

Future Challenges of MTB-MLE for ECD: Research, Evaluation and Collaboration
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Cognitive Anthropology is the study of culturally shared knowledge: the contents of specific cognitive domains as “networks of neural connections”. Examples of some cognitive domains relevant for Early Childhood Development are: parenting skills and childrearing practices in a culture (mothers, fathers, grandparents); perceived stages of child development; and childhood competencies.

Language and Culture; In ethnically and linguistically diverse populations, Mother Tongue Based, Multi-lingual Education is essential for all programs of early childhood care and development. It is not just a language issue. Most fundamentally, it is a cultural issue. To be effective, ECD services at the community level must fit the cognitive domains and cultural ideals of the people.

Although many agree that these issues are very important, relatively little research and evaluation has been conducted on the inputs, outputs and outcomes of ECD services using MTB-MLE in terms of: 1) child and family development; and 2) the improvement of formal and non-formal education systems.

Key questions for internal program evaluations: What are some outcomes of effective MTB-MLE, especially in terms of improved birth outcomes; children with vulnerable status identified and served; improved child development; improved parenting knowledge and skills; timely enrolment in pre-primary and primary education; improved internal efficiency of primary school systems: lower absenteeism, grade repetition, drop-out rates; and higher achievement and primary school completion rates; and greater parent involvement in schools. External program evaluations are also needed.

High-Priority Research Topics *(A selected and edited list from the paper)*

Educational and social equity: Ethnographic studies on educational equity and child rights with respect to linguistic and cultural status during the ECD period; child and parental rights (presence/absence) in MTB-MLE ECD services; and relationship of (presence/absence of) MTB-MLE to the frequency of community conflict, domestic violence or other social pathologies.

Policies and Strategic Plans: Research on the inclusion/absence of language policies or statements in ECD Policies and Strategic Plans, Educational and National Development Plans (MDGs, Poverty Reduction); and assessment of the inclusion of the early childhood period and/or parenting education in National Language Policies or Plans.

Parental attitudes and language teaching skills: Ethnographic studies on parental attitudes regarding MTB-MLE toward: mother tongue and its importance and utility; maintaining mother tongue and home culture; and having their children learn the national language(s);

Use of cognitive domain research: Use of cognitive domains (indigenous knowledge and practices) regarding parenting and child development in MTB-MLE and their results.

Quality issues regarding MTB-MLE program contents for ECD services: Developing, deriving or adapting curricula, educational materials, methods and manuals.

Planned transition services (home or pre-primary to primary school): How were transition services structured and conducted? What were the results?

Pre- and In-Service Training; Ethnographic studies are needed on the pre- and in-service training of bi- and multi-lingual teachers or facilitators, teacher trainers, school or program managers, and directors of ECCD systems. Which systems are most effective?

Child Development and Language Outcomes: Developmental levels of young children (0 to 36 months; 37 mo – 60 months) served or not served by ECD MTB-MLE programs; assessment of language outcomes for pre-primary and primary age school children in terms of understanding, reading, writing (biliteracy) and speaking; and educational achievement in primary school (in all developmental areas).

Issues of Sustainability and Scale: Which MTB-MLE programmes have been taken to scale in which world areas/countries, and how have they done so?

SOME CHALLENGES IN CONDUCTING RESEARCH ON MTB-MLE FOR ECD: Most practitioners in this emerging field tend to work in an isolated manner and they engage in very limited professional collaboration. This may be due mainly to a lack of opportunities to collaborate. Research methodologies are not well understood by practitioners in this field. Funding is lacking.

WHAT MIGHT BE DONE? It is time to build a collaborative framework for research at sub-national, national, sub-regional, regional and international levels, possibly through a website linked with global and regional MTB-MLE networks, and with ECD networks, such as the global ECD networks (CG/ECCD, UNESCO, UNICEF, SIL, WAECE/AMEI, World Forum) and regional ECD networks (ADEA WG/ECD, ARNEC, Red Primera Infancia, ARC, and ISSA)

A CALL TO ACTION: New sources of support for research on MTB-MLE in ECD services are urgently needed. Researchers and evaluators must collaborate to create a “critical mass” of people who are able to address topics such as those above. Please share with others your research tools, designs and books, articles, reports and bibliographies. Plan and hold special training workshops and seminars.