency in the Thai language for ethnically diverse children, promoting harmonious coexistence within cultural diversity. This is intended to establish concrete mechanisms that support the appreciation of linguistic diversity in an increasingly m u l t i c u l t u r a l s o c i e t y .

2. Relevant government agencies should establish policies, and plans, and collaborate to facilitate and support flexibility in implementing bilingual-multilingual learning programs using the mother tongue as a foundational element from kindergarten to the lower primary levels. This should be based on the principle of adapting lessons to the sociocultural context, teaching the Thai language that is appropriate to the linguistic abilities and diverse social environments of children, particularly in culturally sensitive areas.

P r i m a r y l e v e l a g e n c y

1. Relevant government agencies to encourage personnel in the field of education to have a deeper understanding of the significance of language, culture, and education. They should

also organize bicultural-multilingual learning experiences that prioritize the use of the mother tongue as a fundamental element. The primary objective of such experiences should be to enhance the Thai language proficiency of children in the bi-multi-lingual group without requiring them to abandon their mother tongue. This will help to create a learning atmosphere that fosters harmony.

2. Relevant government agencies should support the utilization of schools that have developed curricula for multilingual-multicultural learning experiences based on the mother tongue. They should also encourage collaboration with experts in educational institutions at the higher level, specifically those related to managing learning for multilingual-multicultural children. This collaboration aims to serve as a foundation for assisting in the development of teaching and learning practices in schools within culturally similar contexts.

O p e r a t i o n a l l e v e l u n i t

1. Educational institutions should raise awareness and provide new knowledge and understanding to teachers, parents, and school staff involved with multilingual-multicultural children. It is crucial to communicate that developing proficiency in the Thai language for these children does not necessitate abandoning their mother tongue. On the contrary, utilizing the mother tongue to support and cultivate enthusiasm for learning the Thai language should be emphasized. This approach should be implemented together with preserving the cultural identity of the children, ultimately transforming them into proficient multilingual individuals.

2. Educational institutions should establish an educational management system within the school that emphasizes the significance of a learning system connected to the support system for bilingual-multilingual children, spanning from their admission to graduation. Furthermore, this system should involve generating reports to disseminate essential information to coordinating agencies for subsequent assistance.

A c k n o w l e d g e m e n t :
This work is funded by Office of the Education Council.

References

- Aphatnannanthon, T. (2019). *Thai education in the context of a multicultural society*:
<https://researchcafe.org/thailand-education-policy-for-multicultural-society/>
- Applied Linguistics Foundation (2021). *Documents for the curriculum for teaching and learning in the bilingual/multilingual approach*. Kindergarten level 2. CMRU MOOC: A lifelong learning resource for local development, Chiang Mai Rajabhat University:
<https://cmrumooc.teachable.com/p/2>
- Au, K. (1993). *Literacy instruction in multicultural settings*. Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Ball, J. (2010). *Educational equity for children from diverse language backgrounds: Mother tongue – based bilingual or multilingual education in the early years*. Presentation to UNESCO International Symposium: Translation and Cultural Mediation, Paris: UNESCO, 22/23 February 2010, on the occasion of the 11th International Mother Language Day in collaboration with the International Association for Translation and Intercultural Studies, 2010 International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures.
- Ball, J. (2011). *Enhancing learning of children from diverse language backgrounds: Mother tongue based bilingual or multilingual education*. UNESCO.
- Ballantyne, K. G., Sanderman, A. R., & McLaughlin, N. (2008). *Dual language learners in the early years: Getting Ready to Succeed in School*. Washington, DC: National Clearing house for English Language Acquisition:
[http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/sabout/ecell/early years.pdf](http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/sabout/ecell/early%20years.pdf)
- Christie, J. F., Enz, B. J., Vukelich, C., & Roskos, K. A. (2014). *Teaching language and literacy preschool through the elementary grades*: Pearson.
- Curriculum Planning and Development Division. (2021). *Mother tongue languages Syllabus secondary*: Ministry of education Singapore.
- Espinosa, L., & Crandell, J. (2020). *Early learning and care for multilingual and dual language learners ages zero to five*. In California Department of Education, *Improving Education for Multilingual and English Learner Students: Research to Practice*. (189-250):

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/el/er/documents/mleleducation.pdf>

Malone, S. (2007). *Mother tongue-based multilingual education: implications for education policy* [Conference session]. Seminar on Education Policy and the Right to Education: Towards More Equitable Outcomes for South Asia's Children, Kathmandu.

Morell, Z., & Medellin, C. (2018). *Cores principle for supporting emergent multilingual learners:*

<https://www.nysabe.net/wp-content/pdfs/NYSABE-Bilingual-Times-Fall-2018.pdf>

New York Department of Education. (2017). *Core principles for supporting emergent multilingual learners (EMLLs):*

https://infohub.nyced.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/emll-core-principles.pdf?sfvrsn=84952a93_2

Pflepsen, A. (2011). *Improving learning outcomes through mother tongue-based education. RTI International:*

https://ierc-publicfiles.s3.amazonaws.com/public/resources/Mother_tongue-based_instruction_and_learning_outcomes_FINAL_updated_Jan_2013.pdf

UNESCO (2018). *MTB MLE resource kit-including the excluded: promoting multilingual education*. Bangkok.

UNICEF Thailand (2018). *A bridge to a bright future: a project to provide bi-Multilingual education (Thai–Malay) in schools in the southern border provinces*. Bangkok: United Nations Children's Fund.

Wright, W. E., Boun, S., & García, O. (2015). *The handbook of bilingual and multilingual education*. John Wiley & Sons. DOI:10.1002/9781118533406