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# Mother-Tongue-Based Education in Kawthoolei

Importance of language in education for Kawthoolei communities



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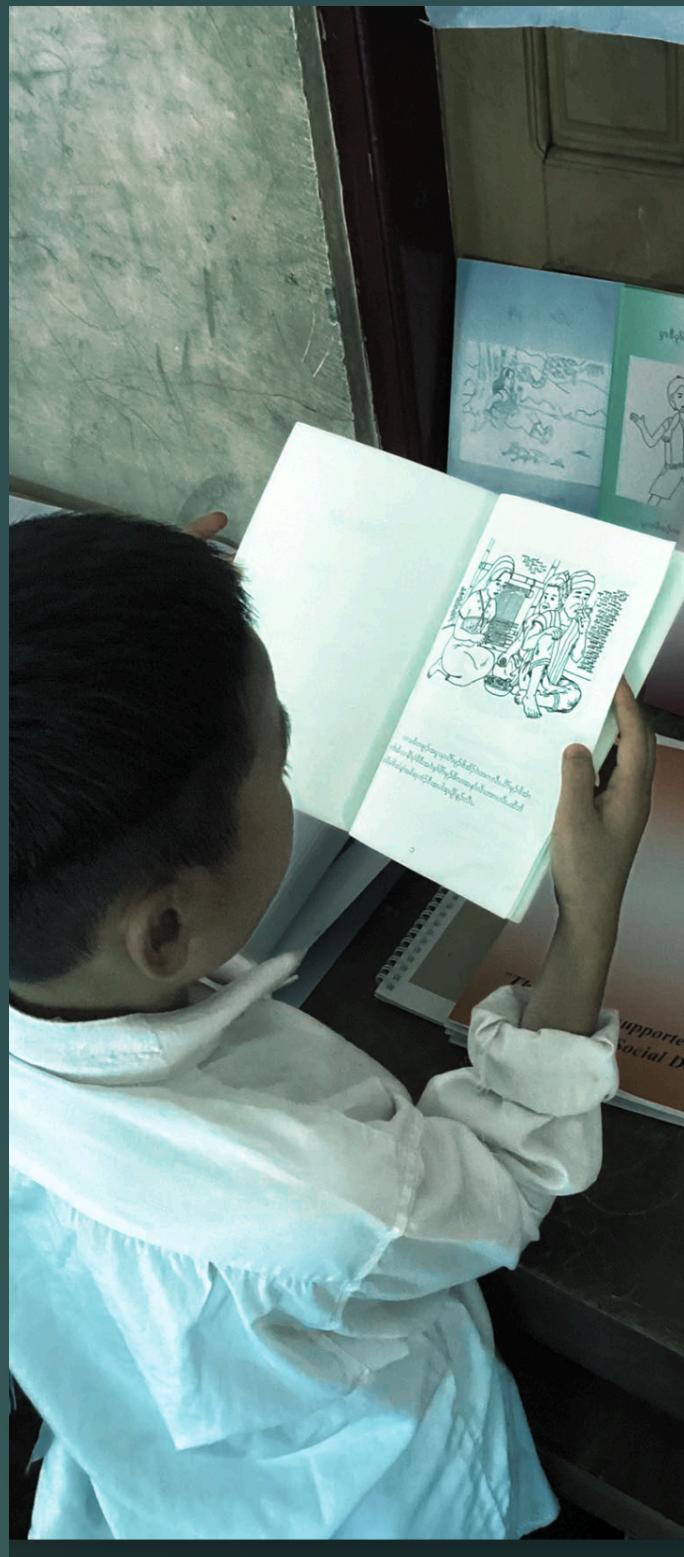
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# Mother-Tongue-Based-Education: A Foundation for Inclusive and Quality Learning

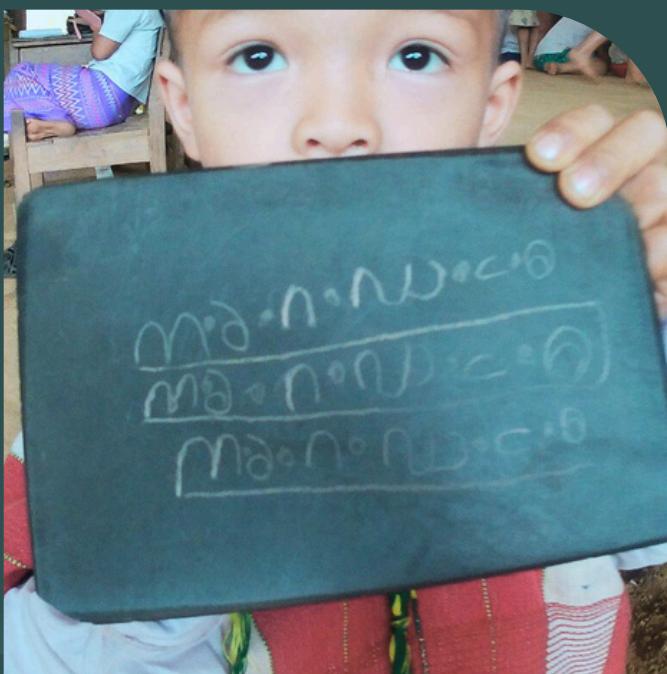
Learning begins best in the language children understand. Evidence from global and local contexts confirmed that when children start learning in their mother language, they develop stronger comprehension, confidence, and critical thinking skills. Mother-tongue-based education lays a solid foundation for lifelong learning while supporting successful transition to additional languages.

In Myanmar, the Kawthoolei education system, led by the Karen Education and Culture Department (KECD), demonstrates how education rooted in mother language strengthens learning outcomes, preserves culture identity, and promotes inclusion for ethnic communities in conflict-affected and underserved areas.



# Global Context and SDG Alignment

## Why Mother Language in Education Matters



UNESCO recognizes mother-tongue-based multilingual education as a cornerstone of inclusive, equitable, and quality education. Instruction in learners' first language improves understanding of core concepts, increases classroom participation, and reduces dropout rates particularly for children from ethnic and minority language communities.

Mother-tongue-based education also supports effective multilingualism. A strong foundation in the first language enhances the acquisition of national and international languages, contributing to better long-term academic and social outcomes.

## Contribution to Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4)

Mother-tongue-based education directly advances multiple SDG 4 targets:

- SDG 4.1: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality primary and secondary education by improving learning outcomes through first-language instruction.
- SDG 4.5: Reduces disparities in education by addressing linguistic barrier faced by ethnic and minority learners.
- SDG 4.7: Promotes respect for culture diversity, linguistic heritage, and global citizenship through education.
- SDG 4.c: Strengthens teacher capacity through culturally responsive pedagogy and mother-tongue-based teaching practices.



# Kawthoolei Education System Spotlight

## Mother-Tongue-Based Education in Kawthoolei



The Karen Education and Culture Department (KECD) plays a pivotal role in promoting mother-tongue-based education. Through comprehensive training sessions, KECD prepares teachers to effectively deliver curriculum in the Karen language, enhancing educational outcomes and cultural relevance for students in Kawthoolei.

## Role of the Karen Education and Culture Department (KECD)

The Karen Education and Culture Department (KECD) is the principal authority responsible for the design, coordination, and implementation of the Kawthoolei education system. KECD plays a central role in safeguarding that mother-tongue-based education is systematically integrated across curriculum development, teaching practice and school governance.

KECD leads the development of mother-tongue curricula, textbooks and learning materials that are culturally relevant and aligned with community values. By institutionalizing the use of Karen and other local languages as languages of instruction in early and primary education, KECD strengthens foundational learning, comprehension, and learning participation.

In addition, KECD oversees teacher recruitment, training, and professional development, with a strong emphasis on culturally responsive pedagogy and mother-tongue-based multilingual education. This includes preparing teachers to support students' gradual transition to additional languages while maintaining strong first-language foundations. KECD also coordinates with community education, a community-rooted governance model, KECD enhances system resilience, accountability, and local ownership.

## Technical and Implementation Collaboration: Role of the Karen Teacher Working Group (KTWG)

Under the overall leadership and policy direction of Karen Education and Culture Department (KECD), the Karen Teachers Working Group (KTWG) serves as a key technical and implementation organization within the Kawthoolei education system. KTWG provides specialized support in teacher training, pedagogical mentoring, and classroom practice, with a strong focus on mother-tongue-based multilingual education. Through pre-service and in-service training, KTWG strengthens teachers' capacity to deliver effective first-language instruction and to support learners' gradual transition to additional languages.

KTWG also contributes to the development, piloting and adaptation of teaching and learning materials in mother languages, ensuring that curricula are practically applicable and responsive to classroom realities. By working closely with KECD, township education, and community schools, KTWG helps to achieve effective teaching and learning outcomes at the school level.

# International Mother Language Day & Call to Action

International Mother Language Day – 21 February

International Mother Language Day celebrates linguistic diversity and reaffirms the right of all learners to receive education in their mother language. It highlights the essential role that languages play in education, inclusion and sustainable development.

The Kawthoolei education system demonstrates that mother-tongue-based education is not only a culture right, but also a practical and effective strategy for achieving inclusive, quality education aligned with UNESCO's vision and SDG 4 commitments.



## Call to Action

Sustaining and expanding mother-tongue-based education requires collective commitment and partnership. By supporting community-led education system such as Kawthoolei, stakeholders contribute to improved learning outcomes, reduced educational inequalities, and the preservation of linguistics and culture diversity in Myanmar.

## Key Advocacy Message

- **Invest in ethnic and community-led education systems**, including the Kawthoolei education system, recognizing their critical role in delivering equitable education in conflict-affected and hard-to-reach contexts.
- **Invest in teachers and teaching quality**, through sustained support for teacher training, professional development, and culturally responsive pedagogy grounded in mother languages.
- **Remove linguistic barriers to learning**, particularly for children in conflict-affected, displaced, and marginalized communities, to ensure meaningful access to education.
- **Protect and promote linguistic and cultural diversity**, recognizing language as a driver of identity, social cohesion, and sustainable development.

## Take Action:

- Learn more about mother-tongue-based education
- Support mother-language teaching and teacher development
- Partner with Kawthoolei education initiatives

