Bilingual support for the new Kindergarten Curriculum in Myanmar

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Overview

• Background to Language & Education Reform in Myanmar

• Process of Bilingual KG Curriculum Development

• Policy Lessons Learned

• Considerations for Next Steps
Myanmar Education & Language Context

• The 1947 Constitution guaranteed all citizens could practice their own cultures, religions and languages.

• Myanmar (Burmese) has always been the official language of instruction (1948 Const., 1974 Const., and 2008 Const,). English as co-language from 1948-1974.

• Comprehensive Education Sector Review started In late 2012, to develop a National Education Sector Plan

• In 2014, the National Education Law (NEL) was submitted to Parliament and approved in 2015. In 2015, amendments to the NEL were submitted to Parliament, and after review, also approved.

• Mon language materials (Mon as Subject) introduced in formal schools by Mon State Gov’t in 2016/17
Support for KG Curriculum & Bi-lingual KG Materials

Quality Basic Education Program (QBEP)  Multi-Donor Educ Fund—2012-16
• QBEP Goal = “increased number and proportion of children in Myanmar accessing and completing quality basic education.” with four cross-cutting themes:
  1. equity/inclusion
  2. school learning and effectiveness
  3. addressing multilingual/bilingual contexts
  4. addressing capacity, institutional, and policy development

Peace Building Education & Advocacy (PBEA)  UNICEF/Dutch Gov’t—2013-16
• aims to strengthen social cohesion, resilience, and human security through improved education policies and practices in 14 conflict-affected countries
• Myanmar focus on promoting social cohesion—special focus on language policies and interventions at Nat’l/State level
• Examples = Mandalay Conference; Mon/Kachin/Kayin State Language Policies; Mon Language Subject materials in gov’t schools
New National KG Curriculum

- New KG Curriculum to replace existing ‘Thu Nge Tang’ curriculum for 5-year-olds. First revision of curriculum in over 30 years.
- KG Working Group established — MoE staff from many Departments, University and Education College staff, NGO and INGO staff, national and international experts, retired advisers.
- New curriculum follows experiential student-based approach to early learning — no textbooks for students.
- KG curriculum aligned with new Primary Curriculum — supported by Government of Japan.
- KG Teachers to receive curriculum guidelines, detailed weekly topic-based syllabus, and a set of teacher guides on early childhood development, on classroom management, on language development, on community/parent relations, etc.
- KG Classroom materials include Speech Posters, Alphabet Charts, Letter cards, and classroom kits.
- Bilingual teacher manual, big books, posters and games planned.
Myanmar Education Reform

• 2015 NEL - Elections - 2016 Amended NEL—aﬀected pace of Education Reform

• Major implications of the NEL for KG Curriculum:
  – Kindergarten for children aged 5 years—if it is part of basic education, it is compulsory
  – National Education Policy Commission (NEPC) established—approves Education Policy and Reform. Recently formed.
  – National Curriculum Committee established—responsible to approve all new curriculum, reports to NEPC
  – National Race ethnic languages may be used as ‘classroom language’, but not as ‘medium of instruction’
  – Decisions on the introduction, quality, and use of National Race ethnic languages through schools to be determined by State/Region Governments, not the Ministry of Education
Bilingual KG materials

• To support non-Myanmar speaking KG students, bilingual teacher guides and supplementary materials developed. Training manual/materials also planned.

• Initial phase started with 65 national ethnic languages

• The following KG bilingual materials developed:
  • Teacher Guides for Language Development—including basics of respective language, poems, songs, stories, key vocabulary, lesson plans for L1 in ethnic language and Myanmar
  • Big Books—bilingual in ethnic language and Myanmar
  • Alphabet posters—in ethnic languages and Myanmar
  • Game boards and Match Cards
Process to Develop Mother Tongue KG Materials

- QBEP partnered with national NGO—Myanmar Baptist Convention (MBC)—to coordinate and train Language & Culture Groups (LCGs)—with technical support from Department of Myanmar Education Research and other ECD partners

- MBC managed coordination of 65 LCGs—representing various ethnic groups across the country. MBC also managed editing and design of materials

- Three ‘teams’ of LCGs (around 20-25 LCGs each) organized to join a series of 4 workshops

- Criteria for selecting LCGs included: having written script; having interest in preparing KG materials; and having basic capacity to follow process

- Each LCG required to organize awareness raising workshops on mother tongue learning, collect data on stories, songs, frequently use words, conduct story writing and lesson planning workshops, and carry out field testing before finalization
Process to Develop Mother Tongue KG Materials (cont’d)

Series of 4 workshops organized for each team of LCGs

1. 4-day orientation workshop: Principles of Partnership and expectations; Overview of material development process; Principles of ECD; KG curriculum framework; and Introduction on language guide and its components

2. 10-day Training of Trainers for story writing—Principles of writing stories for children and big story books. Each LCG develops one book as sample by the end of the workshop

3. 4-day review meeting—share and receive feedback on draft language guide, stories, poems and games with resource persons. Provide update on process and challenges.

4. 5-day workshop on lesson planning: monthly, weekly, daily plans for Language Development
Issues faced during the process

- Lack of political will required continuous advocacy
- Capacity gaps in MoE regarding early childhood language acquisition and story writing
- Limited knowledge amongst LCGs on ECD and early learning—or on materials development including design—layout—illustration
- Lack of continuity among resource persons facilitating and LCG members joining the workshops
- Inaccessibility to LCGs: No focal department or body at national or state level to coordinate LCGs; and Weak transportation and communication services
- Dispute among and within LCGs: dominant vs non dominant, ownership of scripts, multiple versions of orthography
- Difficult to edit(review ethnic language materials (Irregular Fonts, incompatibility with design software. No editors)
Policy Lessons 1

In policy – one word makes a difference

• The amended National Education Law states that Myanmar and English are the official ‘languages of instruction’, but that National Ethnic languages can be used as Classroom Language, especially in the early grades.
  – It is unclear whether ‘classroom language’ allows or prohibits the Ministry of Education to develop and introduce bilingual teacher guides, supplementary reading materials, posters and games into formal schools.
Policy Lesson 2
Lack of Policy Clarity Can Create Delays

Initial lack of clarity whether KG is part of Basic Education (BE) or Pre-school. If KG is part of BE, then it is compulsory.

— If KG is in BE—bi-lingual Teacher Guides and Big Books could be interpreted as ethnic languages becoming ‘language of instruction’—which the NEL does not allow

— If KG is compulsory, and only some select ethnic groups receive mother tongue materials—this is unfair and inequitable. All National Ethnic languages should receive the same type of support or clear rationale on how/why it is being phased in.
Policy Lesson 3
New Policy Bodies Take Time to Function

• Based on NEL—all new curriculum must be reviewed by National Curriculum Committee (NCC).
  – Formation of high-level Nat’l Educ Policy Commission (NEPC) cannot be rushed and is politically sensitive. Official approval of KG & Primary Curriculum must be approved by NCC—which is under NEPC. Following rule of law, the official roll out of KG curriculum was delayed until NCC approval. National level field testing is being carried out in 2016/17 instead.
  – For bilingual teacher guides and supplementary materials, these are also on hold until Commission is formed and decisions taken on whether they can be reviewed by NCC or quality assured through other means
Policy Lesson 4
Local Government has critical role to play

• Based on the amended National Education Law—the use of materials in national ethnic languages should be reviewed and approved by the State/Region Governments.
  – Some State Gov’t have introduced supplementary materials in national race languages into gov’t schools. Potential for KG materials to be endorsed by State/Region Gov’t
  – Many languages are used across more than several States/Regions. Economies of scale and consistency in language usage requires coordination
  – State/Regional Education Departments lack technical capacity for curriculum development
Considerations for Next Steps

- Introducing bilingual supplementary materials in KG direct implications for Grades 1 & 2. Clear vision for holistic use of bilingual support in the early grades should be considered at the start.
- Policy guidelines/regulations need to be clearly communicated at national and subnational levels.
- Progress made at State/Region levels with mother tongue based KG and Primary Materials needs to be shared.
- Advocacy based on evidence of improved learning needs to be strengthened.
Considerations for Next Steps (cont’d)

• The use and learning of ethnic languages is ideologically charged—relates to social cohesion—and requires a conflict sensitive approach.

• Expectations need to be carefully managed. LCGs not included in initial phases need to identify pathways to participate later. Potential delays in rollout also need to be discussed.

• Competent technical units or teams (NGO, Private Sector, gov’t institution) need to be established to support LCGs and other local groups to produce quality children’s learning materials.
THANK YOU!