

## **Tour report**

### **The 7th International Conference on Language and Education**

The Asia-Pacific Multilingual Education Working Group (MLE WG) has announced The 7th International Conference on Language and Education: Multilingual Education for Transformative Education Systems and Resilient Futures, 4-6 October 2023, Bangkok, Thailand.

The above International Conference has accepted my paper, which is titled "The Relevance in Contemporary Times of Traditional Wisdom Regarding Biodiversity with Special Reference to Language Groups in Andhra Pradesh, India (7MLE109)" Copy of my presentation is attached."

My paper was presented under the Session "Indigenous Knowledge and the Environment" Dr. Sheldon Shaeffer is the Moderator of the session. Dr. Sheldon Shaeffer Chair of the Board of the Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood and was formerly director of UNESCO Bangkok which was one of the organisers of the first MLE conference 20 years ago. He worked in the field of language policy in education from my first Asian experience in Sarawak (Malaysian Borneo) some 55 years ago. The details of the session are presented below:

- a. Session number and title: **1.5 Indigenous Knowledge and the Environment**
- b. Session date and time: **11:00-12:30, 4 October 2023**
- c. Session location: **Riverside 6**



## Presentation information

<b>Presentation 1:</b> Pride in Our Heritage and Hope for the Future: Using Local Languages to Rediscover the Value of Indigenous Wisdom and Knowledge about Biodiversity, Sustainable Land Use and Education in Africa and Asia [7MLE146]			
<b>Presenters' names</b>	Katharine Norton		Yunana Malgwi
<b>Presenters' organizational affiliations</b>	SIL International		SIL International
<b>Presenters' email addresses</b>	<a href="mailto:katharine_Norton@sil.org">katharine_Norton@sil.org</a>		<a href="mailto:yunana_malgwi@sil.org">yunana_malgwi@sil.org</a>
<b>Presentation 2:</b> Our Language and the Climate Crisis: the Case of the Republic of the Marshall Islands [7MLE179]			
<b>Presenters' names</b>	Theresa Kijiner	Nikolas Willson	Hebel Luther
<b>Presenters' organizational affiliations</b>	RMI Public School System	RMI Customary Law & Language Commission	RMI Public School System
<b>Presenters' email addresses</b>	<a href="mailto:tkijiner@pss.edu.mh">tkijiner@pss.edu.mh</a>	<a href="mailto:nwillson@cmi.edu">nwillson@cmi.edu</a>	<a href="mailto:hluther@pss.edu.mh">hluther@pss.edu.mh</a>
<b>Presentation 2 facilitator:</b> Kate McDermott <a href="mailto:kmcdermott@pss.edu.mh">kmcdermott@pss.edu.mh</a>			
<b>Presentation 3:</b> The Relevance in Contemporary Times of Traditional Wisdom Regarding Biodiversity with Special Reference to Language Groups in Andhra Pradesh, India [7MLE109]			
<b>Presenter's name</b>	Anil Kumar Kursenge		
<b>Presenter's organizational affiliation</b>	Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts New Delhi		
<b>Presenter's email address</b>	<a href="mailto:anilkumaranthro@gmail.com">anilkumaranthro@gmail.com</a>		

The current presentation explores how the people groups of Southern India from Andhra Pradesh use indigenous knowledge for natural-resource management." My talk was centred on the understandings, aptitudes, and ideologies cultivated by societies with a long history of interacting with their natural surroundings are referred to as local and indigenous knowledge. Local expertise helps rural and indigenous people make decisions about crucial elements of daily life. This information is crucial to a complex cultural system that also includes language, classification schemes, resource-use customs, social interactions, ritual, and spirituality. These distinct ways of knowing lay the groundwork for locally appropriate sustainable development and are significant aspects of the cultural diversity of the world. The presentation of my paper was well received by the audience.

Approximately 500 scholars from various nations attended the conference. I had the opportunity to meet academics from various nations at the conference. Meeting policy



makers and practitioners from around the world provided an additional chance to exchange knowledge, skills, and research in the areas of language, conventional wisdom, and biodiversity. Through this conference, I made many academic friends with whom I spoke about studies, research experiences, and IGNCA research projects.

Multilingual education (MLE) programmes have proven successful in improving all learning outcomes for multilingual learners. However, such programmes, especially mother-tongue based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) programmes, have faced resistance and multilateral pressure to introduce international languages such as English earlier in the curriculum. Political pushback against MTB-MLE policies and practices directly counters the large global body of evidence about the need for young learners, especially children, to build strong foundational learning in their home languages.

Thus, there is today an even greater need for robust research, exchange of experience and joint action on the relationship between language and such pressing issues, and their relevance to transforming education and education systems. There must also be a focus on generating evidence on the factors impacting multilingual learners' whole cycle of learning, improving foundational learning for multilingual children, improving learning policies and strategies, boosting access to quality learning and empowering school communities to be more resilient as they face uncertain futures.

Against this background, the seminar pleased to announce that the 7<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Language and Education addressed multilingual education for transformative education systems and resilient futures held in Bangkok over three days in October 2023.

The 7<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Language and Education aims to:

1. Promote dialogue, exchange and sharing on the transformative role of MTB-MLE in improving foundational learning, equity, well-being and resilience for all learners, especially those from ethno-linguistic minority and indigenous communities;
2. Connect representatives of indigenous peoples, youth, policy-makers, practitioners and researchers to create linkages on how multilingual approaches can be used to advance access and learning for children, adolescents and adults from marginalised communities;
3. Identify priority areas in policy, practice and research for multilingual education to advance quality, equitable, inclusive education;
4. Explore new research findings and policy questions on the role of, and balance between, different languages – local, regional, national and international – in multilingual contexts.

In addition, the high-level policy forum aims to review the Bangkok Statement on Language and Inclusion, share language-in-education policy updates and exchange challenges and opportunities in implementing MTB-MLE at the 4th high-level policy forum on MLE.

The following major themes were highlighted during the conference.

- **Foundational learning in first languages**
  - Addressing the learning crisis with positive outcomes of developing early grade literacy and numeracy through learners' first languages in MLE
- **Assessments for MLE learners**
  - Formative and summative assessments capturing the complex learning outcomes of multilingual learners
- **Teachers' recruitment and professional development in MLE environments**



- Approaches to recruiting, training and deploying teachers to schools with multilingual learners, with emphasis on capacity building such as language skills, multilingual strategies and multigrade pedagogies
- **Additive MLE models**
  - Lifelong-learning approaches to developing and learning in first languages and how to introduce additional languages (community, regional, national and international languages)
- **MLE programme evaluation**
  - Data collection, monitoring and evaluation analysing the conditions and factors which contributed to an MLE programme producing positive results
- **MLE developments**
  - Updates from the field on current MLE practices at any level of education in contexts where learners have different first languages at local, national and/or subregional levels
- **MLE policies**
  - Updates on and comprehensive overview of national, sub-regional or regional policies impacting language-in-education practices in the Asia-Pacific region
- **Digitalisation of MLE**
  - Digital innovations and use of technologies in materials development, teacher training and virtual/hybrid delivery of MLE
- **Inclusion in MLE**
  - MLE practices on including learners who are vulnerable due to exclusionary factors such as gender, poverty, delays and disabilities, location, refugee/migrant status etc.
- **MLE in crises and emergencies**
  - Implementing MLE and mother tongue-based learning in crisis and emergency contexts such as the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters, displacement
- **Environment, climate change and MLE**
  - Synergies between MLE and climate education in contributing to sustainable solutions for safeguarding languages and the environment
- **Education and the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022-2032)**
  - Non-dominant and indigenous languages, as well as local cultures and knowledges, in education

The 7th International Conference on Language and Education (7MLE) recently concluded in Bangkok, Thailand. This event brought researchers, officials and advocates from educational systems around the world together over October 4-6 for this year's event, themed *Multilingual Education for Transformative Education Systems and Resilient Futures*. The 7MLE included presentations by 24 SIL consultants and provided a space for members of the global education community to share innovation, resources and research related to language and education. In addition to conference presentations and panel discussions, SIL hosted an exhibition booth where participants could visit to learn more about SIL digital apps, training manuals and other resources.

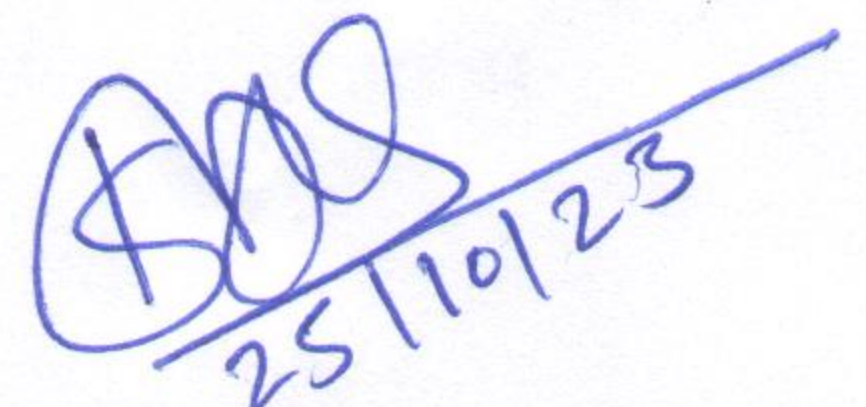
Current research reveals that 40% of the world's children lack access to education in a language they speak and understand well. With globalization resulting in more of the world living in multilingual contexts, responsive education strategies that incorporate diverse language needs become increasingly imperative. Language plays a critically important role in education for diaspora, refugee and migrant communities as well. It is hard to imagine the possibility of achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4—*Quality Education*—without incorporating a focus on language.



The conference's second day opened with a presentation by world-renowned economics professor and senior UN advisor Jeffrey Sachs during a plenary session. SIL Community Development Coordinator Craig Clendinen commented on the significance of having someone of Sachs's position speak into the conference discussion, "Jeffrey Sachs is one of the leading voices for development in the world." Clendinen went on to applaud the evident enthusiasm and commitment to increasing education funding demonstrated by Sachs and World Bank representative, Christian Aedo, during the session, "Most of the time everyone is frustrated that there is not enough money to fund MLE education. To have somebody at [Sachs's] level passionate about education was really an encouragement. It is also a significant shift that the World Bank is expanding their involvement in MLE a great deal." The day concluded with a High-level Policy forum, with SIL leadership participating in this influential discussion. Karsten van Riezen, a member of SIL's Executive Leadership Team, commended the important opportunities this conference provides for SIL practitioners to share and explore research around relevant and emerging topics.

I left for Bangkok on October 1<sup>st</sup> 2023 and got back on October 8<sup>th</sup> 2023. I have to switch hotels every two days because there are no rooms available in the hotel during the seminar dates. I take this opportunity to sincerely acknowledge the immense help and motivation that has been provided by Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), New Delhi through their financial assistance that has enabled me to attend the conference with ease and enthusiasm. I deeply thank IGNCA for generous support and assistance.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to Shri. Ram Bahadur Rai President, IGNCA and Dr. Sachchidanand Joshi, Member Secretary for their support and encouragement. I should not forget to thank and express my gratitude to the Director, Finance officer and working staffs of the Director Office, Accounts Office, JS division staff of IGNCA who had equally provided every help and assistance to me to attend this conference. Last but not the least I would like to thank conference organisers for giving me this opportunity and all the people who in some way or the other have been a part of this conference journey, especially to all my well-wishers.



Prof. K. Anil Kumar

HoD, JS Division