

DFAT Management response to EMULI evaluation

This document sets out DFAT's management response to the independent evaluation of the EMBLI/EMULI (Mother-Tongue Based Multilingual Education) Program in Timor-Leste, commissioned by DFAT and conducted between June and September 2024. The evaluation assessed DFAT-supported assistance from 2012 to mid-2024. DFAT welcomes the evaluation as an important source of evidence and learning to inform future engagement in support of inclusive and equitable education outcomes in Timor-Leste.

Australia's support to EMBLI/EMULI focused on a long-standing pilot initiative with the Ministry of Education in selected preschools and primary schools. The evaluation examined the program's impact, effectiveness and relevance, drawing on student assessment data, classroom observations, stakeholder interviews and document review. It found that EMULI students consistently outperform peers in comparable public schools in the early years, particularly in literacy and numeracy, demonstrating the value of instruction in languages children understand. The evaluation also identified challenges related to sustainability, consistency of teaching practice, cost-effectiveness, and monitoring, evaluation and learning. It concluded that while EMULI remains a relevant and promising approach, further management, technical and system-level adjustments are needed to support expansion and long-term institutionalisation.

Ahead of this management response, DFAT has been progressing priority actions identified in the report, while reducing direct engagement with the program, as the Ministry of Education assumed greater leadership, in line with the EMULI strategic plan.

Accordingly, the evaluation directs most recommendations to the Ministry of Education, reflecting the Government of Timor-Leste's ownership of policy, implementation and institutionalisation of multilingual education. The table below therefore distinguishes between primary responsibility for each recommendation, with DFAT's management response addressing only those recommendations within DFAT's responsibility.

DFAT would like to thank the Ministry of Education, particularly the EMULI team, the Partnership for Human Development staff, and the evaluation team from Mangrove Collective for their contributions to the evaluation and ongoing collaboration.

Impact

	Recommendation	Primary responsibility (per the evaluation)	DFAT role (per the evaluation)	DFAT management response
1	The EMULI program should ensure that regular and reliable learning achievement data be collected, analysed and used to inform program decision-making	Ministry of Education/ EMULI	Support MEL strengthening	DFAT agrees. DFAT supported development of a comprehensive MERL framework within the EMULI Strategic Plan to strengthen evidence-based planning and monitoring under Ministry leadership. DFAT also supported the establishment of an EMULI baseline in 2025 to strengthen evidence-based planning and monitoring under Ministry leadership.
2	EMULI should consider including analysis of Y9 national exam results into a monitoring and evaluation framework, as well as establishing a longitudinal study to track students' progress over their academic career.	Ministry of Education/ EMULI	Support analytical work where aligned	DFAT partially agrees. DFAT recognises the value of using/supporting the strengthening of existing national data sources and Ministry-led analysis. DFAT was not in a position to support analytical work for EMULI. Opportunities to support analytical work will be discussed as part of Australia's next education program that will commence in 2026.
3	MoE to record disaggregated data on progression and retention by school and individual student in EMIS, and make these data available to the EMULI program.	Ministry of Education	–	DFAT notes this recommendation.

Effectiveness

	Recommendation	Primary responsibility (per the evaluation)	DFAT role (per the evaluation)	DFAT management response
1	EMULI should continue to develop mother tongue resources and consider the development of more multilingual resources. EMULI teacher training should emphasise the importance of the use of the EMULI resources for mother tongue-based and child-centred learning.	Ministry of Education	–	DFAT notes this recommendation.
2	EMULI should consider both how the in-service training currently happens, as well as the role of mentors, school leaders and inspectors in supporting teachers to use more child-centred pedagogies	Ministry of Education/ EMULI	Avoid prescribing delivery models	DFAT agrees. DFAT has worked to align targeted support behind the Ministry-led EMULI Strategic Plan. DFAT also notes that this recommendation extends beyond EMULI and will consider lessons for future education sector programming.
3	EMULI should consider returning to the former model of professional development delivered during the first five years of the program.	Ministry of Education/ EMULI	Align future support with national systems	DFAT agrees. DFAT has sought to align its engagement behind the Ministry-led EMULI Strategic Plan. DFAT also notes that this recommendation extends beyond EMULI and will consider lessons for future education sector programming.
4	EMULI should consider the role of both MTB-MLE and child-centred pedagogies in improving learning outcomes.	Ministry of Education	–	DFAT notes this recommendation.

	Recommendation	Primary responsibility (per the evaluation)	DFAT role (per the evaluation)	DFAT management response
5	EMULI should consider ways to de-politicise mother tongue-based multilingual education in Timor-Leste.	Ministry of Education/ EMULI	Avoid donor-led advocacy	DFAT agrees. DFAT support for EMULI shifted to a more supporting role consistent with national ownership of EMULI and the strategic plan.

Relevance

	Recommendation	Primary responsibility (per the evaluation)	DFAT role (per the evaluation)	DFAT management response
1	EMULI should conduct further research into why teachers are not consistently implementing student-centred teaching techniques and why EMULI teachers are deviating from the language progression.	Ministry of Education/ EMULI	Support learning where aligned	DFAT partially agrees. DFAT provided support to EMULI baseline but we could not support further research for EMULI due to the finalisation of our PHD program. Going forward, DFAT will consider research opportunities as part of our new education programming.
2	As part of ongoing advocacy work, the MoE and EMULI program should reinforce that EMULI uses national curriculum content in cycles 1-2. They should also communicate the benefits of the EMULI preschool curriculum and advocate for it to help inform revisions to the current national preschool curriculum, especially regarding language of instruction.	Ministry of Education/ EMULI	–	DFAT notes this recommendation.

	Recommendation	Primary responsibility (per the evaluation)	DFAT role (per the evaluation)	DFAT management response
3	EMULI should try to influence preschool language policy to mandate use of mother tongues. EMULI should support the development of a Language in Education policy which includes mother tongue use (all mother tongues, including Tetun) at preschool and beyond.	Ministry of Education/ EMULI	–	DFAT notes this recommendation.
4	As part of its strategic planning process, the EMULI program should clearly delineate the roles of MoE, the EMULI program team, DFAT and PHD and include clear steps to increasingly transition full technical and financial management to MoE, including any needed capacity development. They may also wish to focus on ways to advocate for increased GoTL funding and look to attract investment from a wider range of donors.	Ministry of Education/ EMULI	Support transition planning	DFAT agrees. DFAT supported Ministry-led strategic planning process to clarify roles and transition planning. DFAT will apply this learning to future education program, to better delineate DFAT and implementing partner roles.
5	Ensure a wider understanding of the role of EMULI in improving learning outcomes, and frame more advocacy around this.	Ministry of Education/ EMULI	–	DFAT notes this recommendation.

	Recommendation	Primary responsibility (per the evaluation)	DFAT role (per the evaluation)	DFAT management response
6	As EMULI develops its strategic vision, it should consider which aspects of the current EMULI program should remain with the new department and which should move elsewhere.	Ministry of Education/ EMULI	–	DFAT notes this recommendation.
7	Program monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) should be strengthened.	Ministry of Education/ EMULI	Support MEL strengthening	DFAT agrees. DFAT supported development of a comprehensive MERL framework and baseline establishment in 2025.
8	The EMULI team should reconsider the roles of mentor and field officer. Rather than revising the mentor and field officer roles, it is advisable to map the support activities needed for new and old teachers/schools, and then design an appropriate staffing structure to cover the needs, keeping in mind required expertise, technical and linguistic skills, and other attributes.	Ministry of Education/ EMULI	Avoid prescribing models	DFAT agrees. DFAT supported Ministry-led strategic planning process to support EMULI structure for expansion. DFAT no longer direct engaged in EMULI so cannot apply this recommendation under this program. But DFAT will apply learning on cost-effectiveness and staffing models to future education programming as appropriate.