Update on MTB-MLE in Papua

This paper builds upon the working paper published by ACDP on Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education in November 2014. The paper outlines the rationale for introducing mother tongue based multilingual education (MTB-MLE), focusing specifically on introducing MTB-MLE in Papua. The paper then considers some of the obstacles to MTB-MLE implementation while also explaining what is currently being done in Papua to overcome these obstacles and initiate MTB-MLE programs.

Indonesia is reported as having 742 languages spoken within its borders, making it the 2nd most linguistically diverse nation in the world. As home to 275 of Indonesia’s many linguistic and cultural groups, Papua harbors an extent of diversity that makes it unique among the nation’s islands. The OTSUS laws of Indonesia recognize the value of Papua’s diversity. Article 58 of UU 21/2001 asserts that Papua should ensure its languages are developed, preserved and used in the classroom where appropriate.

Bahasa Indonesia is the national language of Indonesia as well as the language taught in all schools. The use of languages such as Javanese, Balinese and Sundanese and over 700 other minority languages in schools varies from region to region. However, while Bali and Java have devoted a significant amount of time in the curriculum to ensuring literacy in mother tongue languages, the 275 smaller linguistic communities in Papua face various challenges including gaining community support, accessing resources and improving teacher training.

Introducing MTB-MLE in Papua has potential to help preserve linguistic and cultural diversity in Papua, reduce gaps in enrolment and dropout between western and eastern Indonesia, increase the efficiency of education and help individual students thrive in an increasingly connected multicultural world.

A large body of evidence from different countries as well as advances in the field of cognitive neuroscience show that children who have access to MTB-MLE develop better language skills in their mother tongues as well as the national language. Research has proven that MTB-MLE helps develop and nurture skills in creativity and critical thinking in students while also making it less likely that these students drop out, repeat grades and become passive learners who are given skills in memorizing facts that they may not understand. Differences in reading and academic performance may be dramatic between students who receive bilingual education and those who only receive instruction in the national language.

In contrast, teaching basic skills to young children in a language they do not understand through language immersion is often shown to be detrimental. Children living in the remote villages of Papua could be at a considerable disadvantage in the education system. The farther away a child lives from an urban area, the less Bahasa Indonesian he/she uses and the more he/she will rely on a mother tongue language that is different than the national language. Papuan students’ literacy scores confirm this as they are about 25% of the Indonesian national average. Further, UNICEF and SIL research has revealed that Papuan elementary school students are performing poorly in reading, writing and simple mathematics.

Given the low performance Papuan children, it can be assumed that the considerable money being invested in education in Papua is being spent neither effectively nor efficiently. If MTB-MLE can ensure that students who graduate from elementary school can fluently read, write and do basic mathematics, it would provide a more effective and efficient way of spending the money allocated to education in Papua than the existing cost of building schools, paying teachers and providing curriculum costs for students in rural and remote areas who are graduating without these basic skills.

Currently, pilots, projects and programs are in place in Papua to help overcome the various challenges that have historically prevented indigenous languages from being used more widely as a medium of instruction in Papuan schools.
Generating sufficient political commitment to implement MTB-MLE is often difficult

Government policy in Indonesia does support the use of local languages in classrooms. However, policy can be vague and inhibit adequate support for implementing MTB-MLE programs. For example, government policy allows local languages to be used in classrooms if Bahasa Indonesia cannot be used as the introductory language. However, the ambiguity of the terms ‘cannot be used’ and ‘introductory language’ has led many communities to feel compelled to use Bahasa Indonesia.

A project design for introducing MTB-MLE in Papua has generated some crucial support

One important development has been the acceptance of MTB-MLE as national policy within the RPJMN and the final version of Ministry of Education & Culture national RENSTRA which states explicitly that “the mother tongue could be used as the language of instruction in the early grades as a means to diversify curriculum implementation.”

In addition, some key political support is already in place for integrating MTB-MLE into schools in rural and remote areas of Papua. The government has made an initial commitment to running an MTB-MLE pilot program in collaboration with other stakeholders starting in July 2016. In conjunction with the Provincial Ministry of Education in Papua, a four-year plan to implement the MTB-MLE pilot project in Kuyawage Valley, Lanny Jaya, has been developed.

The Kuyawage Valley is an isolated area with community support for MTB-MLE. It has 13 active preschools, four elementary schools, two junior high schools and one secondary school, which will allow long term research in tracking the students who engage in MTB-MLE as they move through the educational system in the valley.

The program was designed drawing heavily from Thailand’s Patani Malay-Thai Bilingual/Multilingual Education Project, which intended to promote social harmony in an environment of ethnic conflict. The pilot will evaluate the effectiveness of using a transitional MTB-MLE model in improving learning outcomes among students in remote schools over a three-year period. Mother Tongue instruction will be provided in preschool. The national language will gradually be incorporated until it is taught in all but one class by the third grade. Students have been tested before the program’s implementation to gain baseline data. A second test will be given to the children when they are in the second grade to measure the program’s success.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Preschool</th>
<th>Kindergarten</th>
<th>Grade 1</th>
<th>Grade 2</th>
<th>Grade 3-6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local Language</td>
<td>Oral mother tongue for introducing pre-reading, and pre-writing in the mother tongue</td>
<td>Oral and written mother tongue to introduce reading and writing in the mother tongue</td>
<td>Mother tongue (MT) for reading, writing, mathematics. Possibly adapt Buku Paket Kontekstual to Bahasa Lani.</td>
<td>Mother tongue for reading, writing, mathematics. One class that uses a bilingual reader to cover science and, social studies</td>
<td>All classes in Indonesian except for Muatan Lokal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesian</td>
<td>Oral Indonesian for introducing pre-reading and pre-writing in Indonesian</td>
<td>Oral and written introduction to Indonesian to introduce reading and writing and numbers in Indonesian</td>
<td>Oral and written introduction to Indonesian as a second language (consider using revised Indonesian Buku Paket Kontekstual Papua); Bilingual Reader to cover other material</td>
<td>All subjects in Indonesian except for “Muatan Lokal”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Decision of Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language of Instruction</td>
<td>Mother Tongue</td>
<td>Mother Tongue</td>
<td>Mother Tongue</td>
<td>Mother Tongue and Indonesian</td>
<td>Indonesian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Survey data gathered for the Papua MTB-MLE pilot program

Surveys have provided important initial data needed to implement and monitor Papua’s pilot MTB-MLE program. Data has been collected to give information on the site where the MTB-MLE pilot project will be located as well as on the current status of student language use and literacy skills. Some of the survey findings are as follows:

**Language use in Lanny Jaya**

According to a sociolinguistic survey, Bahasa Indonesia is very much a secondary language in the baseline population and a weak one at that. Lani is the first language of almost all of the children. From a sample of 184 grade 2 and 3 students, 75% found Indonesian difficult and 88% found Lani easy. Likely, only 13% of these students are fluently bilingual.

However, despite that three times as many students find Lani easy and Indonesian difficult, almost 65% of teachers use Indonesian in classroom instruction and only 20% use Lani, the language students easily understand. Further, 6.9% of the students, on average, were forbidden to use their local language on school premise. Students in boarding schools with non-Papuan teachers were more likely to be beaten for using the local language than students from other schools.

**Literacy skills of children in Lanny Jaya**

The Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) survey, conducted in Lanny Jaya at the same time as the sociolinguistic survey, revealed that Papuan students’ literacy scores are about 25% of the Indonesian national average. 2014 Indonesian EGRA results showed children in Eastern Indonesia to score 50% lower than national norms. The children in the Lanny Jaya sample performed at a level roughly 50% below the rest of Eastern Indonesia, indicating that these children have extremely limited progress towards literacy. Despite the overall low levels of performance, however, the data do show consistent progress being made from one grade to another.

Although there is an overall low level of performance, the data did contain a limited number of cases of children who are performing extremely well, and even above national norms. While this high performance could be ascribed to a high level of ability, it is also important to consider also that the children who score highly also demonstrate a high level of proficiency in Indonesian.

The initial surveys raised questions including:

- Whether schools in the baseline area are devoting too much time in developing proficiency in Bahasa Indonesian rather than in literacy;
- Whether there are fundamental cultural, geographic, economic or religious features of the baseline area that make literacy and education less desirable or more difficult among the local population;
- Whether the entire education delivery system in Papua more poorly resourced than in other areas and results are suffering;
- Whether language of instruction really does have that great of a negative impact on literacy development.

Developing mother tongue orthography and reading and instructional materials as well as curricula is difficult since Papua’s languages are in various stages of development

Some of Papua’s languages are vibrant and well developed; however, others are dormant or dying, and others may be strictly oral and lack the most basic linguistic analysis including a writing system. In Lanny Jaya, very few, if any, Lani speakers have been trained to write Lani. Finding and nurturing Lani writers and translators was difficult due to there being several different dialects of the language, seven vowel sounds that needed to be written in a five vowel writing system, the absence of certain necessary words in Lani for producing teacher guides and the need to simplify language in order to reach a target audience with low literacy levels.

The development of curriculum for MTB-MLE in Lanny Jaya has resulted in various obstacles as well as lessons learned

Curriculum development for implementing MTB-MLE in Lanny Jaya in Papua has started with a review of the national educational indicators and a review of Indonesian PAUD curriculum. In addition, PAUD curriculum used for MTB-MLE in Ambon and the Papuan early elementary school curriculum, which are both considered as best practice, have been adapted into Lani. A curriculum development team was also formed to draft the curriculum and develop books, teacher guides and learning aids. After teachers and Lani leaders checked the books on site, the curriculum was made ready for printing.

Adapting these curricula presented large challenges related to working through linguistic, artistic, curricular, educational and contextualization issues. These challenges made it evident that developing the orthography, reading and instructional materials for all 275 languages in Papua is not viable. The sub-department responsible for curriculum development, which currently relies on buying and distributing national curriculum, will also need to change practices in order to develop MTB-MLE.

The newly established “Language and Letters Section” within the provincial office of Education and Culture in Papua, working with NGOs and Foundations such as SIL, has the potential for providing critical support for developing Papuan languages and MTB-MLE. In addition, establishing MTB-MLE committees at the community level would also facilitate stronger implementation. Funding for the MTB-MLE has been allocated within the provincial budget and the government has identified several priority languages for MTB-MLE programs.
Four capacity development workshops, an international study tour and teacher training initiatives have been implemented in Papua to build the understanding and capacity needed to prepare those implementing high quality MTB-MLE

For greater numbers of communities and schools to embrace high quality MTB-MLE, the government must provide greater support for capacity development, implementation and coordination of MTB-MLE initiatives. In addition, teachers need to be trained to teach in a multi-lingual context and to use mother tongue instruction in school.

Four capacity development workshops have been held to expand the understanding among key MTB-MLE stakeholders in Papua in order to nurture their support for MTB-MLE programs. Three of the workshops brought together officials from different government departments engaged in education to create communication and unite efforts of those working together to develop curriculum and train teachers. The fourth capacity development workshop focused on curriculum development and walked participants through the components necessary to adapt and create books, teaching aids and teacher guides for minority languages in line with the national indicators. The workshop both taught the concepts of MTB-MLE curriculum while developing MTB-MLE curriculum for rural and remote contexts.

To train teachers, a handbook has been developed called the Guidelines MTB-MLE Development. Further, effort has been made to develop parental school committees in rural and remote areas to support education through analyzing community resources, assessing educational goals and priorities, evaluating schools in the community and selecting the Community School Committee if there is not one already functioning.

In April 2015, participants from Indonesia’s Department of Education and Culture, the Teachers Colleges (KPGs) and the State University of Cenderawasih (UNCEN) were taken on an International Study Tour to provide them with a better understanding of MTB-MLE. These participants were taken to Thailand to attend a UNESCO conference on MTB-MLE and to Ambon to learn from the work of The Sulinama Foundation, a local foundation. That is in its sixth year of implementing a mother tongue based preschool program in Indonesia.

In Thailand, the success of MTB-MLE trials has led the government to adopt a comprehensive national language policy that supports the right of all Thailand’s ethnic minority children to obtain an education that incorporates their mother tongue. As part of an effort to promote peace amongst ethnic minorities whose fear of assimilation by the Thai majority has resulted in social violence that has led to the killing of 150 teachers, Thai officials supported the Patani Malay-Thai Bilingual/Multilingual Education (PM-MLE) project in Thailand’s Deep South.

PM-MLE is meant to bring the cultural identity of the Patani Malay people into the education system, show respect for their cultural heritage and reduce resentment. Under PM-MLE, both Thai and Patani Malay are used as the language of instruction, although at different times in the curriculum. Class time is also devoted to children’s academic and socio-cultural development in order to promote their respect for their own and other cultures.

The success of MTB-MLE in Thailand has led the study team in Papua to draw heavily from the PM-MLE program when designing the MTB-MLE pilot program for Papua.
Misperception of the value and cost of MTB-MLE among governments and communities are common and need to be overcome to ensure the success of MTB-MLE program in Papua

MTB-MLE tends to be misunderstood among the isolated and rural communities that would stand to benefit most from its implementation. When rural and remote communities do support the use of mother tongues in classrooms, their support tends to be based on the fear that languages and cultures will die out rather than perceived educational benefits.

The cost of MTB-MLE is also commonly misunderstood. MTB-MLE is often presumed to be too cost prohibitive for large-scale implementation. This partly stems from government officials having not accurately tabulated how much has already been spent in educating children without resulting in basic literacy skills. Overcoming this challenge requires a communications strategy, which is currently under development. The purpose of this is to ensure accurate information is available at the national, provincial, district, sub district and community levels for advocacy purposes.

Sources:
- ACDP, 2015. Support for Mother Tongue Based, Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) for Schools in Rural and Remote Areas of Papua. ACDP 023.