



# The Bangkok Priorities for Action on First Language-based Multilingual Education

## Section 1: Preamble

1. We, the ministers and designated ministerial representatives of our respective countries, gathered in Bangkok, Thailand, at the 4th High-Level Policy Forum on Multilingual Education, 5 October 2023, in parallel with the 7th International Conference on Language and Education, 4–6 October 2023, to explore the role of languages in accelerating learning and strengthening education systems to be more transformative, inclusive and resilient.
2. We **reaffirm** the Bangkok Statement on Language and Inclusion (2019), issued as the outcome document of the 3rd High-Level Policy Forum on Multilingual Education, 25 September 2019, whose recommended action items work toward the realisation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) for children's right to quality education and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" in relation to language, especially in the early years.
3. We **confirm** that the way languages are identified and classified changes by country, so herein we refer to first language as 'the language children speak and understand fluently.' This term can also be known in this document and elsewhere as their L1, home language, mother tongue, local language, etc., depending on the context. Further, some children growing up in multilingual communities may have more than one first language.

4. We **recognise** that our world is facing a foundational learning crisis, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and other crises and emergencies, with an estimated seventy (70) per cent of children in low- and middle-income countries unable to read and understand a simple text by age 10, as emphasised at the Transforming Education Summit in September 2022.
5. We **take note** of the opportunities first language-based multilingual education provides in advancing foundational learning, transforming education systems and contributing positively to emerging global issues such as digitalisation of education and greening education, particularly for linguistically marginalized groups such as ethnic minorities, indigenous persons, persons with disabilities and migrants/refugees.
6. We **recall** the evidence from the Asia-Pacific region and beyond, such as reported in previous editions of the Asia-Pacific Multilingual Education Working Group's International Conference on Language and Education series, that demonstrates the positive impact that well-planned, quality first language-based multilingual education policies and programmes have in improving foundational learning outcomes in languages and other subjects and contributing to children's holistic development.
7. We **emphasise** the urgent need for first language-based multilingual education policies, programmes and practices to accelerate learning, strengthen education systems and address the learning crisis through first languages.

## Section 2: Priority Areas for Action on First Language-based Multilingual Education

8. We therefore **prioritise action** in the following areas, which build upon the action plan contained in section 3 of the Bangkok Statement on Language and Inclusion (2019), and **call upon** our international, regional and national communities, including government officials, representatives of United Nations agencies, development partners and civil society organizations, members of research, youth, ethnolinguistic minority and indigenous communities, to further advance language in learning policies and transformation education systems:
  - i. We reaffirm the importance of **highlighting language(s)-of-instruction issues** through relevant research, policies and practices, and we call for action on:
    - Strengthening **high-quality research and nationally generated evidence** from the Asia-Pacific region on the languages learners speak and understand fluently such as through school-level language mapping and the linkage between first language-based multilingual education policies, programmes and practices and learning, particularly foundational literacy, numeracy and transferable skills, and emerging global issues such as technology and climate change.
  - ii. We reaffirm the importance of **fostering investment** for quality multilingual education by strengthening planning, monitoring and equitable financing, and we call for action on:
    - Systematically integrating first language-based multilingual education as a thematic topic in education sector review, analyses and planning processes and policy discussions with targeted, adequate and sustained **budget allocation**.

- iii. We reaffirm the importance of **enhancing the quality of first language-based multilingual education** by developing clear policies, strategies and guidelines, and we call for action on:
  - Developing, reviewing, evaluating and improving **the effectiveness of and implementation of first language-based multilingual education policies**, including national and sub-national policies that enable foundational learning to occur in the language that each learner understands and speaks fluently in the early years, followed by systematic introduction of additional languages (regional, national and international languages) while maintaining a first language component for as long as possible.
  - Developing high-quality culturally and linguistically relevant **teaching and learning materials**, in print and digital form, and aligned **classroom-based formative and summative assessments** that are appropriately designed to monitor the learning outcomes of multilingual learners.
  - Ensuring **options and multiple means** of accommodation, support, accessibility and engagement in the learning process, including for out-of-school learners, youth and adults, when language is identified as a barrier for learners but first language-based multilingual education is not yet available.
- iv. We reaffirm the importance of **diversifying the teacher workforce and building teacher capacity** through clear teacher development policies, strategies and guidelines, and we call for action on:
  - Aligning the **recruitment, training and deployment of teachers** with the needs of multilingual learners, ensuring that learners have teachers who share the same first language or are trained in first language-based and multilingual approaches to teaching and learning.
- v. We reaffirm the importance of **gathering, monitoring and reporting data disaggregated by first language**, correlated to the school attendance and learning outcomes of primary-aged children (SDG thematic indicator 4.5.2), and we call for action on:
  - Reviewing, improving and analysing **national data and indicators** to track correlations between language and learning on SDG indicators related to foundational learning including 4.6.1, 4.6.2 and 4.6.3, with focus on 4.5.2, which contributes to **SDG 4 national and regional mid-term and end-term** analyses and review processes.
- vi. We reaffirm the importance of **strengthening partnerships with relevant stakeholders and partners**, and we call for action on:
  - Engaging **relevant stakeholders at all stages** of the first language-based multilingual education planning and implementation process to ensure decisions are based on evidence and appropriate to the specific context.
  - Promoting the value of **local languages, cultures and knowledges**, with indigenous and ethnic minority communities in safeguarding local knowledge, building resilience and developing social-emotional learning (SEL) across sectors that contributes to **lifelong learning for the whole community**.

## Section 3: First language-based multilingual education as an accelerator of learning: The way forward

**9.** We will **take** these Priorities for Action as a framework for accelerating our national work to addressing the learning crisis, achieving SDG 4 and transforming education systems to be more inclusive and more resilient, and agree to **work** to advance these Priorities for Action, considering individual countries' national priorities and unique challenges, and to monitor and report on our progress against this framework at future events.

**10.** We **request** that the Asia-Pacific Multilingual Education Working Group, co-chaired by the UNESCO Regional Office in Bangkok and the UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office, to track progress on these Priorities for Action and support countries in the implementation of the identified priority areas by monitoring progress, identifying and providing opportunities for learning and capacity development, promoting cross-border policy dialogue, exchange and learning and facilitating evidence collection and advocacy promotion to help transform education systems with first language-based multilingual education.

### Stay in touch

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