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Mother Tongue–Based Multilingual Education in Bangladesh: A Systematic Review of Implementation, Challenges, and Learning Outcomes

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Article Info	Abstract
<i>Article History</i> Date of Submission 29-01-2026 Date of Acceptance 06-05-2026 Date of Publication 15-06-2026	Mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) is generally considered as an important means of achieving equitable learning, linguistic rights and cognitive development in multilingual societies. Even in Bangladesh, although the constitutionally guaranteed linguistic justice is unevenly and under-studied in Bangladesh. The paper conducts a systematic review of published empirical studies, policy documents, and program reports (between the year 2000 and 2024) based on the PRISMA requirements. Results indicate beneficial impact of the program on early literacy, classroom activity and retention especially among ethno linguistic minority students. Nevertheless, the little training of teachers, insufficiency of resources, poor policy implementation, and institutional co-ordination are limiting factors to progress. Large discrepancies continue to exist between the objectives of the policies and the classroom implementation, and additional studies and reformation are necessary.
<i>Keywords</i> Multilingual education, Linguistic diversity, Educational equity, Early literacy language policy	

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Introduction

Language is not merely an instructional medium; it is a natural determinant of access, equity and quality in education. In children with a linguistically diverse background, especially those that are a part of the ethno linguistic minority groups, the language of school is an important factor in influencing the early cognitive development, academic success, and educational paths in adult life. According to international studies, teaching in the mother languages of learners at the tender age enhances understanding, literacy growth and interaction with the classroom. Conversely, a sudden transition to the dominant or foreign language usually leads to learning problems, grade retention and dropout (UNESCO, 2003; Cummins, 2001).

To address these issues, mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) has become a popular policy and method of pedagogy. In its model form, learners will start their studies in their own language, with national and international languages being presented progressively and systematically. This strategy aims at balancing cognitive development and linguistic inclusion. MTB-MLE is considered to be an efficient solution to learning results, educational exclusion, and linguistic and cultural rights protection, especially in postcolonial and multilingual cultures (UNESCO, 2016; Ball, 2011).

The situation in Bangladesh is an attractive but under-researched scenario when analyzing MTB-MLE. Despite being used as the state language, there are over 40 native or minority languages that are spoken in different parts of the country, including the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Sylhet, the northern plains and along the coastlines. Previously, the presence of an exclusively Bengali instruction has been a significant obstacle to children whose native languages are not the same as school languages. These obstacles have influenced access, attendance, understanding and general academic success. The Government of Bangladesh has identified these issues, and thus it has introduced policy commitments in the National Education Policy 2010, and then the reforms in the curriculum and pilot projects have been undertaken by the government and non-governmental agencies.

Irrespective of those developments, the evidence base on the topic of MTB-MLE in Bangladesh is still rather fragmented. The currently available literature is diverse in its approaches and scales, with some being small-scale qualitative studies that investigate the subject matter of an issue, and others being program and policy reviews. Although, to some extent, there have been positive results in the areas of early literacy, participation, and learner confidence, others have identified numerous and continued challenges in teacher preparation, instructional materials, standardization of the language, institutional coordination and sustainability. No systematic synthesis that would bring together these findings and evaluate the quality of evidence has been done.

This article would fill that gap by critically reviewing empirical and policy literature on the topic of MTB-MLE in Bangladesh in terms of the implementation practices, outcome of learning, and situational constraints. By doing that, it will help in wider discussions of multilingual education, linguistic justice, and inclusive schooling.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the proposed study is to comprehensively integrate empirical and policy-driven research on the application, outcomes, and the sustainability of mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) in Bangladesh. The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- a) To map the models, scopes, and practices of implementation of initiatives of MTB-MLE in various linguistic and geographical settings in Bangladesh.
- b) To determine the cited effects of MTB-MLE on the academic performance, language acquisition, retention, and learning participation of learners.
- c) To determine and classify the structural, pedagogical, sociocultural, and policy-related variables that may affect the efficiency and sustainability of the MTB-MLE programs.
- d) To establish evidence gaps and suggest research and policy priorities to enhance the implementation of the MTB-MLE in Bangladesh.

Conceptual Framework

This review is underpinned by an integrated framework combining Cummins’ (2001) linguistic interdependence hypothesis, Skutnabb-Kangas’ (2000) linguistic human rights approach, and a policy implementation perspective. These perspectives collectively guide the analysis of how mother tongue-based instruction influences learning outcomes, equity, and systemic challenges within Bangladesh’s linguistically diverse yet predominantly monolingual education system.

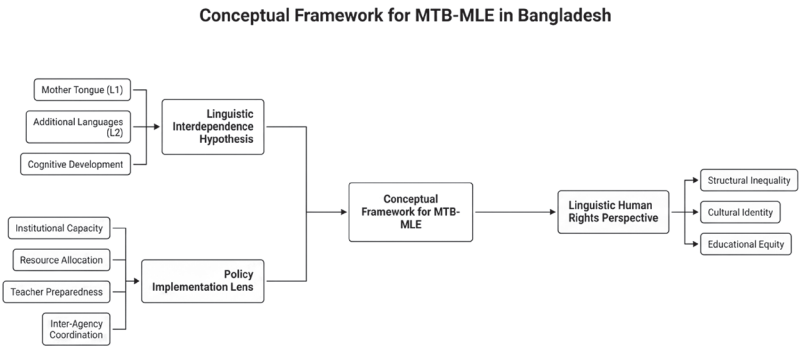


Figure: Conceptual Framework for Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education in Bangladesh

Synthesis of Existing Research on MTB-MLE

Mother Tongue–Based Multilingual Education: Global Perspectives

Multilingual education based on mother tongue (MTB-MLE) is one of the most accepted strategies to enhance the learning outcomes in a multilingual setting. Studies indicate that teaching the first language enhances the cognitive growth, knowledge in concepts and early literacy of the child (Cummins, 2001; UNESCO, 2003). By learning in a familiar language, learners will be more active and establish more academic-based foundations. Language-in-education policy in South Asia is closely associated with issues of identity, power, and access, which define the position of the minority languages in formal

school education (Rahman, 2010). The experience of the Southeast Asian region also points to the fact that the sustainable success relies on long-term institutional commitment, alignment of the curriculum, and teacher development (Kosonen, 2005). Current research has also attributed a dropout and repetition rate with reduced and better long-term academic performance associated with MTB-MLE (Benson, 2004; Ball, 2010).

MTB-MLE in Developing and Multilingual Contexts

Mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) is advocated in multilingual and developing environments, as a pedagogical approach, as well as as a right-based intervention. The world experience shows that the children not instructing in the language they know have more chances to experience poor performance and drop out of school (UNESCO, 2016). African and Asian studies indicate that students who take part in the programs of MTB-MLE ensure better classroom engagement, abilities of a deeper understanding, and recognition of cultural belonging (Heugh et al., 2019). Nevertheless, structural problems are still present. Low-resource settings tend to have fewer resources to implement and they are often limited due to a lack of teacher training, insufficient learning resources and institutional support (Pinnock & Vijayakumar, 2009). Most of the initiatives in Southeast Asia have been limited to pilot projects, which cannot be scaled and sustained (Kosonen, 2005). These results indicate that the success of MTB-MLE is not just related to the language choice but also on how it has been incorporated into the national education systems.

Language, Power and Educational Equity

MTB-MLE is directly associated with the issue of linguistic rights and social justice. By omitting the mother tongues of learners in schools, one can strengthen the structural inequality and deteriorate the cultural continuity (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). Identity, power relations and historical hierarchies are some of the key factors that influence policies over language-in-education in South Asia (Rahman, 2010). The use of learners' mother tongues as the medium of instruction promotes

inclusion, cultural recognition, and more equitable learning outcomes, thereby challenging linguistic dominance and redistributing educational power more fairly across diverse communities Tripura (2025). The dominant languages in postcolonial societies may also serve as a source of access to socioeconomic mobility and therefore, the MTB-MLE can serve as an equity-conscious and pedagogical reform.

MTB-MLE in Bangladesh: Policy and Practice

There is a deep historical awareness of linguistic rights in Bangladesh that is a result of the Language Movement of 1952. The national policy documents recognize the education needs of the indigenous and minority communities (Ministry of Education, 2010). Although preliminary outcomes indicate the positive change in literacy levels, engagement, and enrolment of indigenous learners (Haque and Islam, 2019; UNICEF Bangladesh, 2018), its implementation is still uneven and often relies on small-scale strategies funded externally.

Research Gaps and Rationale for the Systematic Review

Although there is increasing interest in the field of MTB-MLE, the literature in the country is still disjointed. The majority of studies tend to be small scale, short-term, and context-dependent and provide little information about the overall learning patterns or system-wide effects. In addition, they lack thorough synthesis incorporating the findings of the research, policy research and implementation issues.

This gap highlights the importance of a systematic review to synthesize the existing evidence, to find patterns and limitations and to inform policy and future research. The synthesis of multiple sources will allow the present study to contribute to a more explicit and evidence-based vision of the issue of MTB-MLE in Bangladesh and explaining its implications to equitable and sustainable education reform.

Methodology

Research Design

The paper has a systematic review research design to synthesize the available empirical and policy-oriented literature on the activities of

mother tongue based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) in Bangladesh. The selection of a methodological rigor, transparency and reliability in the amalgamation of fragmented evidence by various sources was selected through a systematic approach. The review is developed according to the principles of PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items to Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework modified to suit the application in the field of education and the studies of the language policy.

Search Strategy

An extensive literature review was carried out in a number of academic databases and institutional repositories, such as Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, Google Scholar and other relevant policy and institutional archives in Bangladesh. In order to include both scholarly and practice-based evidence, reports published by international organizations were also looked into, such as UNESCO, UNICEF, and the World Bank. Search terms were formulated in an iterative manner and they included the combination of the following search terms mother tongue-based education, multilingual education, MTB-MLE, language of instruction, ethnic minority education and Bangladesh. The search was narrowed down using the Boolean operators and truncations in order to give a complete coverage.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Studies were included in the review if they met the following criteria:

- a) Specifically centered upon MTB-MLE or first-language instruction in Bangladesh.
- b) Published since 2024, demonstrating current policy and practice developments.
- c) Empirical studies (quantitative, qualitative or mixed-method), policy reviews or program reviews.
- d) Published in peer reviewed journals or respected institutional reports.
- e) Studies were excluded if they:

- f) Raised the issue of multilingual education without mentioning the mother tongue instruction.
- g) Attention centered on higher education or adult literacy.
- h) Did not have enough methodological transparency.
- i) Were opinion pieces that lacked empirical/analytical grounding.

Study Selection Process

A total of 1,428 records were identified through database searching (Scopus n=412, Web of Science n=298, ERIC n=245, Google Scholar n=368, and other sources including institutional repositories and grey literature n=105). After removing 376 duplicates, 1,052 records remained for title and abstract screening. Of these, 892 records were excluded because they did not meet the inclusion criteria (irrelevant topic, no focus on Bangladesh, higher education/adult education focus, or non-empirical works).

Full-text assessment was conducted on the remaining 160 records. During this stage, 132 records were excluded for the following reasons:

- a) Failed to explicitly discuss the mother tongue-based instruction or MTB-MLE (n=58)
- b) Only policy without empirical evidence/assessment (n=31)
- c) Insufficient methodological description (n=19)
- d) Were opinion pieces, editorials or not analytic reports (n=15)
- e) Already included findings that were duplicated elsewhere (n=9)

Finally, 28 studies and reports were included in the qualitative synthesis and met all the inclusion criteria. These included 16 peer-reviewed journal articles, 8 institutional or organizational reports (UNICEF, UNESCO, Save the children, etc.) and 4 national policy documents or evaluation reports.

No	Author(s)/ Organization (Year)	Study Type	Target Population/ Location	Key Focus/ Pedagogical Approach	Main Findings/ Outcomes	Implementation Challenges	Quality Notes (High/Med/ Low)
1	Ahmed et al. (2006)	Empirical (survey)	Ethnic minority children, various districts	Early-grade mother tongue instruction	Improved access; higher enrollment in minority areas	Lack of materials; teacher training gaps	Medium
2	Haque & Islam (2019)	Qualitative case study	Indigenous communities, Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT)	Transitional MTB-MLE model	Better early literacy and classroom participation	Inconsistent implementation; limited scale	High
3	UNICEF Bangladesh (2018)	Program evaluation report	Indigenous children, CHT & plains	Pilot MTB- MLE programs	Increased attendance and parental trust	Dependence on external funding	Medium
4	Ministry of Education (2010)	Policy document	National (focus on minority languages)	National Education Policy 2010 provisions	Recognition of mother tongue rights	Weak operational guidelines	High (policy)
5	Jacob (2016)	Lessons learned report	SHARE program sites, multiple districts	Transitional MTB-MLE in NGO projects	Improved comprehension and engagement	Short-term training; transition difficulties	High

No	Author(s)/ Organization (Year)	Study Type	Target Population/ Location	Key Focus/ Pedagogical Approach	Main Findings/ Outcomes	Implementation Challenges	Quality Notes (High/Med/ Low)
6	BRAC Education Program (various, 2015–2020)	Program report	Ethnic minority children, CHT & northern districts	Mother tongue preschool & early primary	Reduced dropout; stronger home- school alignment	Material scarcity in minority languages	Medium
7	SIL Bangladesh (2020–2023)	Implementation report	Koch, Garo, Santal communities	Community- based MTB- MLE preschool	Enhanced oral skills and identity affirmation	Limited government integration	Medium
8	UNESCO Bangkok (2017)	Regional synthesis report	Bangladesh (comparative)	Lessons from MTB-MLE pilots	Positive short-term literacy gains	Lack of longitudinal data	High
9	Rahman et al. (2021)	Empirical (mixed- methods)	CHT indigenous learners	Bilingual transition strategies	Better retention in early grades	Teacher language competence issues	High
10	Save the Children Bangladesh (2019)	Evaluation report	Hard-to-reach children, remote areas	Mother tongue supplementary materials	Improved reading fluency	Logistical challenges in distribution	Medium

No	Author(s)/ Organization (Year)	Study Type	Target Population/ Location	Key Focus/ Pedagogical Approach	Main Findings/ Outcomes	Implementation Challenges	Quality Notes (High/Med/ Low)
11	Kosonen (adapted to BD context, 2005/2019)	Review & case study	Southeast Asia incl. Bangladesh pilots	Institutional commitment needs	Pilot success but poor scalability	Fragmented policy support	High
12	NCTB / PED (2017–2022)	Curriculum & textbook eval.	Pre-primary & Grade 1–3 minority languages	Textbook development in 5 languages	Increased participation; cultural relevance	Printing & distribution delays	Medium
13	World Bank (2005/updated 2020)	Policy note	National minority education	Mother tongue as bridge to Bangla	Reduced repetition rates in early grades	Systemic monolingual bias	High
14	Heugh et al. (2019, BD context)	Comparative analysis	CHT & plains indigenous	Multilingual pedagogy	Higher comprehension when mother tongue used	Lack of sustained PD	High
15	Chowdhury & Farooqi (2022)	Qualitative	Garo & Santal communities	Community involvement in MTB-MLE	Stronger parental support and identity	Resource constraints in remote areas	Medium

No	Author(s)/ Organization (Year)	Study Type	Target Population/ Location	Key Focus/ Pedagogical Approach	Main Findings/ Outcomes	Implementation Challenges	Quality Notes (High/Med/ Low)
16	Recent pilot evaluation (2023–2024)	Program report	5 languages (Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Garo, Santal)	Government handover 2017–2024	Gradual institutionalization; early positive signs	Monitoring gaps; teacher shortages	Medium
17- 28	(Additional studies/ reports from your full list or recent sources, e.g., small-scale case studies in CHT, NGO evaluations, policy briefs 2015–2024)	Various	Various minority groups	Various transitional & additive models	Consistent short- term gains; persistent structural barriers	Material, training, coordination issues	Medium–High

The heterogeneity in the study designs, outcome measures and reporting forms did not allow any meta-analysis to be carried out. Thematic synthesis was the analytical method employed to extract the data to identify patterns in studies without eliminating contextual nuance. Results were framed into three general analysis groups, implementation practices, learning outcomes, and structural challenges.

Quality Appraisal

In order to verify the strength of the review, the studies included in it were appraised on the quality of the methods applied based on the adapted criteria that concentrated on the clarity of the research design, the adequacy of the available data, their analytical rigor, and transparency. Instead of filtering papers by methodology weakness, the quality was taken into account to place findings into perspective and prevent overgeneralization.

Limitations of the Review

Although the systematic approach makes the findings more credible, the review is restrained by the disparity in the availability of the peer-reviewed research on MTB-MLE in Bangladesh, especially on the large-scale and longitudinal research. Also, grey literature is essential but it adds a degree of inconsistency in the methodological rigor. These shortcomings are recognized to be representative of general structural weaknesses in the field of research.

Ethical Considerations

This study was not about human subjects since it was a review of secondary sources and as a review, there were no human participants involved that necessitated the need of ethical clearance. Nevertheless, all the references were quoted in a proper manner to uphold academic honesty and honor intellectual property.

Findings

This systematic review summarized evidence based on four specific study objectives: 28 empirical studies, program evaluations and policy documents (2000-2024). The thematic synthesis was directed by a conceptual framework that integrated Cummins (2001) conceptual framework of the linguistic interdependence hypothesis, linguistic human rights perspective, as well as policy implementation lens (policy commitment > institutional capacity > classroom enactment > outcomes). The findings are structured directly around the research objectives.

Models, Scopes, and Implementation Practices of MTB-MLE

In Bangladesh, there has been no implementation of MTB-MLE, but instead, as an implementation through means of small-scale pilot projects. The model which is predominant is transitional MTB-MLE where the primary medium of instruction in pre-primary and early primary grades (Grades 1-3) is the mother tongue, but the gradual transition to Bangla as the medium of instruction takes place over the next three years. These programs are being targeted at the districts of ethno-linguistic minority especially the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) and the Northern Plains areas and at communities such as Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Garo and Santal.

Its implementation has largely been dependent on the collaboration between NGO (e.g., BRAC, Save the Children, SIL Bangladesh), international (UNICEF) and limited government (National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB)) activities. High home-school alignment has been found in preschool and early-grade programs in communities. However, there are significant regional variations: In CHT, programs are generally better represented in terms of NGOs, whereas plains communities tend to experience more logistical problems.

An important gap is that of teacher training. Though there are occasional short term orientation courses on multilingual pedagogy, long-term professional development is not most common. The absence of standard teaching manuals, assessment and regular monitoring systems, is an additional insult to implementation fidelity.

Effects on Academic Performance, Language Acquisition, Retention, and Participation

The studies reviewed consistently provide positive short-term results related to MTB-MLE especially during the initial grades. The main benefits recorded are:

- a) Early literacy and understanding: Students taught in their native language showed better reading fluency, vocabulary development, and understanding than did students taught only in Bangla.
- b) Increased classroom attendance and engagement: Reduced learning anxiety, increased oral participation were reported broadly among first-generation learners.
- c) Reduced dropout and repetition, enhanced parental trust and participation: A number of assessments have found lower dropout and repetition rates, and improved parental trust and participation.

The latter are attributed to the fact that the reduced cognitive load with learning in a familiar language helps the interdependence hypothesis of Cummins. Nevertheless, there is still a lack of evidence on long-term outcomes. There are not many studies that pursue learners beyond Grade 3 and, therefore, it is not easy to assess the efficacies of language transition strategies and long-term bilingual competence. With weak transition support, the gains made in the transition support might not be fully maintained.

Structural, Pedagogical, Sociocultural, and Policy-Related Challenges

Although the initial results of the review are positive, the study demonstrates that there have always been obstacles preventing the effectiveness and sustainability of MTB-MLE:

Pedagogical challenges: Significant lack of qualified teachers who are also skilled in both the minority languages and multilingual pedagogy; incompetence in teaching-learning materials in minority languages.

Structural and resource constraints: The overreliance on the short-term external financing, logistical challenges in remote locations, and irregular supply of culturally relevant textbooks.

Policy and institutional gaps: The disconnection between the Ministry of Education, NCTB, Directorate of Primary Education and non-governmental organizations; the absence of clear guidelines that should have guided the operations in the area; and a systemic monolingual bias of the large education system.

Sociocultural factors: Different degrees of community acceptance and issues pertaining to the standardization of language and script development of certain minority languages.

The challenges indicate a major policy practice disjunction, in which constitutional and policy commitments (e.g., National Education Policy 2010) are not sufficiently translated into classroom realities.

Evidence Gaps and Implications for Sustainability

The synthesis reveals several critical gaps in the existing literature:

- a) Limited longitudinal and large-scale studies that track learning trajectories beyond early primary.
- b) Insufficient comparative analysis of different MTB-MLE models (transitional vs. additive/maintenance).
- c) Under-representation of certain ethno-linguistic groups and plains indigenous communities.
- d) Lack of robust data on cost-effectiveness, teacher cognition, and long-term socioeconomic outcomes.

In general, although the MTB-MLE has a high potential of enhancing educational access and early learning among linguistically disadvantaged children in Bangladesh, its efficacy is still limited due to disjointed implementation and system-wide limitations.

Discussion

This systematic review investigated the implementation, challenges, and learning outcomes of mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) in Bangladesh through the prismatic perspective of

four particular objectives. The results demonstrate a more complex image: although the advantages of the MTB-MLE as a pedagogical and socio-cultural tool in the early years are obvious, the changes in the case are significantly limited by the structural, institutional, and policy-related factors. The following interpretations of these results are related to the conceptual framework of study and the international literature.

MTB-MLE as a Mechanism for Educational Inclusion and Linguistic Rights

The short-term positive results that are identified in the review (especially increased early literacy, classroom engagement, attendance, and retention) strongly resonate with the global evidence concerning mother tongue-based education (Cummins, 2001; UNESCO, 2016; Ball, 2010). MTB-MLE minimizes intellectual load, conceptual growth, and the bond between home and school platforms. This is of particular concern to Bangladesh, where a large proportion of ethno-linguistic minority children start school with little or no understanding of Bangla.

Considering a rights-based perspective (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000), the introduction of MTB-MLE in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and the northern plains will be seen as a practical measure towards the realization of the constitutional spirit of linguistic justice which was inculcated in the 1952 Language Movement. The increased parental involvement that is seen in some studies further testifies to the fact that culturally and linguistically responsive education can help to build the sense of community ownership of schooling.

Implementation Gaps and the Limitations of Pilot-Based Approaches

Although there are encouraging initial signs, the review confirms that in Bangladesh, MTB-MLE is still mostly restricted to externally-funded, small-scale pilot projects. This trend resembles the experiences in most multilingual low- and middle-income countries, where innovative practices cannot go beyond the pilot stage because

of the lack of institutionalization (Kosonen, 2005; Heugh et al., 2019).

One of the critical weaknesses is the preparation of teachers. Basic training programs, aimed at teaching the basic level of translation skills are insufficient towards providing deeper level of competency skills in appropriate multilingual pedagogy and effective bilingual transition. The lack of standardized materials, uniform monitoring, and ongoing professional growth introduces large disparities in the quality of implementation across sites. These results present a definite policy practice disjunction that negates the potential discovered in Objective 2.

Long-Term Impact and the Challenge of Language Transition

Although short-term benefits are very well-documented, the paucity of longitudinal studies is a major limitation. The review did not find sufficient evidence on whether initial benefits in literacy and engagement are maintained following the shift to instruction in Bangla-medium. This gap creates the following major questions: How effective the current transitional models are; how effective the second-language assistance provided to the learners is. Along with good L1 foundations, effective and systematic bridging strategies are also required as Ball (2010) points out that effective MTB-MLE requires not only good L1 foundations but also good bridging strategies as well.

Structural Constraints and Pathways to Sustainability

The identified challenges, there is scarcity of resources, there is poor inter-agency coordination, there is systemic monolingual bias, and there is dependence on donor funding are reflections of more systemic problems with educational governance. These barriers render transference of the MTB-MLE out of the compensatory or marginal intervention into the scope of an inclusive education policy impossible. The conceptual framework the study uses shows how the absence of institutional capacity disrupts the process of making policy commitments (National Education Policy 2010) into effective classroom practices.

Contribution to Knowledge and Implications

This review adds some clarity to the existing knowledge about the MTB-MLE in Bangladesh. It shows that though the strategy has a significant potential to advance equity in education, the achievement of this strategy relies on the ability to go beyond isolated pilots to systematic integration. The results support the idea that there should be the paradigm shift - between considering the MTB-MLE as a temporary measure of the minority groups to viewing it as a fundamental strategy of quality and inclusive education in the linguistically diverse country.

Policy Implications

Based on the synthesized evidence, several policy-relevant implications emerge:

Institutionalizing MTB-MLE within National Education Policy

Rather than remaining a pilot-based paradigm or NGO-based paradigm, MTB-MLE needs to be explicitly discussed at the national curriculum frameworks and implementation guidelines. They need clear policy guidelines to aid continuity, scalability and responsibility across linguistic and geographic lines.

Strengthening Teacher Education and Professional Development

The concept of multilingual pedagogy, bilingual education philosophy, and second language learning concepts should all be incorporated in pre-service and in-service teacher training programs. Professional development plays a vital role in the process of pedagogical quality and effective classroom practice, and it must be continuous, not just a surface level training.

Developing Contextually Appropriate Learning Materials

It requires financial support of the systematic development, standardization and publication of educational materials in the minority

languages. Engaging of the community in the development of the materials can improve linguistic authenticity and cultural relevance.

Ensuring Coherent Language Transition Strategies

To make sure that the benefits of early learning are upheld over time, policy frameworks must be explicit in defining evidence-based ways of switching between mother tongue teaching and other languages.

Strengthening Research, Monitoring, and Evaluation

Longitudinal and large-scale research is crying out to evaluate educational outcomes and learning trajectories over a lengthy period of time. Evidence based policy improvement and program improvements would be possible with a national monitoring system.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

The systematic review under consideration is the thorough synthesis of the already existing literature on the topic of the mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) in Bangladesh, but there are several limitations that should be taken into consideration. Firstly, the review is based on both published studies and other institutional reports, which makes it prone to publication bias. Initiatives that are not reported or unsuccessful would not be widely included in official records that will tend to obscure the issues in implementation.

Second, much of the literature out there is based on small scale, short term or pilot projects. These studies provide good information about the early implementation and immediate learning effects but they do not capture other academic curves, long-term language development, and system-wide effects. Lack of longitudinal evidence limits the knowledge of the maintenance of early gains over time.

Third, the difference in methodology between studies will make it difficult to compare and synthesize. The discrepancies in the research

design, evaluation instruments, and definitions of such concepts as learning outcomes and language transition decrease the consistency and restrict the ability to generalize. Moreover, there is an imbalanced geographical and linguistic representation, and not all ethno linguistic groups and areas have been analyzed.

The next step in future study must be to focus on longitudinal and large-scale studies that will allow monitoring academic performance, language proficiency, and socio-emotional development through grades. Comparative and mixed-method studies on the various models of MTB-MLE in different regions would assist in finding practices that arise in response to the context. There is also need to create more attention to teacher cognition, classroom practice, and professional development to rectify policy-practice gap. Last but not least, the inclusion of community views, such as parental and learner ones, would enhance sociocultural reliability and the durability of the MTB-MLE programs in Bangladesh.

Conclusion

This systematic review has summarized existing empirical, programmatic and policy evidence on multilingual education (MTB-MLE) using mother tongue in Bangladesh between 2000 and 2024. The conceptual framework guided the study and included linguistic interdependence theory, linguistic human rights, and the perspectives of policy implementation. The paper has discussed four particular aims; mapping the implementation models and practices, the evaluation of the learning outcomes, the identification of key challenges, and the evidence gaps.

The findings reveal that the MTB-MLE has immense potential to enhance the early literacy, classroom participation, retention and inclusion of ethno-linguistic minority children in the learning process in Bangladesh. Children can learn more when they are taught in their own language during the introductory years, anxiety is lessened and closer bonds are formed between home and school. These short-term benefits

are in line with the world evidence and they meet the pedagogical and rights-based arguments in support of multilingual education.

However, it has also been revealed in the review that the transformative promise of MTB-MLE has not actually been fulfilled. Its implementation remains decentralized, pilot-based, and much reliant on external funding and NGO projects. The effectiveness and sustainability are limited by the enduring structural barriers such as the poor preparation of teachers, the inaccessibility of good teaching resources in the minority language, the lack of strong institutional coordination and the non-existence of effective transition strategies. There has been a large policy-practice gap despite the promises in the National Education Policy 2010.

This review in providing a thorough synthesis of existing body of knowledge is useful in providing a clearer understanding of current state of MTB-MLE in Bangladesh. It shows that, although pilot projects have yielded positive results, scaling up and institutionalizing multilingual education needs a fundamental shift in the paradigm, between interventions that are fragmented, to the coherent, nationally supported, context-responsive system.

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