

MOTHER TONGUE-BASED MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION

*Experiences and Emerging Issues in
Southeast Asia and Malaysia*

edited by
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Preface

This edited volume consists of contributions from a mix of international and Malaysian academics, as well as inputs from indigenous practitioners in Malaysia involved in local community projects related to mother tongue-based education. Most of the chapters were written subsequent to the presentations made by the authors at the online International Conference on Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education held between 23-25 November 2021. The conference was jointly organised by *Inisiatif Pengislahan Pendidikan Nasional* (IPPN) or National Education Reform Initiative – a network of (then) 15 non-governmental organisations working on educational issues in Malaysia – and the United Chinese School Committees' Association of Malaysia (Dong Zong), assisted by a small team of committed academics headed by the editor. Subsequent to this, a few additional papers were commissioned to ensure a more comprehensive outlook as a collection.

The effectiveness of the mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) has been recognised internationally based on numerous empirical studies. However, the Malaysian academia has not attempted to adopt the MTB-MLE framework in their research, even though the Malaysian context – given the existence of Chinese- and Tamil-medium primary schools alongside the Malay-medium national schools – offers a wealth of experiences in undertaking comparative studies. The crucial role played by the language of instruction in foundational education, and how the learning of languages should take place and sequenced in schools to achieve the best results constitute an important subject for scholars of Malaysian education to explore further. In addition, MTB-MLE may also offer solutions to address the widespread phenomenon of language shift that is happening among indigenous peoples in Sabah and Sarawak. Consequently, the conference was conceived with the following objectives in mind:

1. Promote Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE);
2. Enhance understanding and development of MTB-MLE;

3. Generate discussions at the intersection of policy, practice and research on MTB-MLE;
4. Enhance understanding of the linkages of language policy with social cohesion and Sustainable Development Goals;
5. Explore possibilities in building regional and national MTB-MLE coalitions.

Being open-ended and long term in nature, the five objectives remain an ongoing pursuit. It is hoped that this volume will contribute to the impetus towards the realisation of some of these objectives and to more informed public debates on the educational issues in Malaysia and abroad.

I would like to thank Dato' Dr Tan Yew Sing – the chairperson of IPPN when this conference was conceived – for entrusting me with the responsibility to chair the Programme Sub-Committee in planning for the conference. Appreciation is due for the substantial ground work and secretariat assistance provided by Mr Kong Wee Cheng, Mr Chia Wei Loon, Mr Yap Heng Lung from Dong Zong. I wish to also acknowledge Ustaz Megat Mohd Amin (the then secretary of IPPN) as well as Mr Arumugam Kalimuthu, the current chairperson of IPPN, for their support. A big thank you to Miss Yasmeen Mohd Faisal Syam, my research assistant who helped gather and review some of the relevant academic literature and studies. My sincere thanks also go to Professor Emeritus Dr Joseph Lo Bianco of Melbourne University for reading the first draft of the Introductory Chapter and providing valuable feedback, references and words of encouragement. Last but not least, credit is due to the generous financial support of Dong Zong and IKMAS (OO-2023-004) which makes this publication possible.

Helen Ting Mu Hung