Three Approaches to Basic Education in East Timor
A Comparative Analysis

Steve Walter - GIAL
The Context

➢ Timor-Leste – a newly independent country rebuilding its education system
➢ 20+ languages spoken in the country
➢ Tetun Dili, a creole, is the most widely spoken language in the country (50-90% have some knowledge)
➢ Roughly 250,000 primary-aged children
➢ Portuguese is the heritage colonial language but few proficient speakers
➢ World Bank EGRA assessment in 2009 showed low performance in reading
➢ Intense political debate about language policy
Three Approaches

**Tetun-medium** (the major current model)
- Partly submersion, partly MT
- Initial instruction in Tetun-Dili, introduction to Portuguese
- Intensive current attention to curriculum development, language development, and systems development

**The Portuguese Reference Schools** (one school per district)
- A full submersion model
- European-trained staffs from Portugal
- European-style facilities and equipment
- Longer instructional day
- Located only in urban areas with high SES clientele

**EMBLI** (5 preschools and 5 primary schools in 3 districts)
- Initial instruction in L1; subsequent literacy in Tetun-Dili
- Existing teachers trained to teach in L1; supporting materials
The Big Question???

“How well are these models working and how do we plan for the future of basic education in Timor-Leste?”
The Research Design

Three Districts:
   Lautem, Manatuto, Oe-cusse

Five Languages:
   Tetun, Portuguese, Fataluku, Galolen, Baikeno

Three Programs (models):
   Standard (Tetun-medium), MT, Portuguese-medium

Two Assessment Instruments:
   Curriculum-based Assessment (CBA) and EGRA

Children in Three Grades:
   Preschool, 1, 2
## The Assessment Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language Medium</th>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tetun-medium</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>1,659</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMBLI (MTB-MLE)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>432</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portuguese-medium</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTALS</strong></td>
<td><strong>62</strong></td>
<td><strong>2,341</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Performance on the EGRA Subtests by Program (Grade 2 only)

- Letters
- Word Rec.
- Nonwords
- Text Fluency
- Comprehension

Group Mean Score (percent)

Regular L2, EMBLI, Reference
Performance by Program on the Subtests of the CBA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Group Mean Scores (percent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tetun-medium</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMBLI</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portuguese-medium</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Percent of Cohort who are Good Readers by Program

- Preschool
- Grade 1
- Grade 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Preschool</th>
<th>Grade 1</th>
<th>Grade 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regular L2</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMBLI</td>
<td>49.1</td>
<td>60.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Impact of Preschool Attendance on the EGRA Subtests

- Letters: No Preschool = 62, Preschool = 118, Advantage to Preschool = 107
- Familiar Words: No Preschool = 40, Preschool = 121, Advantage to Preschool = 121
- Nonwords: No Preschool = 30, Preschool = 132, Advantage to Preschool = 132
- Text reading: No Preschool = 20, Preschool = 140, Advantage to Preschool = 140
- Comprehension: No Preschool = 15, Preschool = 120, Advantage to Preschool = 120

Group Mean Scores (percent)
## Impact of SES on the Children in the Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SES Level</th>
<th>CBA (Grade 2 only)</th>
<th>EGRA (Grade 2 only)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average Score</td>
<td>St. Dev.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>34.44</td>
<td>23.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>49.39</td>
<td>27.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>60.06</td>
<td>25.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## “True” Educational Effectiveness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic Educational Effectiveness (normal SES)</th>
<th>SES Gain</th>
<th>Preschool Attend.</th>
<th>Being Absent</th>
<th>Total Contextual adj.</th>
<th>Predicted by the Model</th>
<th>Actual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regular L2</td>
<td>34.51</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>-9.47</td>
<td>-6.55</td>
<td>27.96</td>
<td>27.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMBLI</td>
<td>57.46</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>5.59</td>
<td>-9.67</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>57.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference</td>
<td>38.99</td>
<td>8.99</td>
<td>7.30</td>
<td>-2.6</td>
<td>13.69</td>
<td>52.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

➢ “True” gain in effectiveness due to MTB-MLE = 66.5%
➢ “True” gain in effectiveness due to European trained staff = 13.0%
➢ Advantage of EMBLI over Reference schools = 47.4%
Conclusions

• It is (almost) always misleading to interpret test results independently of relevant contextual variables.
• The positive impact of MT instruction is very strongly evident in the data from East Timor.
• Through Grade 2 the effectiveness of the Portuguese Reference program is more apparent than real, being only 13 percent higher than the Tetun-medium program once contextual effects are removed.
• The resources currently being invested in the Reference program would be better spent elsewhere.