

Enhancing Awareness and Building the Capacity of SEAMEO in Establishing Mother Tongue-based Multilingual Education Programs in Southeast Asia
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This paper outlines a study and program implemented by the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) to prepare a core group of educators to act as focal persons in developing multilingual education programs at country and regional levels.

The program has two phases, and phase two is currently is nearing completion. Phase 1, implemented from June 2006 to July 2009, saw all 11 member countries participating in regional discussions and collecting country policies and good functioning models around the area in preparation for advocacy work and implementation of pilot programs. Support was provided by other bodies, such as UNESCO, UNICEF and SIL International.

The purpose of Phase 2 is the creation of advocacy materials as well as sharing of knowledge, skills training and guidelines on developing non-dominant language curricula and teaching techniques. For the four activities taking place in Phase 2, participants were divided into two groups. Group A is comprised of education officials and those who have influence on policy; group B is comprised of educators and specialists responsible for teaching training and curriculum development. Each activity had participants from Group B, which was involved in capacity building. Group A was involved in advocacy.

Activity 1 focused on reviewing policies in SEA, key messages on MLE, components of strong mother-tongue based MLE programs. Participants were able to look at cases in their own countries and assess them against the indicators of strong MLE programs.

Activity 2 involved strong training on curriculum adaptation. The training lasted ten days, and there will be follow up trainings in the future.

Activity 3 was a study tour, of which the first part has been completed and the second will be carried out in December 2010. The tour provided the opportunity to visit effective MLE programs in Asia. Two months ago, they visited a project in Yunnan. Although the context in Yunnan is different than in Southeast Asia, participants saw many commonalities. Next month, they're going to Orissa, India.

Activity 4 was a set of national training workshops that provided opportunities to put in practice what they learned from the first three activities and address country unique needs.

Participants in each activity remained the same, and as a result some people changed their views on MLE and began to support it. In the future, there will be annual meetings of ministers, directors to create a mechanism whereby we can exchange information, present proposals, involving mother tongue-based MLE in all agendas and keeping an open mind to diversify policies, practices and models.