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SUCCESS AND CHALLENGES IN DEVELOPING A PATTANI MALAY - THAI BILINGUAL/MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION IN SOUTHERNMOST PROVINCES OF THAILAND

Abstract:

Thailand is linguistically and culturally diverse. Apart from Standard Thai, with its status as the nation's official language and its function as a language of wider communication for all ethnic groups, the country boasts more than 70 languages. Patani Malay is spoken by the majority in the 3 southernmost provinces of Thailand: Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat-including 5 districts of Songkla-where there is violence and political unrest. In this incident research is an action research which objectives of the study are to develop curriculum and learning method by using the Patani Malay Mothers Tongue-based bilingual education/Multilingual education (MTB-BE/MLE) in the primary school in four southern border provinces of Thailand and to empower, fostering self- esteem and positive attitudes to schooling among Patani Malay communities. The study found that Patani Malay is the language people use most in their daily lives, have most confidence in using and prefer to use more than any other language (Bahasa Malaysia, Standard Thai, or Southern Thai) and the use of the student's mother tongue in school can improve learning outcomes. Moreover, Patani Malay communities have more positive attitudes to Thai schooling system.

Keywords:

Mothers Tongue-Based bilingual education/Multilingual education, Patani Malay, Standard Thai.

1 Introduction

1.1 Rationale

Thailand is linguistically and culturally diverse. Apart from Standard Thai, with its status as the nation's official language and its function as a language of wider communication for all ethnic groups, the country boasts more than 70 other languages. The Southern border provinces have a unique language and culture. Eighty three percent (83%) of the population speaks the Patani-Malay dialect (Suwilai et.al 2004) and are predominantly Muslims. The Compulsory Education Act (1925) requires all children to attend Ministry of Education-approved school, where Thai is the main medium of instruction. However, many minority children, including Patani Malay speakers, find it difficult to adjust to the all-Thai curriculum. The burden of learning in what is to them of foreign language, make it difficult to acquire knowledge, and is one cause of sub-standard academic performance. International research conducted by UNESCO and other has proven that the use of the student mother's tongue in school can improve learning outcomes. Thus, the Patani Malay Mother Tongue-based bilingual education (MTB-BE/MLE) research team has sought, through intensive preliminary research, curriculum development, teacher training, and community involvement, to develop a new approach.

1.2 Expected Outcomes

The expectation of this project are as follow;

- 1) The school performance of Patani Malay speaking children will be raised, enabling them to pass the National Test, improve their job prospect, and enhance their overall quality of life.
- 2) The unique Patani Malay language and cultural heritage will be preserved.
- 3) Patani Malay communities will be empowered, fostering self-esteem and more positive attitudes to schooling.

1.3 Target communities/areas

Four primary schools in four southern border provinces (Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat and Satun), as well as ethnic Malay communities around those target school. Expansion to other schools can be carried out once necessary infrastructure, teacher training, and community support is in place.

1.4 Responsible parties

Muslim Thais in the four southern provinces, Mahidol University's Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia (through its Center for Documentation and Revitalization of Endangered Languages and Cultures), Prince of Songkla University staff and the Ministry of Education's Officer of the Basic Education Commission (OBEC).

1.5 Funding

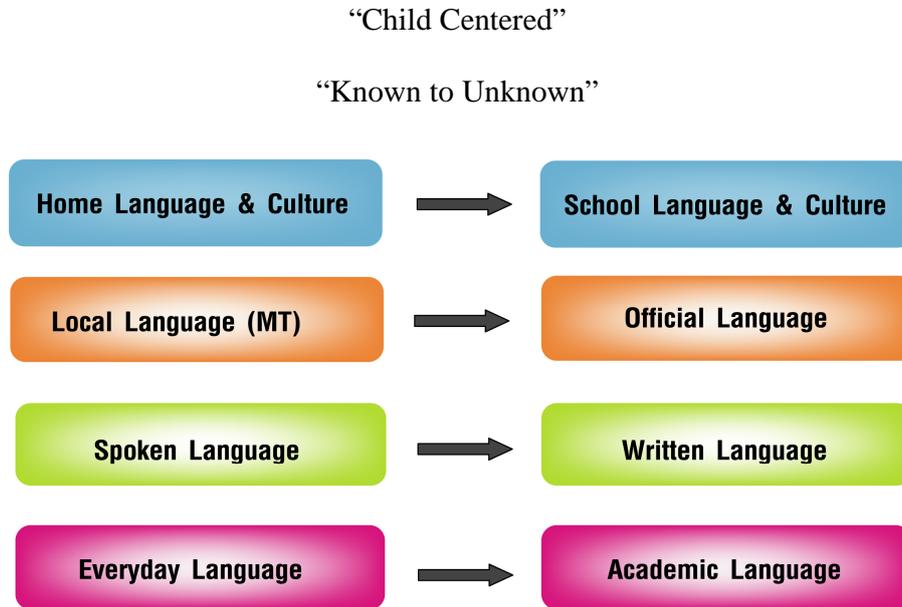
At present, the Program is funded by UNICEF, Thailand Research Fund (TRF) and Mahidol University.

1.6 Schedule

(Preliminary phase) 2007-2016. After one year of extensive preliminary research, MTB-BE/MLE kindergarten 1 classes started in 2008. The program follows those original students, adding additional grades (kindergarten 2, grade 1, etc.) as the children grow. The seemingly long preliminary phase is justified because only a long-term, intensively researched and carefully planned program will bring about optimal results.

2 The strategies and methodologies in Patani Malay – Thai MTB-BE/MLE project

In approaching the program, we follow a child-centered approach that start with the “known” to help the child understand the unknown, as shown in the diagram below:



This approach also fosters a child-friendly environment in the school as the child’s language and culture are used as the basis for education. The teaching and learning materials and activities focus on:

- 1) Academic development
- 2) Language development
- 3) Socio-cultural development

2.1 For academic development, this program uses the Ministry of Education standards. Adding content that builds on the knowledge and experience children bring when they begin school.

2.2 For language development, a step-by-step model is followed. This model develops listening and speaking skills in the first language (L1=Patani Malay) before moving on to reading and writing in the L1. Similarly, listening and speaking skills in the second language (L2=Thai), as well as literacy skills in the L1, are developed before L2 literacy is begun.

Apart from that, this program focuses on meaning as well as accuracy, in all learning activities, for all subjects, in all grades. Higher level thinking, reflected by Bloom’s Taxonomy (1956), is emphasized in all subjects and grades.

In this way, a bridge is built from the students' home language and culture to the wider society, so that they know how to interact well in both Patani Malay and Thai settings.

2.3 For socio-cultural development, teaching and learning activities and materials reflect the community's and parent's values and goals.

The Patani Malay MTB-BE/MLE program consists of two main parts. Part 1 focuses on language teaching. This involves teaching both the Thai language and the Patani Malay language as subjects, the latter providing teaching subject according to Ministry of Education Competency Standards. For this, the Patani Malay language is used as the medium of instruction in kindergarten 1 through Primary Grade 1. Thereafter, Patani Malay is used to introduce lessons and Thai academic terminology, using Thai textbooks accompanied by exercise/activity books in Patani Malay.

In terms of teaching methodologies, teachers make use of a variety of materials and techniques. These include the use of cultural scenes to stimulate discussion, listening stories, picture stories, Patani Malay primer, Patani Malay-Thai transitional primer, big books for shared reading experiences, small books for small group and individual reading, songs (many composed specifically for the project), games, etc.

3 Evaluation

Preliminary evaluations of the project have been very positive, satisfying all the stakeholders. According to the pre-test and post-test analyses, the Thai language skills of kindergarten 1 and kindergarten 2, show dramatic improvement (more than 45% on average) among children in the MTB-BE/MLE pilot school.

In the recent on site evaluation conducted by the Thailand Research Fund (one of the donors), parents were asked to grade the project: they gave it 99.9% parental comment included the following:

- "In the past my child could not read, but now he can read and write with no difficulty."
- "The children ask lots of questions, and are always trying to read signs."
- "My daughter loves to read at home and write by herself."
- "My older children [who were not in the MTB-BE/MLE program] do not read or write as well as my younger child [in the program]."

Teachers gave the project grades ranging from 80-90%, noting that, while the students in the project exhibited much more creativity, confidence, and enthusiasm than students in traditional monolingual Thai classes, the MTB-BE/MLE approach can be very tiring for the teachers. Teacher's comments included the following:

- "When we changed to MLE, it appears that children go to school early."
- "Children are happy in class. When they are happy I am happy too. But it is exhausting for me."
- "Children in the MLE program are not absent as often as other kids."

The first group of children in this Pilot Project has completed two years of kindergarten and is now beginning Grade 1. All of those involved hope that the children will achieve a good education moreover, they will be proud and productive members of the Patani Malay community and also of Thailand:

“In addition to being proud of their native language, children have learnt to live with others who speak different languages. The same level of language understanding will result in the understanding of all issues. ...an unequal level of language understanding causes dissatisfaction with each other. Thai and Malay people should be able to effectively communicate since we live in the same country”

(Mrs Tuanyoh Nisani, kindergarten teacher in Banprachan School)

4 Challenges/issues faced in project implementation

This project has faced many challenges. Since the project is in a conflict zone, security is concern. While some project activities have taken place in the villages where the schools are located, larger gatherings of stakeholders, including teacher training and materials development, generally must take place outside the conflict area.

The project has also faced challenges in relation to the Thai-based alphabet used in the early years, as some people felt that only the Arabic-based Jawi script should be used. However, in extensive preliminary research, the discovered that the Jawi script actually represents an older Central Malay dialect that is quite different from modern spoken Patani Malay. Thus, it would be very confusing for young children. In addition, most of the villagers are only familiar with the religious use of Jawi, and do not use the script for non-religious purposes. Most of the villagers surveyed did not want to use a Romanized script (such as that used for the Malay language), as they were unfamiliar with it. The Thai-based alphabet was developed with extensive community input and testing, and the result is a writing system that is very easy for adults and children to master. However, the Jawi script is not being ignored: some Jawi letters are introduced in the first grade and the script will be taught as a subject beginning in the third grade (after the children have mastered reading and writing in Patani Malay and Thai).

Teacher training has also been an issue. Because the MTB-BE/MLE approach is so different from traditional Thai teaching practices, much more pre-service and in-service training has been required than originally forecast. This, in turn, has led to some budget issues, as a large percentage of the budget has needed to be allocated to teacher training without which the project could never succeed.

References

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