



Multilingual Education Landscaping Exercise: Key Findings

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Full Form
AWC	Anganwadi Centre
AWW	Anganwadi Worker
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
DIKSHA	Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing
ELNI	Early Learning Network of India
FLN	Foundational Literacy and Numeracy
LLF	Language and Learning Foundation, Delhi
MLE	Multilingual Education
MoI	Medium of Instruction
MT	Mother tongue
MTB-MLE	Mother Tongue-based Multilingual Education
NCERT	National Council of Educational Research and Training
NCF-FS	National Curriculum Framework – Foundational Stage
NEP	National Education Policy
NIPUN	National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy
NDL	Non-Dominant Language
SCERT	State Council of Educational Research and Training
SIL	Summer Institute of Linguistics
TLM	Teaching-Learning Material
TPD	Teacher Professional Development
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

Executive Summary

Context and Objective

Despite constitutional and policy-level support for multilingual education (MLE) in India—most notably in the NEP (2020) and NCF-FS (2023)—implementation remains inconsistent and often superficial. The present landscaping study was undertaken to inform the Trusts' MLE strategy and funding roadmap for this sub-theme.

Methodology

The study used expert consultations, calls with organizations working in the domain, field visits in four states, and desk research to map the range of MLE efforts across the country.

Key Findings & Gaps Identified

1. **Predominance of Early-Exit Transitional Models:** Most MLE programs shift to the state language as medium of instruction (MoI) by Grade 3–4. Even Odisha's long-standing, state-mandated MLE program is early-exit.
2. **Equating MLE with Tribal Education:** Most programs focus on tribal communities. Other linguistic minorities (e.g. nomadic, coastal, or migrant groups in growing urban locations or border areas of states) remain neglected.
3. **Limited Models for Mixed-Language Classrooms:** Programs overwhelmingly target homogeneous-L1 (i.e., First language of children) classrooms. Pedagogical strategies for mixed-language settings, where children speak different languages at home and study in one classroom, are lacking.
4. **Neglect of Early Years (ECE):** Systematic and deliberate mother tongue-based ECE programs are rare in practice. Even where attempted (e.g. Odisha's MTELP+ program), sustainability of practices and reach are unclear.
5. **Curricular and Pedagogical Weaknesses:** Most MLE programs have weak integration with effective Foundational Literacy Numeracy (FLN) practices, limited engagement with children's literature, and lack effective strategies for multi-grade and mixed-language classrooms.
6. **Inadequate Teacher Preparation:** State-supported MLE programs often lack teacher-student language alignment. Most teacher training is ad hoc, with limited reach and continuity. Inclusion of MLE in pre-service teacher education curriculum and practice is completely missing.
7. **Tokenistic Cultural Integration:** While cultural symbols like festivals and artifacts are present, deeper curricular integration or community involvement is rare.
8. **Weak Ecosystem Coordination, Advocacy, and Funding Sustainability:** MLE work in India is supported by a small set of actors with fragmented funding and limited ecosystem coordination; large philanthropic foundations remain largely absent.

9. **Limited Research, Documentation, and Outcome Tracking:** Most MLE programs lack systematic research, program documentation, and tracking of student learning outcomes across languages and over time, to build strong evidence and knowledge.
10. **Lack of Developmentally-appropriate Children's Literature in Mother Tongues (MT):** There is a critical shortage of developmentally-appropriate and culturally-rooted children's books in tribal and minority languages, limiting opportunities for reading practice and engagement. As markets will not drive development of children's books, sustained support by government and philanthropy is needed.
11. **Technology application for MLE is largely untapped:** Despite growing technology applications for creation and collation of resources, its application in MLE seems to be limited at present, barring few open-source platforms where books developed or translated in tribal languages can be found.

Multilingual Education (MLE) Landscaping Exercise: Key Findings

I. Introduction

Multilingual Education (MLE) is an area of deep and pressing concern in our country where, by one estimate, approximately one in four primary school children experience moderate to severe learning disadvantage as they are taught in a language they do not understand¹. This issue is especially acute in regions with a high number of tribal languages, although it is by no means restricted to tribal populations. We recognise that it is unlikely that issues related to robust and defensible ideas of early learning can be addressed in a comprehensive manner without attending seriously to MLE.

Despite the long impetus given to mother-tongue education in important policies like the National Education Policy (NEP, 2020) and NCF-Foundational Stage (2023), states do not have a clear or focused strategy on how to provide children with appropriate MLE within complex linguistic and educational scenarios they face.

While the Trusts have done significant work in the spaces of literacy, literature and libraries in highly-disadvantaged and underserved regions, we are yet to have a comprehensive strategy and approach to the area of MLE. To help develop an MLE grant-making strategy for the Trusts, a subgroup within the Education theme undertook a short landscaping exercise to understand the current programs and MLE programming scenario in the country. The present document presents the findings from this landscaping exercise.

II. Objectives of the MLE Landscaping Exercise

1. To get a broad sense of the different mother-tongue-based (MT) and multilingual education (MLE) efforts across the country².
2. To understand the key features of these MT-based/MLE programs, their implementation in the field, and any ongoing and upcoming trends in MLE programming.
3. To design the Trusts' MLE strategy based on discussions with sector experts, field visits and analyses of key gap areas.

III. Methodology

1. **Consultation on MLE strategy** (7th Feb, 2025) where the Trusts' thrust on the theme as well as the landscaping exercise was introduced to key organizations and experts in the domain.
2. **Online meetings** with people associated with organizations running MT-based /MLE programs, or those who could lead us to important MLE programs that were not on our radar.
3. **Field visits to select MLE project areas** in Rajasthan (Dungarpur, LLF), Odisha (Keonjhar, State MLE program), Chhattisgarh (Bastar, LLF) and Maharashtra (Akola, Unnati Foundation).

¹ Jhingran, 2005.

² Please note that the current exercise does not cover English-language education efforts.

4. **Desk research on MLE programs** and material from organization websites; initial review of key literature, select program evaluation reports, reports commissioned by multilateral agencies on language-in-education programs in South Asia, and news articles on state-supported MLE programs.

IV. Organizations/Programs in the Landscaping Study

The tables in this section list the large-scale and relatively small-scale MT or MLE-based programs that came up during the landscaping study, and that were followed up to different degrees.

Large-Scale MLE Programs					
#	Prog/Org Name	Description	Desk research	Online Meetings	Field Visit
1	Odisha's MLE Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Started in 2005-06 10 tribal languages, 8 districts MLE Policy announced in 2014 Program was to be expanded to 21 languages. Current status – Just about functional in north Odisha districts showing interest. 	✓	✓	✓
2	Language and Learning Foundation	<p>Rajasthan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dugarpur district Earlier demonstration project (2019-2024) in 40 schools Ongoing MLE pilot: Started in 2024 in 100 schools (new block, old areas exited) Intervention in Grades 1-3 Wagdi language in both projects LLF's early demonstration of L1 inclusion in regular system <p>Chhattisgarh</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'Neev' programme in 2 districts (mainly Bastar, some work in Sukma) 1524 schools in Bastar; 60 in Sukma Started in 2022 with 200 demo schools Languages: Halbi, Bhatari, Gond. Uses 'bilingual-biliteracy' model, numeracy introduced in L1 too. <p>Jharkhand</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> State-supported MLE project 'Palash' planned in 7 districts: Khunti, West Singhbhum, Latehar, Dumka, Sahebganj, Lohardaga, Simdega. Work began in 4 districts in 2024 	✓	✓	✓

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1000 schools total where there is a language match between teachers and students • Earlier demo done in ~250 schools across the same 7 districts • 5 tribal languages: Ho, Khadia, Kudukh, Mundari, Santhali. <p>Odisha</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning MLE demonstration in 2 districts: Koraput & Nabrangpur • The Union Education Minister has shown interest in advancing MLE in Odisha. <p>Assam</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was scheduled for 2025-26, but stalled due to political reasons • Sonitpur (tea-garden area) • Planned in 120-200 schools • Sadri language; Material ready 			
3	Assam's tribal-language medium schools	<p>State-supported MT-based programs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 14-15 languages offered as MoIs by govt. at Foundational Stage: Assamese, Bodo, Bengali, English, Hindi, Garo, Manipuri, Hmar, Karbi, Rabha, Tiwa, Deori, Dimasa, Santali (and now Mising) • Textbooks are prepared by SCERT (with support from Literary Groups of each community - Sahitya Sabhas) and freely distributed for elementary levels like the main language <p>Bodo-medium schools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bodo medium education started in 1963 from Grades 1-4 and gradually being upgraded started in Grade 5-10 in 1968. From 2023-2024 it is started for class 11 Arts stream. It is running all along in the state. • Identity-based demands from the community, student unions, and literary societies. • Districts in the Bodoland Territorial Region • Devanagari script used for Bodo in Assam • Bodo medium continues up to Grade 10. Then transition to English medium. 	✓	✓	

		<p>Garo-medium schools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Running from the very beginning in 60s-70s. • These schools are along the Meghalaya border in Assam. • Roman script used for Garo in Assam • Garo medium up to Grade 8, then transition to English medium. <p>Mising-medium schools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mising was earlier introduced in ~250 schools, and later dropped. Now govt. will restart Mising as MoI from April 2025 in 200 schools (where 100% Mising children) • 8-10 districts in Assam. • Mising Agom Kebang (the Mising community cultural body) has already prepared books in Mising. Funds come from MAC but development and translation is done by SCERT in collaboration with MAK. • To start from Anganwadi & Grade 1 this year, and add one grade every year till G5. • Govt will bring teachers from other places to these Mising schools. They will receive 1–2-month training. 			
4	Room to Read, India	<p>Room to Read began integrating mother tongue insights into their global literacy model from 2016, emphasizing orality and phonics</p> <p><u>Key Projects from the Past:</u></p> <p>Rajasthan (Sirohi district)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 100 schools, 2016 onwards • Languages: Adivasi Garasia, Marwari, Rajput Garasi, Hindi. Devanagari script for all. • Sociolinguistic mapping and phoneme mapping by Minati Panda in Sirohi district • Wanted to try a translanguaging model, but the govt. pushed for a transition-to-Hindi model by the end of Grade 2. <p>Madhya Pradesh (Barwani district)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Languages: Wagdi & Nimari • Same model • <i>Implementation details not shared yet.</i> 		✓	

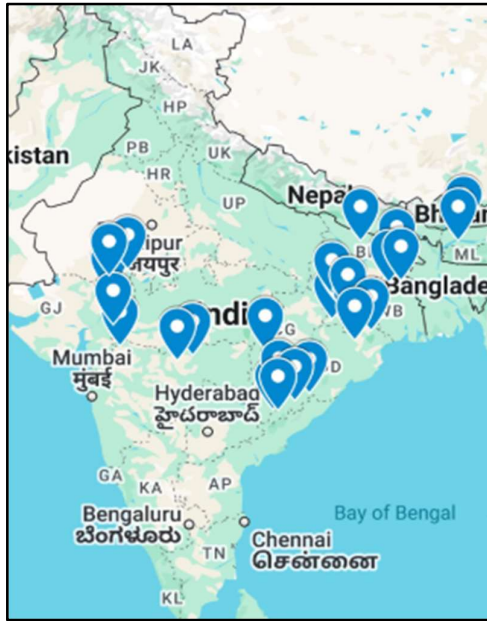
		USAID-IPEL-related projects <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some work in Bihar, UP, Jharkhand • Linguistic mapping done but political resistance to multilinguality. • Projects either did not start or stopped before implementation could deepen. Current status: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No active MLE programs running. • At best, L1 orality is built in through picture cards and culturally contextual story material, but do not use structured MT-based or bilingual materials. 			
5	Andhra MLE program (Discontinued)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Started in 2004 • 8 tribal languages • Started with 240 primary schools; later expanded to ~1350 schools • Discontinued after 5 years 	~		

Small-scale MLE Programs

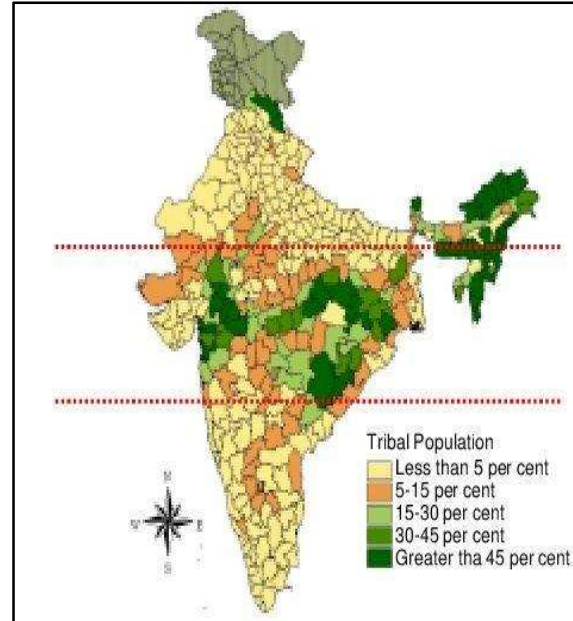
#	Prog/Org Name	Description	Desk research	Online Meetings	Field Visit
1	Unnati ISEC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maharashtra • Akola district • 4 schools (Grades 2-4) 	✓	✓	✓
2	Aragamee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Odisha (South) • Rayagada and Koraput • 37 Village Learning Centres + 1 Aragamee school in Kashipur block, Koraput 	✓	✓	
3	Asha Kiran Foundation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Odisha (South) • Koraput and Malkangiri • 14 MLE Centres (in and out of government schools) • Mother tongue-based programme LKG to Grade 3. For Grade 4 and 5, they transition to state material 	✓	✓	
4	Nirmaan Society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rajasthan (South) • Udaipur & Chittorgarh districts • Will pilot Mother-tongue Based MLE program in 5 private and 10 government schools from 2025 • Model inspired by standard SIL model 	✓	✓	
5	Suchana NGO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • West Bengal • Birbhum district 	✓		

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The Multilingual Early Learning Group (ELG) in 3 village centres for about 150 children from 9 villages 			
6	Aripana Foundation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Bihar (North) ● Darbhanga (high flood-prone area) ● 3 govt. schools ● Teaching in Maithili is slowly picking up. Main focus seems to be English language teaching, library work, and some support work in AWCs. ● Supported AI for Bharat and Bhashini projects with Maithili language recordings and digitisation of resources. 	✓	✓	
7	Ganesh Devy's Adivasi Academy's MLE school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Gujarat (Tejgarh) ● One residential MLE school as part of Adivasi Academy 	✓	✓	
8	QUEST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Maharashtra ● Amravati district (Chikhaldara, Dharni) ● MT-based education (or Marathi-bilingual instruction) inputs to 462 AWWs. ● Full-fledged MLE pilot planned in 3-5 schools tracked for at least 3 years (Grades 1-3) 	✓	✓	
9	Pratham	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Assam ● Keonjhar & Chirang ● Community-based learning model in 25 villages ● MLE-inspired, play-based bilingual intervention. Focus on home language first, transition to school language (Assamese) 	✓	✓	

A rough mapping of the geographies covered by these projects is shown in the figure below on the left. It overlaps, almost perfectly, with the 'Central Indian Tribal Belt' shown on the figure on the right. (This aspect is discussed in more detail in the next section).



Rough map of MLE programs in the landscaping exercise
(~30 districts, 9 states)



District-wise Percentage Tribal Population Map³
(9-10 states in the central belt of India)

V. Key Observations and Trends from the Landscaping Study

1. Multilingual education is interpreted differently by different organizations and States.

Experts in the MLE literature often define ‘multilingual education’ as the use of two or more languages as the *medium of instruction* (MoI) *for subjects other than the languages themselves*, either simultaneously or sequentially at different points in education. This definition has been extended by adding “and with high levels of multilingualism and, preferably, multiliteracy as a goal at the end of formal schooling”⁴. Based on these features, we have found programs falling on different points on the **continuum from ‘non-forms’ to ‘weak forms’ to ‘strong-forms’ of MLE programs**⁵. Some examples:

- Only mother-tongue based early childhood programs (e.g. Asha Kiran Society in Odisha).
- Bilingual-biliteracy programs where student’s home languages (or L1) are included as one of the two languages taught in the early grades, but the formal school MoI is still the state/regional language. Further, once the curriculum fully transitions to the state language in Grade 3 or 4, student L1s are no longer taught in school (e.g. LLF’s program in Bastar district).
- Programs like the Odisha MLE project starts with student L1 as the MoI (so subjects Math and EVS are also taught in this language), and slowly transitions to Odia as MoI over 3 years, starting with only-oral introduction and later moving to literacy in Odia. Student L1s continue to be taught as subjects in Grade 4 and 5.

³ Source: Phansalkar & Verma, 2004.

⁴ Mohanty *et al.*, 2009, as cited in Mohanty, 2019, p.164.

⁵ Based on Skutnabb-Kangas & McCarty, 2008, as cited in Mohanty, 2019.

- In programs mandated by states like Assam in certain tribal-dominated areas and languages (e.g. Garo, Boro, Mising), the official MoI remains the tribal language throughout elementary school years, and then transitions to English in Grades 8 or 10 or beyond.

The program designs are often determined by practical limitations in the field and the willingness of the state, and not necessarily by a lack of knowledge about desirable and effective models among the people running these programs. However, this still merits discussion because varied program designs are being clubbed under 'MLE' programs. Many of these programs count it as a big win if the MTs find a place in the classrooms – to whatever extent and in whichever form.

2. Most 'MLE programs' are early-exit, transitional programs.

International scholarship as well as several policy frameworks recommend that the student L1 be continued as MoI (or at least be taught as a subject) till the end of elementary school (Grade 8; or, at the very least, until Grade 5). However, even the "strongest" form of MLE program in our landscaping exercise—the Odisha MLE program—is an 'early-exit' program, as the MoI shifts to Odia in Grade 3-4 and student L1 is taught only till Grade 5. Even in Grades 1 and 2, both L1 and regional language are taught to students, because teachers fear that without that, students would not be able to easily transition to regional language in later grades. In this context, most of the MLE programs reviewed in the current landscaping study would be considered "very early-exit" programs that aim to bridge students from their home languages to the formal MoI (or state language) as soon as possible, **without any plan to build student capability in their L1s once the transition is over in the curriculum.** Such programs, however, claim that they "allow" children to continue to use L1 orally during classroom discussions even after this official transition. Perhaps the only exception to this trend are some State-supported programs like the ones in Assam, where schools designated as Bodo-, Garo-, or Mising-medium will continue to be taught subjects in these languages till the end of elementary grades, at the very least. But, as these programs were not studied in great detail, it is difficult to say what goes on in these schools with certainty.

3. A majority of the current MLE-related efforts seem to be smaller-scale projects run by civil-society organizations in tribal areas.

These efforts range from 1 to 40 schools or learning centres spread across one-two districts, and could be operating within the school or outside (sometimes on the school premises but before or after school hours). When operating outside of the formal school system, these programs usually hire and train local youth to run classes. Mostly, these "volunteers" are 10th or 12th pass, with very few of them being graduates.

4. MLE is often equated with tribal education.

Even though India is a richly multilingual country with various kinds of linguistic diversity present in classrooms, the MLE programmes in the current scenario are largely focused in tribal areas. Perhaps this overlap is the reason why most of the MLE programs covered in this landscaping exercise fall within the 'Central Indian Tribal Belt' covering ~9-10 states from west to east (see maps in the earlier section). Even when programs have focused on

inter-state border areas where children face major linguistic hurdles, the focus is either on bridging children from a known tribal language to one of the major regional languages of the area, or on providing education materials in two regional languages along the borders of the same tribal areas. We came across only one small-scale program that uses a non-tribal language student language (Maithili) where the community is facing poor educational outcomes and severe economic disadvantage. We did not come across any other programs that focus on **multilingual situations involving non-tribal languages where children may struggle** (e.g. inter-state migratory populations like Bengali-speaking children in Bengaluru; or urban multilingual settings where a single classroom might have children speaking multiple state languages). From anecdotal information, informal approaches like asking for peer support, using flash cards, translanguaging and explaining word meanings by teachers where they know some of these languages are perhaps being used, but we haven't come across a systematic program to address such difficult and tricky situations.

Dr. G.N. Devy⁶, cultural activist, literary critic and leader of the People's Linguistic Survey of India, has also alerted the Trusts team to consider the **nomadic and coastal displaced communities**, in addition to tribal (Adivasi) communities and migrant labour groups, given their linguistic and socio-economic marginalisation.

5. With rare exceptions, almost all MLE programs studied address homogeneous language situations where there is one majority tribal language or L1 in a school.

Notably, Odisha MLE program and LLF's demonstration projects (~200 schools in each such project) selected *only* schools that had >80-90% children who speak the same L1. However, situations where multiple languages are spoken in a single classroom—either in tribal/rural settings or in urban migratory community settings—have not been adequately addressed through these MLE programs. In LLF's recent district-wide scale up program in Bastar, there are ~20% schools that have mixed languages, and they are only beginning to plan what an MLE intervention in such schools could look like. Some of the smaller-scale projects (e.g., Agragamee in Odisha and the one residential school of the Adivasi Academy) claim to be running their MLE programs with multiple L1s in the same classrooms, but this has not been observed in action by the Trusts team. From Dr. G.N. Devy's experience in the Adivasi Academy school, this requires high levels of teacher training, discernment and autonomy to handle multiple MoIs together in the same classroom. In such cases, the teacher works in the ways that she deems best towards achieving clear curricular goals, while the prescribed textbooks and material often take a backseat⁷.

6. Dearth of ongoing mother-tongue based or MLE programs in pre-primary years.

Odisha made a significant early effort to integrate students' mother tongues into pre-primary education by developing the *Naba Arunima* (or *Nua Arunima*) curricula in 10 tribal languages between 2012 and 2015⁸. This initiative was reportedly scaled up as the 'Mother Tongue-Based Early Learning and Parents+ (MTELP+) Programme (2016–2021), reaching 7,202

⁶ G. N. Devy, personal communication, 15 April 2025.

⁷ Ibid.

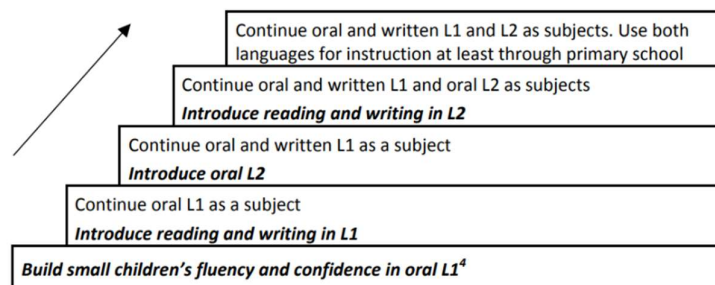
⁸ Lepcha, U. (n.d.).

Anganwadi Centres across 12 tribal districts. The programme aimed to strengthen the capacity of AWWs and ICDS managers to support children's transition to formal schooling, while enhancing community and parental engagement. An evaluation⁹ found that it improved AWWs' capacity and attitudes, increased classroom use of home languages, and strengthened community engagement. However, gaps remained in multilingual strategies for mixed-language settings, quality of TLMs, and depth of parental involvement. The current status of this project could not be ascertained. Alarming, the MLE coordinator for Keonjhar (one of the districts in the MTELP+ study) said he has never heard of the project! This suggests that even well-designed initiatives may not always translate into sustained field-level presence or visibility.

Organizations like LLF and QUEST plan to intervene in this space but do not yet have a program for early years that fully integrates children's mother tongues into the curriculum and pedagogy. From among the smaller-scale projects, only two (Asha Kiran and Suchana) are intervening in this space currently, but this may not be in any systematic manner. Anecdotally, many organizations with ECE programs may be encouraging the AWW to interact with children in their L1s, and perhaps providing some supplementary books and material to support this process. Lack of systematic access to their L1 during children's early years of schooling, is an important finding of this study.

7. Most MLE programs use a variation of the 'classic' progression plan

Most of the bilingual / MLE programs covered in the current landscaping exercise use some variation of the 'classic' progression plan, shown in the figure here¹⁰.



Based on this general progression plan, context-specific and grade-wise plans are drawn up. For example, the following figure shows the grade-wise transition plan for the Odisha MLE program.

⁹ Jamia Millia Islamia & Bernard van Leer Foundation, 2021

¹⁰ Source: Malone, Susan E. "Planning Mother-Tongue-Based Education Programs in Minority Language Communities." *SIL Global*, 2010.

	Class-I	Class-II	Class-III	Class-IV	Class-V
MT language learning	Language in MT – Oral & Written (alphabets)	Language in MT – Developing proficiency – Oral & written	Language in MT	MT as subject	MT as subject
Mathematics	Math in MT	Math in MT	Math in MT	Math in L2 (Odia)	Math L2 (Odia)
EVS	Environmental studies in MT	Environmental studies in MT	Environmental studies in MT	Environmental studies in MT and Odia	Environmental studies in Odia
Second language learning (Odia)		Oral & Written (alphabets)	Developing proficiency in Reading & writing	Odia as language subject	Odia as language subject
Third language learning (English)			Oral & Written (alphabets)	English as Language subject - Developing proficiency in Reading & writing	English as language subject

Variations of the classic progression model have been observed in terms of:

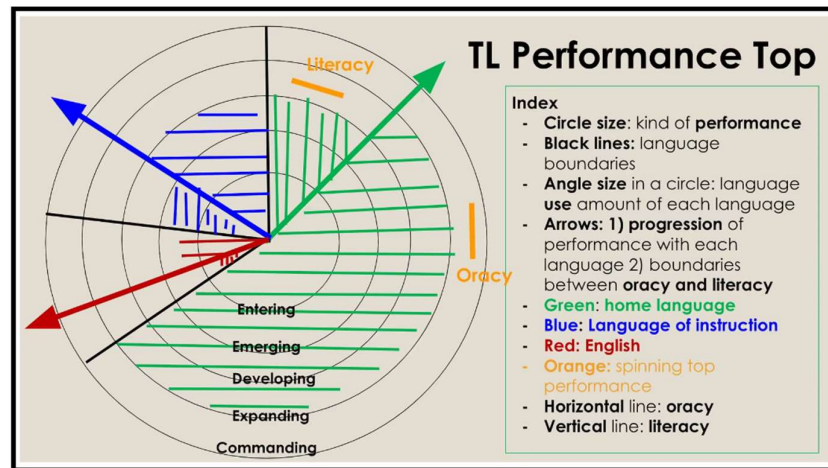
- Most programs use L1 as MoI only till Grade 3.
- Early introduction of L2 (both oracy and literacy), sometimes right from the very early months of Grade 1.
- Integrated teaching of L1 and L2 observed in some programs (e.g., LLF, complemented with bilingual textbooks and workbooks) whereas others teach L1 and L2 separately (e.g., Odisha MLE project and most SIL-supported programs)
- Teaching of L1 as a subject beyond Grade 3 continues in some programs (e.g., Odisha MLE project, SIL-supported projects) whereas others drop L1 after the official transition to L2/regional language as MoI.

Classic progression models presuppose that *all students are monolingual in their L1* (Son, 2014). However, there is growing recognition that except in some cases, like highly-remote, tribal settings, most students in India are likely to be emergent bi/multilingual and use the multiple languages in their repertoire flexibly and in inter-connected ways. For example, a child may use Marathi grammar with Warli vocabulary inserted in; or, the other way around. Given students' translanguaging capabilities, some recent models¹¹ encourage designing curricula and assessments that look at students' use of all of their languages *together* rather than just looking at their independent capabilities in these languages. This is conceptualised akin to a spinning top of linguistic resources as opposed to a static top (see figure¹² below). In such conceptualizations, the interventions would be designed to enable students to progress in each language from *entering* to *emerging* to *developing* to *expanding* up to the

¹¹ For example: TOP model (<https://www.translanguagingeducation.org/tl-performance-top>)

¹² Source: Sangsok Son, SIL Global, 2024, <https://www.translanguagingeducation.org/tl-performance-top>

commanding level; and to know how to draw upon their integrated linguistic repertoires in skilful and flexible ways.



While SIL International reports that it has started piloting projects based on translanguaging in Thailand, in this landscaping study, we did not come across programs that have begun to design interventions based on such conceptualisations. Adapting this model to a systematic curricular, pedagogical and assessment design will require extensive piloting and refinement; and the feasibility of recommending such programmes to governments for large-scale adoption will also need to be considered.

8. Availability of teachers or para-teachers who know students' L1 is variable across programs and contexts.

- A critical feature of the Odisha MLE program was that each MLE school had teachers who could use the target tribal language and the state language, Odia. This was ensured through selecting teachers from the same language background or by transferring them from other schools¹³. Where qualified teachers were not available, youth from the community who had completed schooling up to Grades 8 or 10, were selected and trained for implementation of the MLE program. Later on, many of these volunteers were regularized as MLE *Shiksha Sahayaks*.
- Most of the smaller-scale projects also hire local youth from the community (minimum qualification of 10th pass; some are 12th pass and others graduates) who know the local tribal language(s) and train them. For example, Agrabamee (Odisha) claims to rigorously train its learning centre volunteers and supplement the training with Agrabamee school visits, followed by repeat training after a year or so. Similarly, Asha Kiran (Odisha) gives a one-week training at the start of each trimester to their village level volunteers to run their village centres.
- In LLF's Bastar program, however, teachers in government schools are *not specially selected or matched* based on their knowledge of children's L1. In several schools, teachers are from outside of Bastar and do not come knowing local, tribal languages like Halbi, Bhatari, etc. and are now trying to learn. Many factors affect teachers'

¹³ Jhingran, 2019

success in reaching students whose home languages they don't know, such as, teacher motivation to acquire a new language and also the linguistic distance between the school and home language. For example, it may be easier for Hindi-speaking teachers to learn or understand Halbi because of their similarity, but not Gondi, which is from an entirely different language family. Some of the teachers working in such scenarios claimed that supports such as the structured material provided by LLF helps them in learning the language as well as in delivering a mother-tongue based bilingual programme with greater ease.

- d. Some organizations offer government teachers avenues to learn student languages. For example, Unnati ISEC (Maharashtra) has developed a 3-month course for teachers to pick up functional use of Korku language – the tribal language they work with in Akola-Amravati districts. Apparently, several teachers from *Ashramshalas* (tribal residential schools) have taken it up and are happy that they can now access their students' language.

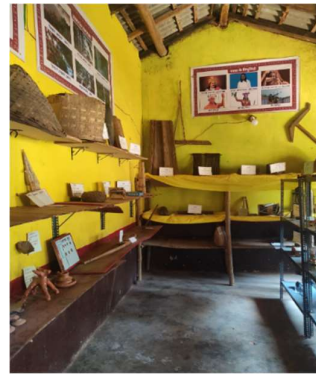
9. Attempts to make the MLE curriculum and approach culturally-rooted were variable across programs, and in some cases even tokenistic.

MLE programs are not based only on the inclusion of student home languages in the education system, but should ideally also be about engendering respect for local cultures and traditions as well as preserving community-based knowledge.

- Most MLE programs aim to make their **curriculum, material and pedagogy culturally relevant** through inclusion of local cultural themes, illustrations from local contexts and daily life by hiring local illustrators, and use of traditional poems, festivals and games. For example, in LLF's picture conversation charts in Bastar, the images depict local festival-related processions, local waterfalls, and common games in the community (see image below). Another example is their festival-themed *akshara* grid from where children can form names of local Halbi festivals like *diyaari*, *aamtihaar*, *goncha*, *aamus* and *pora*. However, without a more detailed analysis of the material, it is not possible to claim the cultural vibrancy of the curriculum with certainty.
- In Keonjhar, one of the Odisha MLE districts, 'Link Indigenous Knowledge Corners' (or LINK corners) were set up in MLE schools in 2017, where artifacts from children's home communities were displayed and used in classroom interactions. However, these are **not dynamic and vibrant uses of indigenous knowledge systems**, but are mostly used in very mechanical and tokenistic ways—like asking children to name various objects kept on the shelf (see image below), or to count spokes on a drum made by a local tribe!



- In terms of **engagement with local communities**, LLF has included the components of **Storytelling Festival (STF)** and **School Museums** in their program (see images below). Overall, the sense was that these two elements are yet to be developed to their full potential through more authentic and frequent engagements with the community members, and involving them more deliberately into the education intervention. Similarly, in Odisha, the Ho community members reported that the school had ever asked community members to come into the school to share stories, or songs, or folk knowledge, though they were excited about the prospect of doing so. From some of these observations, it seems that cultural elements are making only a tokenistic and superficial appearance in the MLE curricula, even if their original imagination was to create a live or dynamic site of exchange between home and school cultures.



10. Lack of integration of effective FLN frameworks and pedagogies with MLE programs, including use of children's literature as part of language education.



The MLE programs visited for the landscaping study all had varying degrees of success with integrating effective language teaching theories and pedagogies. Most MLE programs, in general, seem to think it is enough to include children's languages in the curriculum by way of local songs, words, picture dictionaries, some Big Books, and the like, without paying adequate attention to curricular planning, differentiation and effective instructional strategies. These challenges are not unique to MLE programs, and can be seen across language classrooms in the country. Some examples of issues observed during the field visits are listed here.

- i. Older state-wide MLE programs (e.g. Odisha's) have **static curricula and pedagogy** that have not been revisited or revised for a number of years.
- ii. **Poorly prepared teachers** in terms of understanding of why certain approaches are important, why certain activities are effective and how to modify their teaching to suit different learner needs, even if they are able to "implement the curriculum" to a basic degree.
- iii. **Very low emphasis on oral language development, deeper comprehension, or writing for expression.** Expanded oral conversations were not observed in any classroom – even the best of discussions seemed like Q&A ping pong even though the teacher might be asking a couple of 'why' and elaboration questions.
- iv. **Poorly planned phonics and fluency curriculum**, despite the presence of classroom print and the innovative TLM. For example, in one program, all the *aksharas* are taught in Grade 1 to keep pace with the state curriculum though this does not align with what we know about how long children take to learn extensive symbol sets of most Indian scripts.
- v. **Pedagogical effectiveness of popular routines was questionable.** For example, children were seen choral repeating line-by-line after the teacher during a "big book" activity - which is known to be an ineffective language pedagogy.
- vi. **Lack of rich children's literature**, and simply not enough meaningful texts for children to read. Development of classroom libraries or use of CL (beyond a limited set of big books and a couple of small books given as part of most large-scale MLE programs) were not seen. In fact, it is some of the smaller-scale projects in our study that are leading efforts to develop literature in minority or tribal languages, and take children's literature to students in their regions through school or community library programs (e.g. Unnati, Agrabamee, Suchana and Aripaana Foundation).
- vii. **Lingering monolingual approaches for multilingual children.** As mentioned earlier in the report, classic progression models of MLE as well as the programs based on them teach each language separately. However, languages do not reside as "water-tight compartments" in people's brains and cannot be taught and learnt separately¹⁴. Children learn new languages by using their strong, familiar language as a scaffold. The use of 'mixed' language is a powerful strategy in the process of learning unfamiliar languages¹⁵. LLF teaches L1 and L2 (Hindi) together in their Bastar program; even the textbook and workbooks are bilingual. However, the limitation might be that of the rush to move students to Hindi as soon as possible as it is the official MoI.
- viii. **Lesson objectives and pedagogy mismatched to children's levels of learning.** **This was more pronounced in multi-grade classrooms**, a common reality in the districts visited. Sessions in multigrade classrooms were usually held in a single large group, with no differentiation for children of different grades or ability levels, despite the availability of textbooks for each grade. A notable *exception* was LLF's Bastar program where the multigrade classrooms are managed through structured inputs in the teacher guide. The image presented below shows daily plans for Grades 1 & 2 in the same place, while also clearly identifying common activities to be done with the whole class. Similarly, the student workbook has differently-

¹⁴ Jhingran, 2019, p.65.

¹⁵ Ibid.

coloured sections to identify parts that the teacher needs to directly teach and parts that children can do themselves, while the teacher works with the other group. This is a good start to help teachers think of differentiation, though the uptake and effectiveness may be another thing to be considered.

सप्ताह-12							
दिवस	मौखिक भाषा विकास/पाठ्यपुस्तक पर कार्य और संबंधित लेखन	डिकोडिंग और संबंधित लेखन	पठन		टैकर		
	15-20 मिनट	10 मिनट	कक्षा-1	कक्षा-2	कक्षा-1	कक्षा-2	
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> कविता/बालगीत चित्र चार्ट पर चर्चा- हाट संबंधित लेखन 	TPR (भाषा)	शिक्षक के साथ- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> '1' मात्रा पर कार्य डिकोडिंग का खेल शिक्षक के बिना- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> अभ्यासपुस्तिका पर कार्य- पाठ 62 	शिक्षक के बिना (ग्रे हिस्सा)- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> अभ्यासपुस्तिका पर कार्य- पाठ 56 शिक्षक के साथ (सफेद हिस्सा)- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> पाठ 'तरई' पठन की गतिविधियाँ 	बिग बुक पठन और सामान्य चर्चा- हाथी आउर बोकड़ी	अभ्यासपुस्तिका खंड 2 का पढ़ती अभ्यास-33	<input type="checkbox"/> हस्ताक्षर 
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> कविता/बालगीत चित्र चार्ट पर चर्चा- दशहरा संबंधित लेखन 	TPR (भाषा)	शिक्षक के साथ- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> '1' मात्रा पर कार्य डिकोडिंग का खेल शिक्षक के बिना- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> अभ्यासपुस्तिका पर कार्य- पाठ 63 	शिक्षक के बिना (ग्रे हिस्सा)- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> अभ्यासपुस्तिका पर कार्य- पाठ 57 (पाठ 'तरई' पर आधारित अभ्यास कार्य) शिक्षक के साथ (सफेद हिस्सा)- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> पाठ 'तालाब' पठन की गतिविधियाँ 	बिग बुक पठन और विस्तृत चर्चा- हाथी आउर बोकड़ी	अभ्यासपुस्तिका खंड 2 का पढ़ती अभ्यास-34	<input type="checkbox"/> हस्ताक्षर 

11. Limited professional development efforts around MLE in the country.

There are few professional development (PD) offerings for MLE in the country. The ones that came up in the landscaping exercise reflect meaningful progress in this space but this development is still led by a few key organizations without limited institutional uptake:

- The *Certificate Course on Multilingual Education* developed by SIL International in collaboration with Guwahati University, was launched in 2022. Offered to postgraduate students of Linguistics and English, this two-week course is structured around four units—MLE theory, foundational learning in the home language, bridging strategies, and strategy and advocacy. While originally developed in English, most materials have been translated into Hindi, with potential for broader rollout. With supportive interest from UNICEF, the next step is to ascertain institutional commitment (university) and funding support.
- The Language and Learning Foundation (LLF) has developed a suite of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) courses tailored to various education stakeholders, including teachers, Cluster Academic Coordinators, administrators, and DIET faculty in LLF's project areas. These offerings evolved from a single module within a foundational literacy course into a structured set of 4-6-week short-term programs. Most of these courses include both awareness-building and pedagogical training (the latter designed around LLF's structured program and teacher guides). Key offerings include foundational MLE concepts, the use of children's home languages in classrooms, second language instruction, and supervisory approaches for administrators. These programs have been implemented in districts such as Dungarpur (Rajasthan) and Bastar (Chhattisgarh). LLF has also developed an MLE course for NISHTHA 3.0, in partnership with NCERT and the MoE.

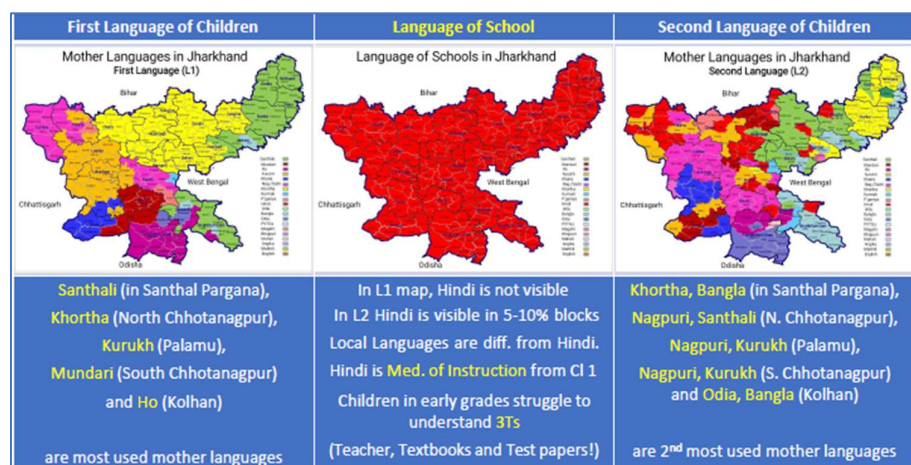
Additional Findings

1. **Across bilingual-biliteracy programs, the script of the dominant/state language/L2 is used to teach literacy in L1, with a few exceptions.**

This is the case not only when L1 doesn't have a script but also when a language may have other regional or native scripts. For example, Gondi has conventionally been written in multiple scripts like Telugu, Devanagari and has literature in native scripts like Masaram Gondi script and Gunjala Gondi script. However, in Bastar, LLF has chosen the state language script (Devanagari for Hindi) for Gondi so that children do not experience an additional "cognitive burden". Perhaps the only exception to this situation was noted for Santhali in the Odisha MLE program, where the native Ol-Chiki script is used in textbooks and other material.

2. **Most of the district-wide and state-wide MLE projects start with a language mapping exercise.**

It goes without saying that larger programmes often start with a language-mapping exercise. But, sometimes, even smaller-scale projects do linguistic and sociocultural surveys to inform their interventions. The target respondents in these surveys vary. For example, in LLF's Bastar language survey, teachers were asked to fill in forms based on Grade-1 children's language profile in respective schools. In an older survey done in Jharkhand (2013), experts went into the field to survey children, community members, and teachers to arrive at language use maps. The findings from these language mapping exercises are largely used to build on advocacy efforts **to get governments to pay attention and to build support for MT-based education programs**. For example, in Jharkhand, findings from the 2013 survey apparently impacted states' policy—the government agreed to promote mother tongue in pre-primary and primary levels and, for the first time, teachers were expected to know student L1s at the time of recruitment¹⁶. (See figure¹⁷ below for the stark representation of the mismatch between student MTs and school MoI from the Jharkhand survey report).



¹⁶ Dr. Binay Pattanayak, personal communication, 12 March 2025

¹⁷ Language Diversity in Jharkhand (2013)

3. **A range of funders of MLE programs identified in the landscaping study, marked by a relative absence of major philanthropic foundations.**

- The state-wise MLE programs, like that of Odisha and Andhra, were **largely funded by the States**, with technical inputs and programmatic facilitation by international agencies like UNICEF and Summer Institute for Linguistics (SIL).
- Other programs reviewed here were **largely supported by CSR funds**. For example, LLF's Bastar 3-year demonstration project was funded by HCL, while its current district-wide project is funded by Deloitte. Similarly, Agramee's village learning centres in South Odisha are funded by SEPL.
- For some of the smaller-scale projects, funding sources include **HNIs** (e.g. for the Agramee school) or **informal fundraising groups** (e.g. 'Friends of Suchana' based in UK), or **religious charities** (e.g. UK-based Project Possible for Asha Kiran's work in Odisha for the last 15 years).
- **Major philanthropic foundations were conspicuous by their absence.** The exceptions are: WIPRO Foundation has funded Unnati's MLE experiment in Maharashtra for 8 years, and SDTT had funded Agramee's tribal education efforts in the past. But, there is both scope and need for greater engagement by major philanthropies to engage with MLE work.
- **Approximate budgets needed to run large-scale but 'low-touch' interventions:** The approximate budget for LLF's district-wide MLE project in Bastar is INR 3 crores per year for the whole team and provision of curricular material in schools. (This translated to approximately INR 700 per child). However, this is a low-touch model with a team size of ~25 people, scale of ~1500 schools, such that each LLF field staff may have up to 80-110 schools under them and they visit each school *only once* in 2-3 months! It should be noted that we are **not recommending** that MLE interventions be run in this low-touch manner. More intensive and effective interventions are likely to **require larger team sizes and hence bigger budgets**.

4. **Digital tools are expanding access to teaching-learning material in diverse languages.**

India's MLE ecosystem is evolving through open-source content platforms, AI-powered translation, and interactive literacy tools, all designed to include young learners across linguistic and socio-economic divides. Three emerging trends are listed here.

1. **Open-Source and Community-Driven Platforms:**

Platforms like StoryWeaver and SIL International's Bloom empower communities to create and translate storybooks and learning materials in indigenous and marginalized languages. StoryWeaver hosts over 40,000 books in 306 languages, including endangered tribal languages like Gondi, Korku, and Santhali. It also funds translation efforts by grassroots organizations. SIL's Bloom Library and Bloom Software offer story creation, audio narration, offline access, and culturally relevant materials in over 1,000 languages, including Maithili and Gondi.

2. **Digital Tools for Literacy and Language Learning:**

Technology tools such as Alpha Tiles App (offers spelling and phonics games in 141

languages globally) and Primer Prep (offers letter-teaching analysis for different languages) engage children in foundational literacy while supporting script diversity. Additional tools like Keyman and Webonary enable multilingual input and dictionary development, contributing to broader language documentation and educational use.

3. **Government-led AI Initiatives for Language Inclusion:**

The Bhashini Project, under Digital India, uses AI and NLP to democratize digital access in 22 scheduled and several non-dominant languages. It supports voice and text translation, enabling digital textbooks and early learning platforms like *e-Jaadui Pitara*. Applications like NIPUN Lakshya App assess reading fluency using speech recognition, promoting data-informed literacy support.

The Trusts' team is yet to review the pedagogical soundness and effectiveness of these tools; however, looking seriously at funding organisations working on high quality digital tools appears to be a promising direction to take.

5. **Emerging professional networks as catalysts for MLE advocacy in India: *National Consortium for Multilingual Education-India (NCMLEI)***

The National Consortium for Multilingual Education-India (NCMLEI) is a collaborative platform that brings together organizations, institutions, and individuals committed to strengthening multilingual education (MLE) across the country. Anchored by the Language and Learning Foundation (LLF), the Consortium works to build a shared understanding of MLE, promote effective practices, and advocate for supportive policies.

- NCMLEI is guided by a Steering Committee comprising LLF, UNICEF, British Council, SIL, and Room to Read India. Currently, NCMLEI has around 33 members, including those from NCERT and NIEPA, academic experts such as Prof. Minati Panda, and several NGOs.
- Regular member meetings serve as platforms to share organizational updates and discuss state-level MLE initiatives.
- In terms of advocacy, NCMLEI will soon bring out a position paper to provide strategic direction to stakeholders. Additional policy briefs and publications are planned. NCMLEI is also collaborating with NCERT to integrate MLE into NCERT's teacher training and national events. The Consortium is also engaging internationally through conversations with UNESCO's Asia-Pacific MLE Working Group.
- The Consortium has also undertaken several initiatives to build capacity and foster dialogue. Its bi-monthly webinar series combines theory with field-based MLE practices, while the (recently launched) quarterly newsletter shares updates from the field, research insights, and advocacy news.
- Most activities are currently funded by LLF, with no dedicated donor support yet.

VI. Key Gaps Identified from the Landscaping Exercise

1. Limited Examples of Strong or Truly Additive Bilingual Education.

- Most MLE programs are early-exit models, transitioning to the state language by Grade 3, whereas national policies and global research recommends mother-tongue based education to continue for at least 5 years in school.
- Very few programs teach student L1 as a subject after transitioning to the L2 or state language as the MoI. Even in those programs, L1 is not taught beyond the primary levels. Ideally, L1 should be continued until at least Grade 5, if not longer.

2. Narrow Focus on Tribal Education in MLE programs.

- There is an overwhelming focus on tribal communities in the current MT-based or MLE programs. While due attention to tribal languages is critical, there is an urgent need to go beyond.
- Minimal attention is paid—at least through systematic programs—to other, non-tribal cultural-linguistic minorities. Examples include nomadic groups, displaced coastal communities, regional language minority groups and seasonal or long-term labour migrants.

3. Lack of Systematic Intervention Models for Classrooms with Multiple Home Languages

- Most systematic MLE programs designed for schools where children speak the same mother tongue ('homogeneous L1 schools').
- Little research or systematic models to support teaching-learning in mixed-language classrooms (that is, where children who speak multiple languages)—a common situation in tribal areas as well as in inter-state border areas and urban migratory settings.
- In fact, in almost all intervention programmes, the issue of multiple languages in classrooms exists and is viewed as a challenge to teachers. There is an urgent need to address this challenge in a way that supports teachers and students to make use of children's L1s productively in classrooms.

4. Neglect of Pre-primary Years

- Minimal systematic, structured interventions targeting the critical 3-6 age group, even if informally there might be some inclusion of home-languages in the AWC. Scarce mother tongue-based ECE programs that were attempted in the past (e.g. Odisha), their continuation in the field could not be ascertained.
- This is an area of urgent need identified by our study, because children need systematic access to their L1 during their early years of schooling.

5. Weak Integration of Effective FLN Pedagogy, Differentiation, & Multilingual Approaches

- Limited emphasis on effective pedagogical principles for foundational literacy and numeracy, teaching of comprehension, writing for expression, and use of children's literature in most MLE programs studied.
- Teaching in multigrade classrooms often lacks differentiation, with curricular planning and pedagogy poorly aligned to varied student levels. LLF's Bastar model shows early promise in addressing this issue through structured guidance.
- Many MLE programs treat languages as separate subjects, even though children often use a mix of languages in their natural communication. LLF's approach in Bastar—where L1 (Halbi or Bhatari) and Hindi are taught together using bilingual materials—offers a more integrated approach, though the quick shift to the state language as medium of instruction may limit its potential.
- Translanguaging is still largely missing in design and pedagogy, and there is no clarity yet on how this pedagogy translates to systematic classroom instruction.

6. Inadequate Teacher Preparation and Deployment for MLE programs

- Most (current) state-supported MLE programs lack systematic recruitment or redeployment strategies that align teachers' language backgrounds with those of their students. This limits the effectiveness—and in some cases, the feasibility—of delivering instruction in the students' mother tongues. Such alignment is observed mainly in small-scale, NGO-led programs where local youth are recruited to support instruction in children's home languages.
- A national framework for integrating MLE into pre-service teacher education is absent. In-service MLE training is ad hoc, small-scale, and largely confined to NGO-led programs and geographies. Most of these training programs are short-term and may lack institutional continuity.
- Teachers need much more preparation than what is available now to support culturally-responsive classroom practice, while integrating effective FLN practices and navigating linguistic and learner diversity.

7. Tokenistic Cultural Relevance & Underdeveloped Cultural Participation

- Cultural elements like festivals and artifacts are often included superficially in program material and pedagogy, without deeper engagement with local traditions or knowledge systems.
- Opportunities to involve communities in shaping culturally-rich curriculum and pedagogy remain largely untapped, especially once the program is running in schools.

- In MLE programs taken to scale by the government, curriculum development in new mother-tongues usually becomes routinised or mechanical¹⁸. For example, textbooks are often direct translations from the state language versions, limiting contextual relevance and reflecting little of children's lived experiences.

8. Limited Research, Documentation and Outcome Tracking in MLE Programs

- There is minimal documentation and analysis of classroom practices, especially around language use and MLE pedagogies in multilingual and mixed-language contexts.
- Even in large-scale, state-supported programs, documentation and research has been insufficient—perhaps except in a few cases like Odisha—resulting in a lack of deeper insights from implementation at scale.
- Additionally, there is insufficient investment in building an evidence base for widely-used approaches such as bilingual-biliteracy models, as well as emerging practices like classroom approaches based on translanguaging. Tracking student learning outcomes and language development across languages and grades in these programs remains a critical need.

Areas with Strong Evidence	Areas Requiring More Research
1. Multilingualism enhances cognitive flexibility, metalinguistic awareness, and has academic benefits.	1. Impact of MLE Programs on Student Learning Outcomes While evaluations (e.g., Odisha MLE evaluation ¹⁹) show improved achievement, peer-reviewed longitudinal studies on student learning outcomes with robust designs are still lacking, including those tracking outcomes as students transition to upper elementary and secondary education in a different medium.
2. Language mismatch has a negative impact. Teaching children in unfamiliar languages—rather than their mother tongue—can impede comprehension and contribute to higher dropout rates and hence educational disparities, particularly among marginalized communities.	2. More research is needed on effective pedagogy and curriculum design for MLE programs, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curricular models and pedagogical strategies that integrate multiple languages effectively (e.g. classroom applications of translanguaging pedagogy) • Effectiveness of current MLE teaching-learning material in diverse linguistic contexts. • Assessment tools and practices that reflect students' proficiencies across languages. • Teacher training strategies for MLE, particularly in under-resourced contexts. • Approaches for classrooms where teachers do not speak students' L1s. • Guidance on introducing multiple scripts in early education. • The role of linguistic distance and exposure to the school language outside the classroom in shaping outcomes across MLE models.

¹⁸ Jhingran, 2019, p. 80.

¹⁹ E.g., Panda, Mohanty, Nag & Biswabandan, 2011

<p>3. MLE builds confidence and cultural identity in tribal communities, encouraging engagement with schooling.</p>	<p>3. What does MLE mean in classrooms with multiple student languages? Most MLE models in the landscaping study target a single L1 / MT per classroom. There is little research or implementation experience in supporting multiple MTs simultaneously in a linguistically diverse classroom</p>
<p>4. Most MLE programs report better student retention and participation in classroom discussions and learning.</p>	<p>4. We need more information on the relative efficacy of different MLE models running in the country: <u>Examples:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efficacy of mixed-language instruction vs. teaching languages in separate sessions. • Impact of transitioning from L1 to school language as MoI in Grade 3 vs. Grade 5. • Impact of continuing L1 instruction beyond Grade 3, even as a subject? • Effect of using L1 informally while the MoI remains the state language. • Outcomes of using multiple scripts vs. a single script for both languages in the MLE program • Effectiveness of bilingual learning materials vs. separate resources for each language.
<p>5. Effective bilingual literacy requires strong L1 skills and gradual L2 exposure. A small study from India²⁰ shows that reading skills can transfer across languages, even with different scripts. However, children must first develop sufficient L1 literacy and L2 oracy before L2 literacy instruction can benefit. Premature introduction of L2, especially as the medium of instruction, can hinder learning in both languages.</p>	<p>5. More data needed on children's language proficiencies when they first join school at the age of five or six, along with teachers' languages. This has been individually attempted by select programs and states, but not as a large-scale, nationally-representative effort. An understanding of the language contexts in schools and classrooms is a prerequisite for developing suitable strategies for the inclusion of children's mother tongue in teaching processes²¹</p>
	<p>6. Integration of Technology in Multilingual Education. The potential of technology, such as AI-driven tools and mobile applications, to support multilingual education in primary schools remains under-explored, particularly in rural and underserved areas.</p>

9. Weak Ecosystem Coordination, Advocacy, and Funding Sustainability

- The MLE ecosystem in the country remains nascent, lacking broad-based momentum to influence policy or practice at scale. Platforms like NCMLEI have potential for knowledge exchange and advocacy but are currently under-leveraged and perhaps underfunded.
- Few large philanthropic actors are engaged; funding is fragmented and largely driven by CSR, HNIs, or informal networks. Organizations with promising MLE models often

²⁰ Nakamura, de Hoop, & Holla (2018)

²¹ McCaffrey & Jhingran (2024)

struggle to carry out deep pilot programs or to scale due to short-term project cycles and limited institutional backing.

10. Lack of Developmentally Appropriate Children's Literature in MT

- A major challenge to strengthening early reading skills is the limited availability of developmentally-appropriate and culturally-relevant storybooks in mother tongues — particularly in tribal and minority languages.
- Expanding access to such materials—beyond a few open-access platforms like Story Weaver—is an urgent need in the domain. As markets will not drive development of children's books, sustained support by government and philanthropy is needed, which is missing.

11. Technology application for MLE is largely untapped:

- The application of technology to MLE seems to be limited at present barring few open-source, community-driven platforms where books and other material developed or translated in tribal languages can be found.
- Most digital tools focus on access to content or basic literacy activities. However, tools that support teachers with pedagogical strategies, formative assessments, or differentiated instruction in multilingual settings are scarce.

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