Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE): an alternative to Monolingual Education Policy in Myanmar

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Abstract

Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) requires the use of a mother tongue as a medium of instruction to enhance the learning of the students. Most ethnic education stakeholders in Myanmar are asking to implement MTB-MLE in order to provide a better education quality to ethnic community's students and also to maintain and promote their language and culture. This research aims to examine the long-term advantages and disadvantages of a monolingual education policy and to propose MTB-MLE. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data in this research. Approximately 13 participants were interviewed. This research found that the majority of ethnic children who are forced to learn and teach in Myanmar, officially recognized as one of two official primary languages of instruction-the other being English, are struggled in learning due to the language barrier. In order to improve education quality and access in Myanmar, MTB-MLE is recognized as an approach provides equal learning opportunity for the community linguistically diverse. Across the globe, international research demonstrates the significant benefits that a focus on MTB-MLE in the early grades brings to education quality and access. This study also points out the benefits of MTB-MLE in term of inclusive education, education quality, and decentralized education system.

Keywords: Mother Tongue Based-Multilingual Education; Medium of Instruction; Monolingual Medium of Instruction; Ethnic Education Provider

1. Introduction

As the impacts of being isolated from the world more than a half century, Myanmar itself has slowly progressed in term of economic development. Even though Myanmar had been reorganized as one of Asia's leading economies with the highest per capita income among Southeast Asia countries in 1960 (Cryiac, 2018). However, International Monetary Fund (IMF) expressed that Myanmar has the lowest per capita GDP in Southeast Asia in 2010 (Asian Development Bank, 2012). Since the country was controlled by the military government in 1962, Myanmar's economic growth rate is slowing down due to the low investment, limited integration with global markets, (Asian Development Bank, 2012). Human resources can also be considered as a core factor of country's development (Arisman, 2018). For decades, Myanmar' education has been conducted with underinvestment, mismanagement as a plan of successive military and quasi-military government. As the result, the education in Myanmar has poor quality and inequalities (Meers, Rasmussen, Oo, & Lian, 2015). This is one of the main reason why Myanmar was at the lowest rank for Human Development. Table (1) shows that Myanmar has been placed at the lowest rank of human development among ASEAN countries for 11 years in last 12 years. In 2019, Myanmar and Cambodia were ranked as the countries with the lowest rate of human development. A year later, Myanmar stood at ninth place followed by Cambodia for human development.

Table 1 Human Development Index in ASEAN Countries from 2010 to 2021

No	Country	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
1	Brunei	0.828	0.832	0.838	0.838	0.837	0.836	0.835	0.834	0.830	0.830	0.830	0.829
2	Cambodia	0.540	0.548	0.555	0.562	0.569	0.574	0.581	0.586	0.591	0.598	0.596	0.593
3	Indonesia	0.664	0.671	0.678	0.683	0.687	0.695	0.699	0.704	0.710	0.716	0.709	0.705
4	Laos	0.551	0.563	0.572	0.582	0.592	0.599	0.604	0.607	0.607	0.610	0.608	0.607
5	Malaysia	0.769	0.773	0.780	0.785	0.792	0.797	0.803	0.805	0.807	0.810	0.806	0.803
6	Myanmar	0.510	0.521	0.531	0.543	0.553	0.562	0.572	0.580	0.590	0.598	0.600	0.585
7	Philippines	0.674	0.679	0.685	0.692	0.696	0.698	0.700	0.704	0.710	0.718	0.710	0.699
8	Singapore	0.910	0.915	0.920	0.923	0.928	0.930	0.934	0.935	0.940	0.943	0.939	0.939
9	Thailand	0.737	0.743	0.746	0.747	0.778	0.781	0.785	0.790	0.795	0.804	0.802	0.800
10	Vietnam	0.663	0.668	0.672	0.676	0.680	0.684	0.688	0.692	0.697	0.703	0.710	0.703

Source: Adopted from "Human Development Index in Southeast Asia from 2010 to 2021", by UNDP (2022)

The 1947 Panglong Agreement was signed among ethnicities in Myanmar on 12 February 1947 for declaration of independence from the British and formation of the Union of Burma (Ethnic Nationalities Affairs Center (ENAC, 2018). In history, Myanmar therefore is not the country representing the only ethnic group, but it was formatting with many ethnicities. Myanmar is an ethnically diverse country. The government recognizes 135 ethnic groups who also have their own language and culture. About 30% of the population in Myanmar are spoken the Burmese language as the second language (Gravers, 2007). Unfortunately, the issues related to minority/ethnic languages in education were deliberately ignored in favor Burmese as language of instruction in national schools. Especially, the literacy, culture and language of minority ethnic group are not allowed to teach in their mother tongue or as a subject in government schools for serval decades (Ethnic Nationalities Affairs Centers, 2018).

The population of Myanmar was approximately 53 million in 2016, with the majority consisting of Burman people who constituted 68% of the population, followed by Shan (9%), Karen (7%), Rakhaing (4%), and Mon (2%) ethnic groups (Ethnologue, 2023). According to the Summer Institute of Linguistics' Ethnologue report in 2016, the people of Myanmar speak a total of 117 languages, including 111 indigenous languages. Among these, the Burmese language has the largest number of native speakers and serves as the official language of Myanmar. It is estimated that approximately 70% of the population speaks Burmese as their first language. Notably, Burmese is not only spoken as the primary or sole language by those residing in the central region of the country but also by individuals of Mon, Shan, Karen, Chinese, and Indian descent (McCormick, 2019).

Conversely, about 30% of the population exhibits varying levels of proficiency in speaking Burmese as a second language, influenced by factors such as exposure, geographical location, and access to government education. It is important to acknowledge that several minority groups do not possess any knowledge of the Burmese language, instead utilizing their respective ethnic languages as their primary language for various purposes.

The country is constitutionally divided into seven states and seven regions. In theory, the regions are meant to represent the majority population, specifically the Burman people, while the states are intended for the minority ethnic groups. However, in reality, many of these minority ethnic groups have settled in regions in search of new opportunities. For instance, a significant number of Karen people reside outside of Karen State, such as in the Bago Region and Ayeyarwady Region (McCormick, 2019). In Myanmar, the language policy has resulted in the continuous marginalization of these minority ethnic groups, leaving them one step behind the Burman population in terms of promoting their culture and language. Additionally, the government has classified numerous smaller languages under eight major languages, namely Burmese, Shan, Karen, Rakhine, Kachin, Chin, Karenni, and Mon. For example, languages such as Jinghpaw, LhaoVo, Zaiwa, Rawang, Lacid, and Lisu are grouped under Kachin, while Naga, Sumi, Angami, and Ao are grouped under

Chin (Ethnologue, 2023). As the language policy predominantly favors the dominant language, even the survival of these smaller languages becomes increasingly challenging.

With each political change that has occurred in Myanmar, a new language policy has been adopted, providing an opportunity for leadership from minority ethnic groups to promote their culture and language. Under these language policies, indigenous languages are utilized in various aspects such as ethnic communication, radio broadcasts, administration, framing, trade, poetry, literature, education, and religion, albeit within the constraints of strict regulations (Ethnologue, 2023).

Myanmar has applied monolingualism for the medium of instruction in teaching since 1962, the year that Myanmar was controlled under the military junta. Despite its ethnic diversity, the state has insisted Burmese language (Bama saga) be the official language in teaching at government schools across the country (South, & Lall, 2016). The policy using monolingual for medium of instruction at national schools, was drawn to support the "Burmanization" in the language space by banning the teaching in ethnic languages (Kwok, 2019). The dream of ethnicities to teach in their own language or to teach their language as a subject at national school has been ended since then. South, and Lall (2016) concluded that this policy, which undermines the culture of minority, is one of the factors cause violence and conflicts between ethnic armed groups and the military government. As the consequence of adopting the monolingualism for the medium of instruction in teaching under the military rule over 50 years, Myanmar becomes of the poorest countries in the world and its education system is showing the negative outcomes (Hayden, & Martin, 2013).

After the military coup in 1962, the space for ethnic groups to promote and maintain their languages was more limited. In this systematic effort of the tension between the military government and the ethnic armed groups, as the regime ignored the rights of the minor ethnicities. Teaching in mother tongue language or teaching the ethnic language as a subject in government schools was banned in order to crate the Myanmar national identity based on Bamar culture (South, & Lall, 2016). In 1973, the first campaign against illiteracy started by the Shan people the Shan people to promote the teaching of reading and writing in Shan language. The Burmese military intelligence did not allow such performance to separate throughout the country. In respond, many volunteer, students, teachers and donors were threatened, tortured, and murdered by the Burmese military intelligence (Kwok, 2019). Moreover, the ethno-linguistic communities are banned to employ their language for street signs, announcement posters. The right to maintain and promote the culture and language of minor ethnic groups are totally limited.

The policy of adopting a single language for medium of instruction has strongly affected the learning of children in ethnic minority and rural areas (Hirschi, 2019). As the result of using only Burmese in teaching and learning, the drop-out rates are getting high. Moreover, the Education Management Information System (EMIS) reported that there are 1,015,340 students who either have never enrolled or dropped out of formal schools (Ni, & Nu, 2019). Figure 1 showed dropout rate for children of primary school age in Myanmar between 2001 and 2016. Furthermore, Paing interviewed with Ning Za Man, a 35 year old man, in 2019, "When I was young many of my classmates dropped out after primary school due to language difficulties. They couldn't understand the subjects being taught in Myanmar language." The number of dropped out student in rural area and ethnic communities is greater that in urban areas. While children in rural were facing with financial problems, the students in ethnic communities are struggling with language to access basic education (Meers, Rasmussen, Oo, & Lian, 2015).
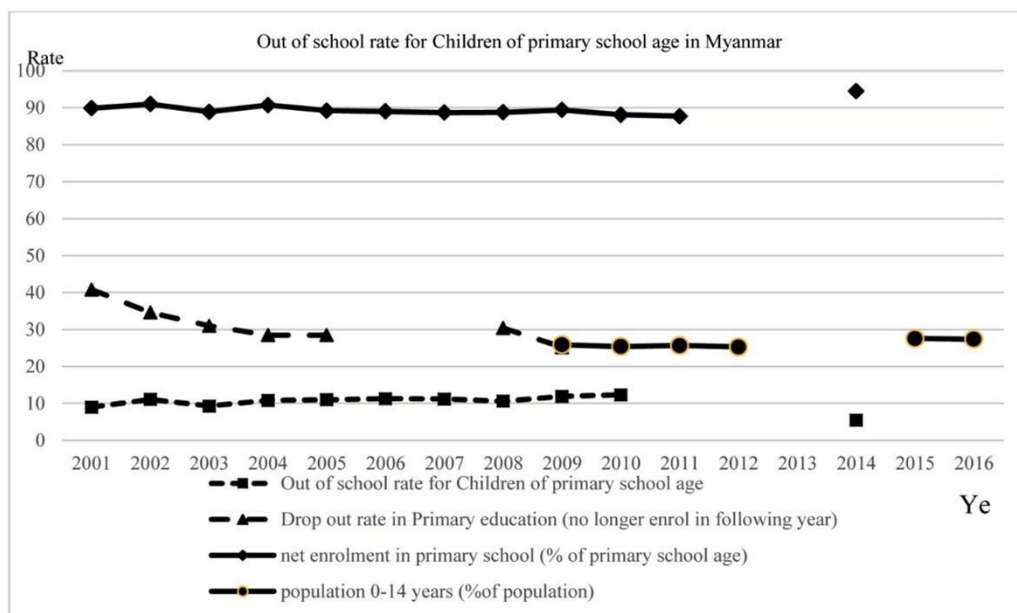
Figure 1 Dropout rate for children of primary school age in Myanmar

Source: Adopted from Major factors leading to out of primary school in Myanmar: a case study of non-formal primary education programme in Dala township Yangon (p.146), by Ni, and Nu (2019)

Educational organizations, activists and ethnic group education providers are demanding for MTB-MLE to improve the learning of children in ethnic minority and rural areas and promote their cultures. Not only the local organizations believed that teaching in the language student understood, can improve the learning outcome but also the United Nations and many countries in Asia Pacific supported MTB education in order to help student in learning. Article (4) of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities in 1992 announces that, "States should take appropriate measures so that, wherever possible, persons belonging to minorities may have adequate opportunities to learn their mother tongue or to have instruction in their mother tongue." In Southeast Asia, the Philippines adopted MTB education system for primary schools, East Timor and Thailand have cooperated with the UN agency for children to promote multilingual education, aimed to the strengthen the learning outcome of the students (Michaels, 2013).

After a long fight between the military government and the ethnic minority rebel groups, some ethnic armed groups agreed to sign the nationwide ceasefire in 1992 (ENAC, 2018). The days after signing, some ethnic education groups urged the government to change its education policy and teach the minority ethnic languages as a subject in state schools. For the first step, ethnic nationalists have asked for the right to teachethnic languages in government school. For the second step, the right for teaching of the full curriculum in the mother tongue has been proposed by ethnic education provider groups (South, & Lall, 2016). Since the democratic reform began in 2011, the role of ethnic nationality languages has been reconsidered to use in government schools (Hirschi, 2019). The UNICEF organized the Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR) education consortium with the supports from AusAID and the World Bank to review the language policy in teaching and learning (South, & Lall, 2016). In 2014, the state allowed the ethnic languages to be taught in government schools. However, there is only a slight of measurable progress because the lesson is being taught outside of official school hours (Kwok, 2019).

As the result of education review in 2014, Myanmar was able to enact the National Education Law on 25 June, 2015. The law aims to develop the modern development which based on the needs of minor ethnic groups (Myanmar Law Information System, 2015). Ethnic Nationalities Affairs Center (ENAC) in 2018 remarked that this is a good initiate for ethnic groups to promote its languages, cultures, and arts. Unfortunately, the National Education Strategic Plan (2016-2021) of new government, the National League

for Democracy (NLD), did not mention about the mother tongue-based education. However, ethnic education provider groups cooperated with Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) to develop curriculum in ethnic languages (ENAC, 2018). Because MTB-MLE is one approach to break the monolinguistic education system and advance to a better education system in the future. Therefore, this research paper will focus on the consequences of using monolingual as medium of instruction at government schools in long term and aims to provide the strong arguments for MTB-MLE as an approach to have a better education system in Myanmar.

This research paper is divided into seven sections. The first section describes mother tongue base-multilingual education system. The main research objectives are described in the second section. The third section then explains research methodology by describing the detailed information of research design and participants. The fourth and the fifth sections are research results and discussion on examining the long-term advantages and disadvantages of monolingual education policy in Myanmar. Lastly, the sixth and seventh sections are conclusion and recommendations to develop a better education system in Myanmar.

1.1 Mother Tongue Based-Multilingual Education System

Until the middle of the twentieth century, the role of the mother tongue in education was not considered as a factor that can improve the education access and quality. In 1953, the UNESCO had published the book so called, "The Use of Vernacular Languages in Education" which highlighted the benefits of using mother tongue in education and becomes the initiative for Education for All (EFA) movement. At the World Conference on Education for All in 1990 which took place in Thailand, delegates from 155 countries agreed to make the early education accessible to all children around the world, yet it did not promote much about the use of mother tongue in school. However, people were more recognized the mother tongue based-multilingual education after the World Education Forum in Senegal in 2000 as the conference mentioned the importance of using students' mother tongue in the formal education system (Malone, 2018). Figure 2 showed how to use MTB-MLE for teaching languages. Nowadays, MTB-MLE programs have been developed all around the world, especially in the Asia-Pacific Region (Malone, 2018).

Mother Tongue Based-Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) can be categorized into two programs: teaching a mother tongue as a subject in government schools and mother longue as the medium of instruction (Gempeso, & Mendez, 2021). Like teaching the national and global languages, the local language also can be taught as a subject in national schools to promote the identities of the minor ethnic groups. On the other hand, mother tongue instruction means the use of the learners' mother tongue as the medium of instruction. It also refers to L1 as a subject of instruction. MTB-MLE can be used for whom first language is not the official language or the national language for their early education (Ball, 2011). MTB-MLE is not an approach only to change the language in the textbook, the examination and to communicate with school personnel, but also to adjust the entry learning strategy which can be focused on critical thinking and knowledge and skill that is required for 21st century (Asia-Pacific Multilingual Education Working Group, 2013). Moreover, even though MTB-MLE generally refers to the use of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction in the classroom, it does not mean the program restricted the chance for learners to access to national and international languages. Rather, it is helping student to learn these languages by build a strong foundation with the language they know best in order to have a smooth transition into other languages.

By using the mother tongue based-multilingual education, the schools will be able to provide a better education system which guaranteed for gender equality, lifelong learning, and active learning. Firstly, MTB-MLE helps to empowerment and promote the gender equality. Ethnic Nationalities Affairs Center (2018) provides five approaches how the girls can get involved in education through MTB-MLE.

1) If the girls are taught in a language they best understand, the percentage of school attendance will increase significantly.

2) The parents' participation in learning and teaching will be improved by using the home language in school.

3) The girls will attend the school longer if the school provide bilingual classrooms.

4) The girls can express greater competence and understanding if they learn in their mother tongue.

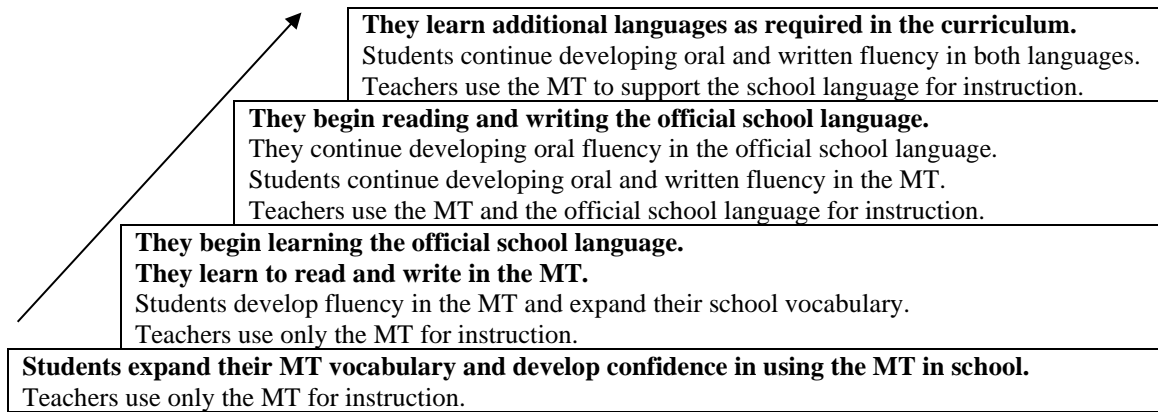5) In learning process, bilingual teachers create more equity in their interaction with girls.

Figure 2 Progression for teaching languages as subjects and using them for instruction in MTB-MLE
Source: Adopted from Including the excluded: promoting multilingual education (p.6), by Malone, 2018

Secondly, lifelong learning is only possible when the education is built on the needs of the community and reflects the ethnically diverse society. Wisbey (2016) explained that Children, youth, and adults require learning opportunities through their own language about their lives and needs. However, not everyone has the opportunities to read and learn. Therefore, using learners' own languages in education can provide a lifelong learning opportunity for all people to prepare for higher education and to acquire the technical and vocational skills needed for employment. Lastly, MTB-MLE helps the students to participate and interact with their teachers. Ting (2022) reported that students who attended in multilingual schools achieve a remarkable academic, personal, and spiritual development. Students can learn better when they are engaged in the classroom.

1.1.1 Mon National School with MTB-MLE

Before the independence of Myanmar, Ethnic education, and the teaching of ethnic languages was delivered by the ethnic nationalists, Buddhist monks, Christian churches (South, & Lall, 2016). For decades, the ethnic nationalists have been fought for freedom including the freedom to promote their language and culture. After a long negotiation between ethnic nationalists and Myanmar government, some ethnic groups developed the mother tongue based multilingual education which can be integrated into the government system (Htet, 2021). The Mon National Education system is an example for other ethnic groups to develop MTB-MLE as it a mixed system of education with self-designed contents and government's curriculum (ENAC, 2018).

The Central Education Department of New Mon State Party (NMSP) established the Mon National School in 1972 to provide education access for all and to promote its language, literacy, and culture. After two decades, the Mon National Education Committee (MNEC) was created in 1992 to administrate the Mon National Schools (South, & Lall, 2016). The 1995 ceasefire between the NMSP and the Myanmar military created opportunity for MNEC to build more schools in the government-controlled zones across the southern Myanmar. In 2018, the total number of the Mon National School under MNEC administration is 132 schools; 113 primary schools, 16 middle schools, 3 secondary schools, and one higher education which is called Bop Htaw Empowerment and Education Program (BHEEP) (ENAC, 2018).

Most ethnic groups included MNEC have taken the bottom-up approaches to develop the mother tongue-based education system. Under the coordination of MNEC, the Mon national education system is offering the opportunities for the learners both to learn the Mon language, literacy, and culture and to integrate into the government system later (Htet, 2021). The Mon national education system focuses on the teaching of ethnic language (Mon Language) at primary school, shifting to half Burmese and half ethnic language at middle school and mostly Burmese for secondary schools (South, & Lall, 2016). The students who study at Mon Nation School, are allowed to take the government matriculation examination. If they passed the examination, they are allowed to go to the national universities as other students who studied at government schools (ENAC, 2018).

At the primary school, MNEC has adopted the MTB-MLE system which mostly uses the learning and teaching materials in the Mon language and the ethnic language for medium of instruction. Some textbooks especially for Mon Language and Mon History are developed in local contents by the committee while Mathematics are translated form Burmese to Mon (South, & Lall, 2016). For the middle school, the committee mainly uses the government curriculum which is used across the country. However, the Burmese History has been replaced by the Mon History. The school uses bilingual education which are both Burmese and Mon Language as the medium of instruction (ENAC, 2018). The secondary school fully uses the government curriculum in order to prepare for the students to take the government matriculation. Therefore, the Mon education system is a good approach to develop MTB-MLE system in Myanmar.

2. Objectives
1) To examine the long-term advantages and disadvantages of monolingual education policy in Myanmar.
2) To propose that the Mother Tongue Based-Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) is a recommended approach to improve the education system in Myanmar.

3. Methods
Qualitative approach has been employed in this research in order to obtain a richly detailed understanding of perceptions on the current education system in Myanmar and the MTB-MLE system. Interview provides a free space for respondents to share their ideas and thoughts freely and also encourage respondents to talk about intimate and confidential issues (Guest, Namey, Toylor, Eley, & McKenna, 2017). Moreover, this research used both primary and secondary data to analyze the factor influencing on Myanmar education system and the characteristic or the core value of MTB-MLE. This section should provide enough detail to allow full replication of the study by suitably skilled investigators. Protocols for new methods should be included, but well-established protocols may simply be referenced.

3.1 Data Collection
This research study used both primary sources and secondary sources in order to achieve its research objectives. The researcher used semi-structure method to get the opinions of the participants about the education system in Myanmar based on their experience and believe. The primary sources are used to collect the direct data on the ground. The interviews were grate sources of information as it gives update information on a particular topic. As the primary sources, the interview process is being conducted by a total of ten participants who are well understood about education system in Myanmar and who are working in education. As the secondary sources, the researcher had collected data from book, journal article, research report, news, and websites (both internal and external institutions) which are related to Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education and education system in Myanmar. Both sources help the researcher to be able to structurally explain the long-term advantages and disadvantages of the current language education policy and the feature of MTB-MLE which help to improve Myanmar education system.

3.2 Participants
For interview, the researcher had conducted thirteen participants who have theoretical or practical knowledge about education system in Myanmar. The participants are divided into two groups: education personnel and higher education students.

3.2.1 Education Personnel
The participants under the education personnel category were chosen based on three criteria. For the first criterion, the researcher decided to select only who had been working in education at least five years. The interviewees for this research must have minimax five-year experience in the field of education because the person who have long experience in education can give the reliable and detail information about education system in Myanmar. The second criterion is about the age. The participants must be over thirty-five years old. The participant who was born before 1987, experienced the two era of education system before and after twenty first century. The researcher believed that these people are able to provide the progress and the changes of language education policy in Myanmar. The last criterion is about the language spoken by participants. As

the interview is going to be conducted in either Burmese or English, the participant must be able to speak one of those languages.

Five participants were selected to participate under the category of education personnel. The first two participants are directly from ethnic education providing organizations: Mon National Education Committee (MNEC) and Karen Education and Culture Department (KECD). The third participant is a retired government servant from education department. The last two participants are from education community-based organization.

3.2.2 Higher Education Student

The participants under the higher education student category were chosen based on three criteria. The first criterion is the researcher has chosenonly participants that finished middle school in Myanmar. If the participants have finished middle school, they will be able to analyze the impact of language policy on the early grades' students. The second criterion is about the age. All participants must be over twenty years old. According to Myanmar education system, most student finished the high school at the age of seventeen. Therefore, the researcher believes that the participants, who are over twenty years old, can be able to explain the long-term advantages and disadvantages of the education system. And the last criterion is about the ethnicities. Myanmar officially comprised with eight major national races including the Burma, the Mon, the Shan, the Karen, the Kayah (Karenni), the Kachin, the Chin, and the Rekhine (Arkanese) (Gravers, 2007). The researcher decided to choose one participant from each main ethnic group in Myanmar. Because they can present the concern of language policy on education from their communities' perspective. Therefore, there are eight students from different ethnicities to be participants under higher education student category. The researcher conducted all interview form November 5th, 2022, to November 27th, 2022.

Table 2 List of Interviewees

No	Participant	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Position	Organization or Primary School	Category
1	Participant A	Male	52	Mon	Deputy Executive Director	Ethnic Nationalities Affairs Center	Education Personnel
2	Participant B	Female	64	Mon	Head Teacher (Retired)	Ministry of Education Myanmar	Education Personnel
3	Participant C	Male	40	Karen	Secretary	Karen Education and Culture Department	Education Personnel
4	Participant D	Male	41	Mon	Secretary	Mon National Education Committee	Education Personnel
5	Participant E	Male	36	Canada	Director	Teacher Focus Myanmar	Education Personnel
6	Participant F	Male	23	Arakan	Student	Walen Primary School	Higher Education Student
7	Participant G	Female	28	Burman	Student	Mingalar Taung High School	Higher Education Student
8	Participant H	Male	21	Chin	Student	Ayeyarwady Adventist Seminary	Higher Education Student

No	Participant	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Position	Organization or Primary School	Category
9	Participant I	Male	25	Kachin	Student	Myitkyina High School (1)	Higher Education Student
10	Participant J	Female	21	Karen	Student	Pantanaw Kyaut Taing School	Higher Education Student
11	Participant K	Male	28	Karenni	Student	Nan Meh Khon High School	Higher Education Student
12	Participant L	Male	33	Mon	Student	Thaung Pyin High School	Higher Education Student
13	Participant M	Female	22	Shan	Student	Hlaing Thar Yar High School (22)	Higher Education Student

3.3 Scope Limitation

The researcher firstly decided to conduct onsite interviews. Due to the current fighting between the Burmese military and various ethnic armed groups, civil unrest and armed conflict has increased. The military regime has declared martial law order in some township and some areas have curfews or stay at home orders. Therefore, the researcher finally decided to conduct online interviews.

4. Results

The research findings and discussions will be discussed in this chapter. Firstly, the research findings present all the important information from primary research sources. In the following part, the two questions of the research will be examined by using the primary source and the secondary sources from books, journal articles, and research reports which are established by both internal and external institutions.

4.1 Challenges in learning due to language gap

In the use of monolingual education in ethnically diverse community, it was found that most students, who are speaking non-Burmese language, have struggles in learning. Figure 3 shows that all the participants had been struggled to understand the concepts of the subjects. Participant F said most students in their class did not understand what their teachers tried to teach as they were taught in Burmese which is not the language they speak at their houses. Participant L also mentioned that majority of the students in his class could not catch up the lessons unless the teachers sometime used the local language for explaining the content of the subjects.

11 out of 13 participants reported that they lost self-confidence to present their thoughts, ideas, and experiences in the class as they are unable to speak the official language of the school. Participant C added that Burmese language is used not only for medium of instruction but also as a language printed in the textbooks. Therefore, it is systematically created the challenges for learners to understand the instruction of the school, to communicate with their teachers, to follow the classroom procedures. Participant H explained that when I was young, I rally completed the assignments and homework which were assigned by my teachers because I nether understand the instruction given by teacher nor written in the textbook. Moreover, the participant K added that on someday, he was sitting on his site without speaking a single word to teacher. He further mentioned that he and his classmates could actively participant in learning if the school use the language that students understand the most.
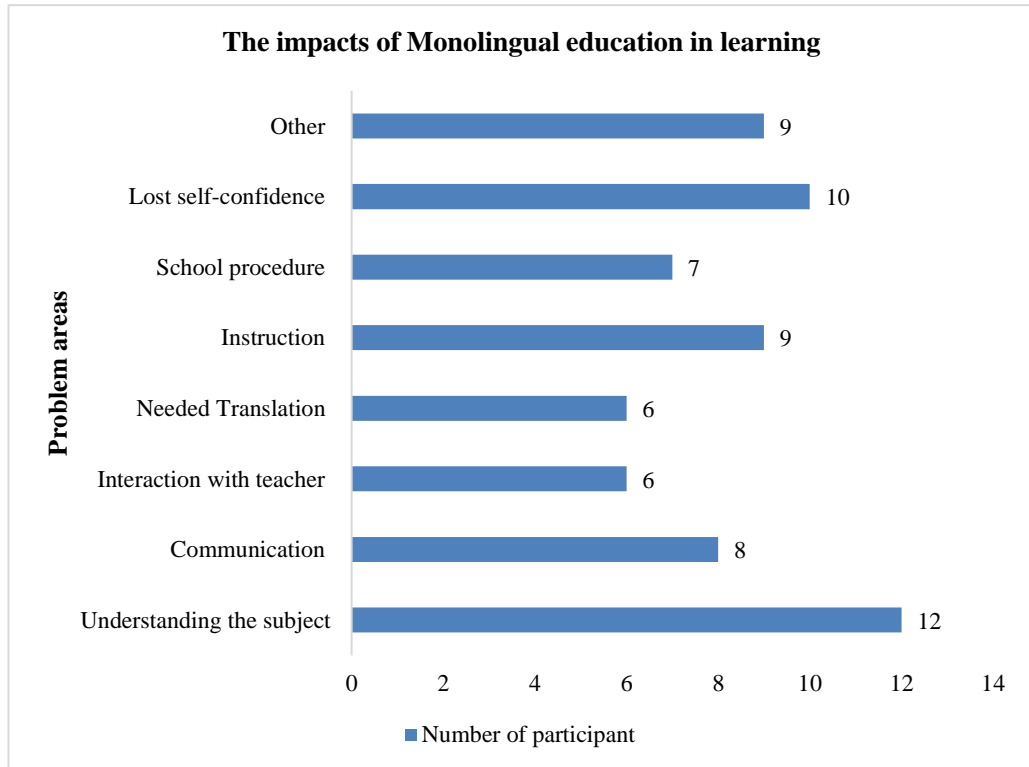
Figure 3: The impacts of Monolingual education in learning

4.2 Long term disadvantages of Monolingual Education

The top three long term disadvantages of monolingual education have been found in this research are less opportunity for employment, high drop-out rate, and limited cognitive development. Myanmar is an ethnically diverse country which consisted with many ethnic groups who have a strong history, culture, and language. Recently, those languages are still being used in many areas such as in teaching, communication, work environment. Participant B, C, D, F, H, I and J mentioned that if you can speak, write, and read only Burmese language, it is almost impossible to find a job in a place where local languages are being used for communication and public relations. The participant G (Personal Communication, November 7, 2022) reported the challenge that she has experienced due to the language barrier,

> "After I graduated, I planned to work at a community-based organization (CBO) in Shan State. But the plan did not go well as I expected. I was not employed despite there are so many vacancy announcements from CBOs. The only reason that I had been rejected from CBOs is that I cannot speak Shan language."

The second negative impact of monolingual education mentioned by the participants C, D, F, I, K, and L is the increased drop-out rate. These five participants explained that most students in their classes prefer to leave the school as they believe the schools have no capacity to improve their future. Participant L added that teaching the students in the language they do not understand is ideologically the same as killing their future.

All participants agreed that the current curriculum and education system in Myanmar is designed in favor of only one dominant ethnicity, culture, and language. Participant C claimed that the opportunity to participate in the classroom are not provided for every student due to the language barrier. Therefore, it limits the ability of a student to think, explore and figure out the world around them. Participant F informed that

students in Myanmar are being taught in one language and most of the contents are based on only one culture. As the consequence, it is almost impossible to think one topic from different perspectives. Participant F therefore concluded that learner who relies on only one language in learning are properly slow for development of knowledge, skills, problem solving.

4.3 Long term advantages of Monolingual Education

All the participants pointed out the language proficiency as a common long-term advantage of monolingual education. Participant B argued that the students will be able to speak Burmese language fluently after they finished the Basic Education because ten years of learning is adequate time for a learner to be proficient in one language. Participant J reported that student will have more opportunity to find a job in urban areas if they can speak Burmese. In term of personal development, participant I mentioned that being able to speak the official language fluently, it will increase self-confidence and confident to use the terms and conditions at workplace.

Participant A, B, C, and L reported that the monolingual education system is supposed to promote equality in education. Participant B further explained that the current education system is designed to provide equal education for all children in Myanmar because it uses the same curriculum and assessment method for all schools across the country. For administration, participant K claimed that it is much more convenient for school personnel to manage the school procedures and needs less budget for implementation.

4.4 All-inclusive Education

All the participants have reported the children in Myanmar do not have the equal right to access education. Moreover, the education service provided by the government could not be reached to all children living in Myanmar. The participant A, C, F, K, and L claimed that the inequalities in education between urban areas and ethnicities' communities or rural area need to be concerned. Participant A mentioned that the children in minor ethnic communities are being disadvantaged not only in term of infrastructure but also the language using at school. Therefore, the participants proposed the MTB-MLE as an approach to ensure for all-inclusive education.

- **Using mother tongue in teaching**: it can improve the education access for marginalized people when MTB-MLE system adopted in schools because it facilitates for all children living in ethnically diverse to learn better in their mother longue.
- **Adopting the contents based on community's culture**: Instead of One-size-fits-all, the contents of the subjects should be designed according to local culture. In this way, it will ensure the real learning opportunities for all children who have traditionally been excluded.
- **Cooperating with local schools and ethnic education providers**: The government can technically and financially support the schools under administration of ethnic education providers to ensure that all children in Myanmar have practiced in education.
- **Gender equality**: When the school uses mother tongue in teaching and learning, it develops confidence for the girls to participate in learning.

4.5 Better Education Quality

Ninety-two percent of participants reported that the learning system in Myanmar is still in the stage of rote learning which can be defined as the memorization of words or sentences based on repetition. Participant E claimed that MTB-MLE is a needed step to promote a better education quality in Myanmar. Participant A further explained that critical thinking can be processed only when the students understand the subject they are being taught. Participant C (Personal Communication, November 6, 2022) remarked that:

"The education quality can be improved if the government adopts Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education as a language of teaching. But if MTB-MLE was taught as a subject at school, I could not figure out any changes in education. The state once adopted a mother tongue subject at government in 2014. That was not effective to improve education quality."

Participant E, F, G, H and L also highlighted the importance of MTB-MLE to obtain a better education quality. First, by using the language or languages that children are most familiar with, it can improve learning outcomes and academic performance as it helps students to communicate with teachers and actively participate in class. Second, if teaching strategy, learning material, and the content of the subject are reflected to linguistic diversity, it can reduce the knowledge gaps among students and ensures that learner at different backgrounds can receive the skills and knowledge they need to grow and succeed. Third, under MTB-MLE, the parents can perform as an essential source in learning for children. The use of mother tongue in teaching and in developing learning material can enhance the participation of parents to help their children in learning.

4.6 A Decentralized System

All participants reported that Myanmar education system is highly centralized and MTB-MLE is one of approaches that can decentralized the education system. Participant L mentioned that every ethnic groups are allowed to open their national school, but these schools are not recognized from the government. If the school under the administration of minor ethnic groups wants the recognition from the nation, it will be asked to practice the education strategy and curriculum of the nation. This kind of management proves how education system was centralized.

Participant A explained that under the mother tongue based multilingual education system, the local government will have the rights to make decision regarded to the languages in teaching, the curriculum uses at schools and management of the school. Participant C reported that by using MTB-MLE, it intends not only to decentralize the education system but also to form a harmonist learning environment by promoting the diversity of the country.

5. Discussion

In this section, the result finding will be discussed based on the research questions presented in chapter one. The secondary sources are also used to support the explanation by comparing and contrasting.

5.1 Long term advantages and disadvantages of Monolingual Education policy in Myanmar

After the monolingual education policy was enacted in Myanmar, numbers of student were being affected by the policy in their learning and for their professional development. There are two long term advantages of monolingual education reported in this research. The first long term advantage of monolingual education is that it provides equality in education. By using one language, one curriculum and one textbook, all student in Myanmar will have the same standard of education. Among thirteen principles of Basic Education Curriculum, promoting equality is one of the most concerned development goals in Myanmar education (Htet, 2020). Four participants agreed that monolingual education aims to promote equality in education. Regardless students' background, language, race and gender, each student will get the same opportunity to achieve their educational goals. Moreover, the national education law in 2014 also highlighted that all the children living in Myanmar should have a standards-based education equality to enhance a better future of the nation (Ministry of Education, 2016).

The second long-term advantage of monolingual education is that students are fluent in official language. Burmese is used as the medium of instruction in all Grades from kindergarten to Grade-12. In old syllabus, there are 5 grades at primary level, 4 grades at middle level and 2 grades at secondary level for basic education (South, & Lall, 2016). If you are a high school student, which means you have been learning Burmese language for 10 years already. Ten years is enough time for a student to be fluent in one language. Participant B reported that most students in Myanmar are capable to speak Burmese language fluently after

they finished the Basic Education. This finding seems to support the statement of Maiworm (2014) that students who has been learning in one language mostly became influent in particular language which also helps them to find a job in a specific discipline. With this language education policy, children later on will be able to use Burmese language, but there is no chance to learn their mother tongue languages.

As the consequences of language education policy in Myanmar, students are facing with many challenges in term of language barrier in learning and personal development. Due to language gap, the participants have mentioned some challenges in learning such as learning without understanding, lost self-confidence to participant in the classroom, and fail to understand the instruction. In long term, these kind of challenges in the classroom become a big impact for students for their further studies and professional development.

There are three long term disadvantages of the monolingual education policy in Myanmar. The first long term disadvantage of the monolingual education is less opportunity for employment. Being able to speak, read, and write only Burmese can limit the chance to find a job after graduating from the schools. Learning the official language or the dominant language is important as it enables people to communicate with others. But there are so many languages being used for communication in Myanmar especially in ethnic communities. According to 1983 census, Burmese, Shan, Karen, Rakhaing, Mon, Chin and Kachin are most spoken languages in Myanmar (Lwin, 2021). Therefore, the opportunities available to those who are able to speak local language alongside Burmese. Participant B, C, D, F, H, I and J mentioned that students who communicate only in Burmese are almost impossible to find a job in ethnic communities. Language helps people to get a job not only in term of communication and translation but also in term of networking opportunities (Hoominfar, 2014).

The second long term disadvantage of monolingual education is a high dropout rate. Language of instruction plays an important role to keep students actively engaged in learning. Due to the language barrier between students and teachers, most students later on lost interest in studies. Since the schools could not create a happy and equal learning environment, the students therefore choose to get out of school. In this case, six participants reported that when the school cannot support the student to create a better future, students choose to leave the school to explore their future. Paing (2019) also pointed out that after financial problem, language barrier is the main reason in pushing children out of school in Myanmar. The growing of language barrier in schools has catalyzed the growth of obstacles for students engaging in education.

The third long term disadvantage of monolingual education is slow cognitive development. When the children are being taught in one language or the contents in the textbooks are based on one culture, students are unable to think from different perspectives. Moreover, without understanding the medium of instruction in schooling, children cannot develop the new knowledge, skills, and critical thinking. For example, participant F claimed that learners who rely on only one language in learning are properly slow to develop their critical thinking and problem-solving skill. Cognitive development occurs largely when the children have the opportunities to learn in various range of cultural environment and languages (Sepulveda, 1973).

In order to fill the language gap or to improve the education system in Myanmar, several studies suggested that Myanmar better to implement Mother Tongue Based-Multilingual education (MTB-MLE). Most ethnic education personnel believe the school should approach with mother tongue-based learning in early grades in order to be effective in learning the common languages such as Burmese and English (South, & Lall, 2016). Moreover, Gervais, and Raynaud (2020) also proposed that Myanmar should introduce the MTB-MLE to preserve linguistic and cultural diversity, to improve access to and quality of education, and to promote national cohesion.

5.2 Mother Tongue Based-Multilingual Education for a better education system

As the country focuses on developmental goals, there are always groups of people who are being left behind physically, socially, and politically. In order to address this challenge, Myanmar should adopt the mother tongue based-multilingual education system. Even though there are only one third of population of Myanmar seeks to be advantaged form MTB-MLE, in practice it helps both student from ethnic groups and Burmese students (ENAC, 2018). MTB-MLE is needed in order to prevent further marginalization of the

poor and vulnerable communities especially for those people who live in ethnic communities. Patrinos (2016) claimed that MTB-MLE aims to reduce the education gaps between dominant groups and minority ethnic and expand education access and quality. ENAC (2018) also mentioned that MTB-MLE intends not only to improve education system in Myanmar but also to support peace building of the nation in the future. Therefore, this study discuses three reasons why Myanmar should implement MTB-MLE that would help to improve education system in Myanmar.

The first reason is that MTB-MLE promotes all-inclusion education, which is an education system reflects to the diversity of the country included culture, literacy, and identity. Under MTB-MLE system, the school will use the language or the languages student the most familiar with. This creates a learning environment where all student can actively participant in and freely share their thoughts and ideas among their friend and with their teachers. Five participants mentioned that the schools are responsible to provide equal learning opportunity for each of the student. MTB-MLE aims to provide an effective learning environment for all children (Asia-Pacific Multilingual Education Working Group, 2013). Beside the language, it also advocates for cultural education which promote the cultural diversity of the country. Participant A and D claimed that MTB-MLE is more than changing the language in the textbook and for the test. It is about reforming the curriculum and teaching technique that reflect to cultural diversity. At school, the students will learn not only the language but also about the diverse cultures of the country. As the result, the new generation will show positive attitudes to minority and indigenous culture (Ball, 2011). Moreover, MTB-MLE also support gender equity. When the school uses the local language or the mother tongue of the learners, it develops self-confidence for girl to believe in their ability in learning (Malone, 2018). The advantage of implementing MTB-MLE is not only increasing the rate of women participation in education but also it provides a space for women to share their ideas and thoughts (ENAC, 2018).

The implementation of MTB-MLE required to develop different curriculum in different regions as it bases on the needs of the children. In contrast, it also becomes challenges for education stakeholders to provide effective learning environment and equal education standard under different curriculums (Cabansag, 2016). However, Hunahunan (2019) reported, after analyzing the Philippine's MTB-MLE curriculum, that the committee was struggled to develop curriculum and learnings materials as it had limited time. But the curriculums later were very much observed by teachers in term of improving the teaching and learning for students in long term. Even though the country implements different curriculums under MTB-MLE, it still has equal standard. For example, the Philippine uses equal curriculum guide in order to have equal standard in education (Bercasio et als, 2016).

The second reason is MTB-MLE provides education quality. MTB-MLE is more than changing the language in teaching. It also facilitates to reform the curriculum based on the needs of the students and their background. Most ethnic education stakeholders want mother tongue-based education not as a subject but as a language of teaching because they believe MTB-MLE would improve access to and quality of education. For example, participant C reported that the education system will not be changed if mother tongues are allowed to teach as a subject at public school. Mother tongue based-multilingual education system aims to enhance students' critical thinking and cognitive development (ENAC, 2018). The classroom using multilingual education allows students to be themselves and develop their personalities as well as their intellects, unlike monolingual classroom where most students sit silently and repeat after the teachers (Benson, 2004). Therefore, this system improves students' confidence, self-esteem, identity, initiative, and motivation as well as creativity. The finding also highlighted that developing new teaching strategy, learning material and the contents of the subjects that are based on cultural diversity, are a part of implementing the MTB-MLE.

The third reason is that MTB-MLE interns to decentralize education system. According to 2008 constitution, the education system in Myanmar is highly centralized. The state uses centralized curriculum and single textbook for all schools throughout the country (Lwin, 2021). By adopting the mother tongue based-multilingual education in Myanmar, the education system can be decentralized as it shares the power to local government to manage the local schools within its community. In this case, participant A explained that if the country implemented MTB-MLE system, the local government would have the right to make decision in education alongside State government. Under MTB-MLE system, the state government mainly

focus on monitoring and technical supports while the local government are responsible for administration and school management (ENAC, 2018). To implement the multilingual education successfully, the government need to build up the partnership between the state and non-state education providers because the local people know better the need of the students and cultural background. Therefore, MTB-MLE is intended to decentralize the education system in term of sharing the power and responsibility.

These are three main reasons why MTB-MLE is needed in order to bring a better education system in Myanmar. Even though teaching ethnic language as a subject could not bring any changes for Myanmar education system, mother tongue based-multilingual education will become one of the best approaches to develop equal access to and quality education. Since it also promotes a decentralized education system, the country will be able to create a peaceful learning environment.

6. Conclusion

To conclude this research study, the researcher has found that the long-term advantages and disadvantages of the current language education policy in Myanmar, monolingual education, for students to support their further studies and profession development. Moreover, the researcher also provided the reasons why Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) should be implemented in Myanmar.

6.1 Long-term advantages and disadvantages of monolingual education policy

Regardless of their first languages, cultures and backgrounds, all students in Myanmar have been taught in the Burmese language as the result of the monolingual education policy. The medium of instruction plays crucial role for students to learn effectively. This research found that all students have received the same standard of education and being comfortable to speak Burmese as the long-term advantages of monolingual education. On the other hand, students are facing with many challenges to achieve an access to education, quality education, and cognitive and effective development due to language used in teaching at schools. This concludes that in the long-term, even though monolingual education policy politically shows the positive signs, it cannot be an effective language education policy for Myanmar. Therefore, monolingual education policy from learners' perspective, it has more disadvantages than advantages.

6.2 Mother Tongue Based-Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE)

Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) system is an education system that aims to achieve mutually beneficial results for both Burmese students and students from other ethnic groups. Students are struggling with many problems in learning due to language barriers and the current curriculum. In order to minimize these ineffective learning cultures, MTB-MLE is proposed as an education system to help Myanmar to develop a better education system. This research study found that MTB-MLE will help Myanmar to promote a better learning environment where every student can engage in learning, to provide quality education, and to introduce a significant step towards decentralization in the field of education. Therefore, the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education System is an approach that practically can provide equal opportunity in leaning for all ethnicities in Myanmar. As the beneficial of teaching through MTB-MLE, it guarantees for minor ethnic groups to maintain and promote their languages and cultures. Moreover, the cooperation between state and local government can build a strong relationship among government members. Therefore, by MTB-MLE, the country will be able to develop harmonious and peaceful education system.

7. Recommendations

The education system in Myanmar is designed in one format of curriculum, textbook, and the assessment method in order to provide equal education. Using the same format of education does not mean proving equal access to education. Instead, it develops more challenges for the students from minor ethnic groups and from rural communities in learning as the government ignored the cultural diversity of the country. The scholars around the world pointed out that Mother Tongue Based-Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) is one the approaches that can improve access to and quality education. The education system including curriculum, textbook and the assessment methods, should be reformed to provide a better education for new

generation. Therefore, the following recommendations are hereby made to develop a better education system in Myanmar.

7.1 In order to support the learning of marginalized children, the main recommendations are:
- o The medium of instruction should be used the language students most familiar with to enhance students' engagement in classroom and facilitate the interaction between teachers and students which are considering as the most basic for effective learning.
- o The government should assist more financial support as well as technical support to informal education which are administrated by ethnic education providers in order to provide a quality education for children in conflict affected communities.
- o The government should outline the procedures for the assessment and recognition of non-formal education to help marginalized students to undertake further studies.

7.2 In order to implement MTB-MLE in Myanmar, the main recommendations are:
- o The preliminary research needs to be conducted in each language community to ensure the number of languages most used in a community.
- o Myanmar should use different approaches for implementation of MTB-MLE such as approach based on State or Region, approach based on ethnicity and approach based on school, to reflect the cultural diversity.
- o The government, scholars, Non-government Organizations and ethnic education providers should work together to draw the curriculum and instructional materials for MTB-MLE.

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