MOTHER TONGUE-BASED MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION FOR TIMOR-LESTE
NATIONAL POLICY

Ministry of Education
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C1</td>
<td>Home culture</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPMT</td>
<td>Council for the Promotion of Mother Tongue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECD</td>
<td>Early Childhood Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INDMO</td>
<td>Instituto Nacional de Mão de Obra / National Institute for Manpower Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>INFORMDPE</td>
<td>Instituto Nacional da Formação de Docentes e Profissionais da Educação / National Institute for Professional and Teacher Training</td>
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<tr>
<td>INL</td>
<td>Instituto Nacional da Linguística / National Institute of Linguistics</td>
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<tr>
<td>L1</td>
<td>Mother Tongue/Home Language</td>
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<tr>
<td>L2</td>
<td>Second Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEA</td>
<td>Language in Education Advisor</td>
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<tr>
<td>ME</td>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOI</td>
<td>Medium of Instruction</td>
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<tr>
<td>MTB-MLE</td>
<td>Mother tongue-based multilingual education</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-government organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEFOPE</td>
<td>Secretariat of State for Vocational Training &amp; Employment</td>
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<tr>
<td>SIL</td>
<td>Summer Institute of Linguistics International (an international organization serving language communities worldwide.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>TA</td>
<td>Teaching Assistant</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children’s Fund</td>
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<td>WG</td>
<td>Working Group (Language in Education)</td>
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APPENDICES

A: RATIONALE: HOW TIMOR-LESTE WILL BENEFIT FROM A MOTHER TONGUE-BASED MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION POLICY
B: BUILDING ON THE MOTHER TONGUE TO CREATE A MULTILINGUAL SYSTEM (BACK COVER OF THIS DOCUMENT)
C: CHARTING THE PROPOSED ROLES OF LANGUAGES IN EDUCATION
Preface

Background of this policy proposal

This policy supports the basic recommendations made in November 2009 by the first Language and Education mission regarding the distribution of languages for teaching in the first nine years of compulsory education. Our proposal goes beyond these recommendations to specify why mother tongue-based teaching is promoted and how it may be implemented in the short-term, while including medium- and long-term objectives.

This language-in-education policy proposal is based on the document Development of a Policy on Language in Education in Timor-Leste produced by Mr.Anacleto Ribeiro and members of the Language in Education Working Group (July 2010) and is the result of further discussions of the Working Group on 8 Sept. 2010 in consultation with Dr.Joe Lo Bianco (University of Melbourne) and on 19 Nov. 2010 in consultation with Dr.Carol Benson (Stockholm University).

Our thanks to all of those who have made helpful comments on the September draft, including Mr.Sheldon Shaeffer and technical staff of UNICEF Dili.

Although multilingual education for children with hearing or visual impairments is not described here, a special policy is urgently needed. We recommend that an adaptation of multilingual education principles be developed by specialists in special education to focus on the use of sign language and Braille writing systems for children with communication disabilities. Meanwhile, many of the principles of mother tongue development and first language learning promoted in this policy will also support these children.
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1. Objectives of the mother tongue-based multilingual education policy

The objectives of the multilingual education policy are tied to four interlocking themes:

1. Cultural identity and citizenship rights
2. Enhanced and transferable literacy
3. Educational access, attainment and success
4. Preparation for later learning in official (national) and international languages

As the International Conference on Bilingual Education in Timor-Leste held on 17-19 April 2008 concluded, mother tongue-based education is all about “helping children learn”. This important document cites the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which, at article 28, states that all children have the right to education and, at article 30, states that all children have the right to learn and use the language of their family. The objectives of a mother tongue-based multilingual education policy therefore are both practical and symbolic; they are about delivery of efficient and effective education but also about cultural, familial and linguistic rights.

Mother tongue-based multilingual education aims to achieve:

♦ **Learning goals** by providing much greater access to curricular content, including cognitively demanding abstract information and skills. In addition, all learners will become multilingual (speaking all target languages well) and multiliterate (able to read and write all target languages) to maximise cognitive and communicative benefits.

♦ **Linguistic goals** by teaching initial literacy in the learner’s best language, providing a foundation of competencies which are readily transferred to additional languages (Tetun, Portuguese and others).

♦ **Social and economic goals** by maximising the home-school connection, creating greater family cohesion, higher participation rates in schooling, improved retention rates throughout schooling, and more equitable attainment across gender, regional, rural and social class divides.
In the context of Timor-Leste, the mother tongue-based multilingual education policy provides a practical framework to implement the constitutional requirements of the State to use and develop skill in the two official languages, Tetun and Portuguese, and further value and develop the other national languages (Section 13). It provides an academic approach and structure to implement the Base Law of Education Article 12 that will “ensure the mastery of Portuguese and Tetun languages; and enable the learning of a first foreign language”. Moreover, it establishes guidelines for curriculum implementation, ensuring that children learn and “gather the knowledge and skills of each cycle, with the possibility of adding to that structure flexible contents, integrating regional and local components, and curricular developments ...(Article 35, paragraph 3). It structures the teaching and learning “in such a way as to make all other curricular components of basic education and secondary education, contribute, systematically, towards capacity development ...” (article 35, paragraph 8).

The basis for these aims is elaborated in Appendix A, which discusses how Timor-Leste as a nation and a society will benefit from the strong multilingualism created by adopting a sound mother tongue-based multilingual education policy.
2. Principles of the mother tongue-based multilingual education policy

Essentially there are two principles that underpin this policy: efficient communication for the citizens of the country in the interests of national unity and recognition of the importance of linguistic diversity for its cultural identity. As explained in Appendix A, these are compatible and mutually reinforcing principles. Both are essential in creating an education system that:

- builds on what learners know
- facilitates beginning literacy (reading, writing and thinking skills)
- supports learners’ identity formation
- makes learning relevant and enjoyable
- links the generations in continued learning
- encourages collaboration between teachers and families
- promotes learner-centred methodologies
2.1 Respective roles of the languages involved

This policy affirms that mother tongue-based education is appropriate for a forward-looking new nation seeking to both interact with the wider world and to retain and secure its unique identity. Languages are like no other human attribute in that we are able to accumulate and acquire as many as our needs require, as many bi- and multilingual Timorese have already demonstrated. This policy will provide all Timorese with the language proficiencies they need to live happy and productive lives and be active, involved citizens of Timor-Leste.

Mother tongues are the home languages of learners, also known as “first language” or L1 (even where there are two or more home languages) because the pedagogical focus is on a language the learner knows best. Using the L1 (in Timor-Leste’s case one of some 20 local languages, including Mambae, Makassae, Baikenu and Fataluku) also means activating C1, home culture and experiences, which are the foundation of learner identity and self-esteem. L1-based multilingual education thus has three basic purposes:

1. To ensure that all learners (especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds who have traditionally lacked access to education) will understand and benefit from literacy and content learning;
2. To valorize and build upon local community languages, culture and identity so that individual and group Constitutional rights are respected and education is made relevant to the needs of learners, their communities, and Timorese national society;
3. To facilitate the learning of additional languages, most immediately the co-official languages Tetun and Portuguese, using an additive multilingual approach.

Tetun, a national and co-official language of Timor-Leste, is considered the “second language” or L2 of most Timorese. As the most widely spoken language of inter-group communication across languages and geographic regions, Tetun is an important lingua franca that is acquired by most through regular use, in addition to the L1. (Note that in some parts of the country Tetun has actually become the L1 of the learner, and should thus be treated according to L1 principles above.) Tetun is a clear representation of national identity as the unique lingua franca of Timor-Leste, and expanding its use in education and other official domains is promoted for the practical and symbolic benefits this L2 offers.
Educationally, the term L2 is appropriate because Tetun is widely spoken in the learner’s environment outside school, which provides more support for formal L2 learning in the classroom.

**Portuguese**, the other co-official language of Timor-Leste, is considered the “third language” or L3 of most Timorese. As a language of historic and present-day identity, valued for the link it provides to the family of Lusophone countries, Portuguese provides the country with a unique identity in Southeast Asia and access to a rich European literary and cultural tradition. Portuguese has been promoted as the main official language of instruction until recently. The fact that this language has been limited to formal domains has meant that most Timorese learners and even teachers have not been able to achieve the proficiency required to teach or learn through Portuguese. Respecting the role of Portuguese in national society, this policy aims to teach the language more systematically and improve proficiency in Portuguese by building on L1 and L2 proficiency.

**English**, a useful international language, is also defined in the Constitution as a “working language” in East Timor/Timor-Leste. For Timorese English may represent a tool for interaction in tourism and hospitality, a working language in sectors such as the oil industry, a medium of instruction in higher education abroad, and/or a language of international affairs with neighbouring countries in the region. Because not all Timorese will require English for their lives or work, English is considered “additional” to the three languages above, and is not prioritised until 3rd Cycle of Basic Education.

**Bahasa Indonesia**, a useful regional language, is defined in the Constitution as a “working language”, but is also an important communicative resource for many Timorese due to their education or work experience. Timor-Leste is naturally tied to Indonesia in communications, geography, economy and education; more than four thousand Timorese are currently involved in higher education, apprenticeship or trades programs across Indonesia. Because not all Timorese will require Bahasa Indonesia for their lives or work, it is considered “additional” to the three languages above, and is not prioritised in pre-primary or primary education.
2.2 Principles of additive multilingual education

Mother tongue-based multilingual education, also known as “first language first” or the “additive” approach, uses a language in which the learner is proficient (L1) to teach beginning literacy (reading and writing) and curricular content (maths, etc.). One or more new languages (L2, L3) are taught systematically, beginning with oral communication, so that learners can transfer literacy and knowledge from the familiar language to the new language(s). The process of transfer begins whenever the learner is ready, depending on how much L2 or L3 s/he has acquired, and takes one to three years. Transfer can be facilitated by building a strong literacy and learning foundation in the L1, by exposing learners to the new language(s), and by explicitly teaching the sounds and letters that differ between the L1 and the new language(s).

In mother tongue-based multilingual education, content like mathematics is taught through the L1 in the early years (preschool and early primary), promoting understanding and developing higher level thinking skills in the familiar language. From grades 3 or 4 upwards, bi- or multilingual methods and materials make learning understandable, introduce higher level L2 and L3 and promote transfer. Learning is assessed bi- or multilingually to ensure that language is not a barrier for learners to demonstrate their understanding.

For the additive approach to work best, L1 development should continue for as long as possible in the education system, in parallel with L2 and L3 learning. Since learners learn at different rates, bilingual methods and assessment allow transfer to occur developmentally. The diagram in Appendix B and a more detailed chart in Appendix C illustrate the idea of building on the L1, and give a strong role to Tetun L2, while integrating Portuguese language study.
How Timor-Leste will benefit from a mother tongue-based multilingual education language policy

The most valuable resources of any nation are its communication abilities and the most central part of a nation’s communication abilities are its languages. Timor-Leste is fortunate to have a rich and remarkable presence of languages, both indigenous and introduced. The country is also fortunate to have a population of skilled users of many languages and the open and accepting attitude to multilingualism which its people display. The absence of narrow language prejudices which are found in other places augurs well for the future development of Timor-Leste. However, there are also issues related to the distribution of language and literacy capabilities which could limit the prospects of many citizens to achieve functional proficiency in the official languages and other languages of key importance to the country’s future.

The present document proposes a policy for languages in education and argues that this is a critical investment for the future well-being of Timorese society. Languages are the vehicles through which Timorese children will acquire the skills of good citizenship in their new and free society. Languages are the repositories of the ancestral wisdom and cultural values of the people who comprise the nation. Languages are the means through which the political will of the people is negotiated and through which the dialogue and debate that are essential to its democracy are conducted. As the country aims for universal access to and completion of primary schooling, literacy in the two official languages is expected. According to current research and experiences, accomplishing this aim depends very much on the provision of mother tongue-based education, as will be explained below.

Far from being opposites, the goals of (1) communicating across language differences through shared and common languages and (2) support for the many languages of the nation, are complementary. These goals are the twin pillars of this policy. The key aim of a language in education policy for Timor-Leste must therefore be the complementary achievement of functional national communication in the co-official languages and the recognition of and support for local languages. In effect this policy reflects an aim for national linguistic unity by recognising and celebrating its characteristic linguistic diversity.

This policy is therefore based on the belief that only a multilingual education policy can promote national stability, economic growth, expanded literacy, educational success, national pride and administrative efficiency. These apparently divergent social and economic objectives can be promoted through a concerted and widespread mother tongue-based multilingual education system.
Each of these goals is discussed below to demonstrate how only a policy of national multilingualism can ultimately secure the place of the two official languages, Portuguese and Tetun. More importantly, a mother tongue-based policy will help Timor-Leste overcome present inequalities and disadvantages suffered by its citizens in gaining access to education and opportunities to benefit from schooling, as well as give citizens access to legal, medical and administrative services so that the most central citizenship objectives of the constitution be advanced. What follows are the reasons for a multilingual education policy and strategies for implementing it. This is intended to stimulate an overarching national language planning process so that the country can make vital decisions about its future communication needs in a rational and systematic way, based on pedagogically sound principles in combination with educational and linguistic goals.

**Literacy and numeracy**
The greatest argument for mother tongue based multilingual education is related to literacy and numeracy. Literacy and numeracy are the instruments through which all learning ultimately takes place. The sequence of language and learning is broadly as follows: children first learn language; they progress to learn literacy and then use language and literacy to enrich, deepen and extend their learning. The object of learning becomes the tool of all further learning of schooling. Achieving success in literacy acquisition should be a central and overarching goal of all education policy and programming. It is here that the case for mother tongue based multilingual education becomes compelling, since the first language is the basis on which successful literacy can be acquired. Once acquired this literacy is readily transferred to literacy in a second or third language. The recent EGRA conducted in Timor-Leste provides irrefutable evidence that much more effort is required to improve literacy attainments and school retention rates for Timorese children. While mother tongue based early instruction vastly assists the acquisition of literacy and numeracy, all teaching needs to constantly address the central role of literacy for all.

**Spirituality and community**
The spiritual life of a community relates deeply to the quality of the communication and sense of deep shared experience that community enjoys. One of the greatest sins of colonial rule was the oppression of national languages, especially by punishing and humiliating children for using their home languages in school. A sovereign and independent Timor-Leste has an absolute moral and political duty to combat all such behaviours. In their push for economic development some post-colonial nations neglected their unique cultural heritage with damaging effect on the shared spiritual and community life of their citizens. A multilingual education program which supports the learning of the national languages also honours the spiritual and community life of ordinary Timorese families.
**Health and well being**

There is a well attested connection between levels of literacy and the health of individuals and communities. Extensive research\(^1\) has shown that low rates of literacy correlate with poor health for individuals and that this in turn weakens community understanding and efforts aimed at improving a range of health-connected issues such as water supply and quality, family planning, nutrition especially infant nutrition and primary health care and related community health questions such as safe driving, avoiding substance abuse, occupational safety and avoiding industrial injury. Ultimately all of these questions depend on effective communication, both oral but also written (often requiring a high degree of literacy). Improving literacy involves using languages and forms of communication that link directly to the lives and circumstances of people. National languages are essential for disseminating critical information about health and safety, and will support public engagement with government and NGO programs of health and wellbeing.

**Family and social cohesion**

Mother tongue support, especially for young children in schooling, also has the important consequence of lessening the alienation that attending institutions such as schools can cause some children and their families. In many post-colonial contexts schooling involves a sharp break between the opportunities and lifestyles that open up for young people and the lives and values of their parents and villages. Minimising such disruption requires linking schools more closely to their surrounding communities so that the participation of parents in decision making around education can be improved. A stronger effort to maintain family and social cohesion can also serve to involve the school as an institution supporting wider community based development in addition to meeting the needs of the economy for workforce related skills.

**National stability and economic progress**

A mother tongue based multilingual education program can also foster national stability and economic progress. First, when children are initially schooled in the languages they know, and in which their initial conceptual development has occurred, they are more likely to remain in school, to succeed in their academic work and to acquire languages of wider communication more effectively. When education predictably disadvantages whole groups of people, such as those in rural areas, or those speaking particular languages, this causes stress and resentment, especially if patterns of group underachievement persist across generations. It should be a high aim of all social and economic policy in Timor-Leste to equalise participation and success in schooling, most strongly represented by the acquisition of literacy.
Research evidence across the world, with immigrant and indigenous children, and in post-colonial contexts, clearly shows that mother tongue based multilingual education is a key component of lessening education inequality. As a major future income generation industry tourism is key to national economic development. National languages and traditional culture are essential elements of the cultural richness of Timor-Leste which is attractive to visitors. Access to the forms of language that permit an individual to claim his or her legal, health and workforce rights depend on an education system that responds to the diversity of communication within the nation.

Citizenship and belonging
The constitution and other founding documents of Timor-Leste make clear that all citizens of the country are entitled to equality under the law, which essentially requires that they are considered equal citizens attracting all the rights and privileges of belonging to the new country. It follows directly that speakers of national languages will perceive a deeper sense of citizenship and belonging if schools are an extension of community life and a bridge between the local and the national levels of society. Schools are the critical transition point to full public participation because they make available the skills, knowledge and concepts that individuals require to engage with their government and with all public administration. Common citizenship requires all public authorities to accelerate access to the public goods and services of the society. At present the two broad predictors of limited access to public goods and services are poverty and isolation and both of these are directly linked to language and literacy capability.

Employment and skills
A developing country is right to stress the critical importance of human resource skills that schools, technical education, apprenticeships and higher education supply. It is the right of all citizens to be able to compete for jobs and to gain the skills which allow them to compete. Employment and skills are closely related to the language and literacy demands of the curriculum, whether it is general or technical, professional or humanistic. The earliest years of schooling shape the rate and level of success for individuals throughout their lives. It is no exaggeration to say that one of the greatest, long term and sustainable investments that a society can make is to universalise access and success in early education. goal of economic planning for the labour market. This, in turn, is profoundly linked to the language of instruction and the way in which the transition from the first language of instruction to a second language of instruction is brought about. Skilled teaching is therefore a fundamental goal of economic planning for the labour market.
Technology and innovation

The deep revolution in communication technologies is one of the most characteristic features of the 21st century. In the past the various language skills which technologies relied upon were rigidly separated: such as speech and writing, moving, and still images, graphics and colour etc. However, modern communications combine all available systems of communication in what are now called multi-modal texts and tools of communication. Innovation today across all technologies therefore taps into multiple ways of communication, among these articulate use of language (such as voice instruction of machines), abbreviated written communication (such as with texting), alongside the traditional communication forms. Multilingualism requires us to use these multi-modal literacies with multiple languages. The result of these changes is that the demands of literacy today are more complex and fast-changing than in earlier times. Children begin school with knowledge of mother tongues and strong pre-literacy skills (children from literate homes know what books are for, the direction of text on a page, and many of the conventions of writing and reading which children from literacy deprived homes do not). The potential to make the most of the complex communication demands of today is enhanced by building on, rather than replacing, the home communication patterns of children. In this context local languages become a precious resource grounding our people in their identity of place, tradition and history, and languages of wider communication become crucial in facilitating the interaction that the globalising world requires. Our lives therefore are simultaneously lived at the community and national level, the regional and the global, and for each of these unique communication tools are required.

Arts and culture

The traditional arts and culture, and contemporary arts and culture, are vital to all societies. Timor-Leste is heir to a rich inheritance of arts and cultural practices from its component population. Languages are themselves artistic achievements as well as being the tools of artistic and cultural exploration, so that poetry, recitation, drama and singing are linked to the diversity of languages in which these genres of expression are conducted. Timor’s languages contain the cultural memory of its people with traditional values and beliefs preserved as collective memory of the nation dating back to the ancestral times. UNESCO has devoted considerable attention in recent years to the critical importance of the intangible cultural heritage of mankind and has nominated languages as a key component of this intangible cultural heritage. UNESCO has also documented the ways in which intact language communities are linked to environmental sustainability, so that the biological and ecological diversity of the world is related to cultural and linguistic diversity. This too supports the use of the mother tongues of Timor-Leste's children in their education.
Urbanisation

Population mobility is a key challenge for many societies. As people move from rural to urban areas in search of employment and a better standard of living there is considerable stress placed on urban services, and the potential for social disruption, crime, gangs, and breakdown of collective life can sometimes follow. In urban areas across the world multilingualism is common and this is true also of Dili in the local context. A shared form of communication is a critical need in rapidly urbanising societies, but this often can lead to the loss of distinctive languages. A policy of support for the unique languages of Timor-Leste enables the process of urbanisation to proceed with less disruption and alienation than has occurred in other societies. The 2010 census of Timor-Leste’s population reveals that 44.8% of the population is under 15 years of age. Maintaining language and social links to villages, towns and regions of the country will mean less pressure on Dili’s services and infrastructure, and not cut off people from their home communities. In turn this will be a downward pressure against crime and alienation.

Charting the proposed roles of languages in education

Shaded areas indicate use of each language in a sequenced approach. Please note that these proposals will not all be possible until linguistic development, materials and teacher training can be adapted.

The general approach will be: Mother tongue (L1) plus oral Tetun (L2) from the beginning of pre-primary into lower primary, introducing oral Portuguese (L3) where possible. By the end of the first cycle it is be expected that children will be able to read and write in their mother tongue, to converse and interact in Tetun and to be prepared as literate learners to begin transferring their reading and writing capabilities from L1 to Tetun and then to Portuguese. This leads to Tetun-Portuguese bilingual education in the second cycle, which could be considered multilingual education with L1 use to support and scaffold comprehension of content instruction. In the second cycle, L1 literacy is further developed with continued study of the L1 as a subject, which will promote cultural foundations for learning and maintain a strong home-school connection.

In third cycle, it is expected that Portuguese and Tetun will continue as the dual languages of instruction. English will be a compulsory language starting Year 7 and Bahasa Indonesia will be introduced as an elective subject (along with other languages) at Year 10.
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<th>1a</th>
<th>2a</th>
<th>3a</th>
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<th>5a</th>
<th>6a</th>
<th>7a-9a</th>
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<td><strong>Rationale</strong></td>
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<td><strong>L1 Home Ls</strong></td>
<td>MOI = medium of instruction (for teaching and learning curricular content) Subj = language taught as subject</td>
<td>MOI (bilingual with L2) Subj: Devel literacy</td>
<td>MOI (bilingual with L2) Subj: Devel literacy</td>
<td>MOI (if possible) Subj</td>
<td>MOI (if possible) Subj</td>
<td>MOI (bilingual with L2) Subj</td>
<td>MOI (bilingual with L2) Subj</td>
<td>MOI (bilingual with L2) Subj</td>
<td>MOI (if possible) Subj</td>
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<td><strong>L2 Tetun</strong></td>
<td>Subj (oral)</td>
<td>Subj (oral)</td>
<td>MOI (bilingual with L1) Subj</td>
<td>MOI (bilingual with L1) Subj</td>
<td>MOI (bi/multilingual with L1 and L3) Subj</td>
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<td><strong>L3 Portuguese</strong></td>
<td>Subj (oral) taught by spec Ts</td>
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<td><strong>L5 Bah Indon</strong></td>
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If the L1 is still in the early stages of development, it could be used for oral language development and content teaching, while using Tetun for...