



## Analysis of Kui Ethnic Minority Language Recognition in Multilingual Communities of Rovieng District in Cambodia

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### Abstract

This article aimed to analyze the recognition of the Kui ethnic minority language in the Rovieng district, Preah Vihear Province, Cambodia based on the Six Stages of Policy Response to Minority Languages and Education (Six Stages) by Stacy Churchill (1986). It employed a qualitative research method by conducting in-depth interviews, joint interviews, and observations with 52 respondents from seven villages. To respond to the educational and language demands of minority populations, Churchill drew out the Six Stages, including learning deficit, socially-linked learning deficit, learning deficit from cultural/social differences, learning deficit from mother tongue deprivation, private use language maintenance, and language equality. In terms of the development of educational opportunities and recognition of ethnic minority languages and cultures in Cambodia according to Churchill's idea, ethnic minority language recognition in a multicultural society should be reviewed and examined to create and initiate development policies as well as projects for minority communities. The findings revealed that Kui language usage in the Rovieng district case had reached Stage 4 (learning deficit from mother tongue deprivation) since Kui and Khmer were used as languages of instruction in Multilingual Education (MLE). Based on the findings, the Six Stages can be partly applied to analyze the case, although it was originally established for OECD nations. However, the Six Stages is not a one-size-fits-all tool. Therefore, it cannot cover all minority communities because each community has different conditions. It is important to consider the unique characteristics of minority communities when developing policies and initiatives to support their languages and cultures.

**Keywords:** *Multilingual Education, Language Recognition, Minority Language, Majority Language, Cambodia*

### 1. Introduction

In Cambodia, there are 22 ethnic minority groups, which comprised a population of 179,193 people in 2008 and 183,831 people in 2013 (1.25 percent of the total population), residing in Cambodia (Ministry of Planning & Ministry of Rural Development (MoP & MRD), 2021). Eighty-eight percent of them live in six northeast provinces. According to Cambodian Law on Land, "an ethnic minority community is a group of people that resides in the territory of the Kingdom of Cambodia whose members manifest ethnic, social, cultural and economic unity, who practice a traditional lifestyle, and who cultivate the lands in their possession depending on customary rules of collective use" (Ministry of Land Management, Urban Planning, and Construction (MLMUPC), 2001, p. 2311). The main occupations for their livelihoods are traditional rotational farming, non-timber forest production harvesting, hunting, fishing, and livestock (MoP & MRD, 2021).

To support the education of ethnic minorities, the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports (MoEYS) has been providing a Multilingual Education (MLE) program in the northern provinces. In 2015, the Royal Government of Cambodia launched the 2014-2018 Multilingual Education National Action Plan (MENAP), which aims to promote ethnic minority children's access to meaningful education by providing MLE in preschool until 3rd grade for primary education (Ball et al., 2019). As stated by Sokha et al. (2021), the MLE program of Cambodia is a bridging model that pupils start learning in their mother tongue. Afterward, they slowly transition to the national language – Khmer. As claimed by Ball et al. (2019), Preah

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Vihear Province has offered MLE at the preschool level. It is implemented in seven preschools, with Kui and Khmer used as the languages of instruction.

The term “Multilingual Education (MLE)” has been defined by the United Nations Education, Scientific and Culture Organization (UNESCO) (2003) and several authors. UNESCO (2003) and García et al. (2017) defined MLE as the use of two or more languages in education. Specifically, Benson and Wong (2017) said that MLE refers to a systematic method of learning two or more languages and other academic content based on learners’ beginning literacy in their native language. García et al. (2017) also said that the bilingual or MLE program is developed to educate language minorities, improve comprehension, and grow linguistic competency in a majority language. In short, multilingual education is a program that uses multiple languages for instruction by slowly switching from utilizing the first language (mother tongue) at the beginning to the second language (majority language).

To respond to the educational and language demands of minority people, Stacy Churchill (1986) drew out the Six Stages of Policy to Minority Languages and Education (Six Stages) to analyze minority language recognition and educational opportunities in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries. Churchill (1986) said that there are not always clear-cut differences in the Six Stages. Therefore, classifications based on how much the minority cultures and languages are recognized and incorporated into policies and practices are suggested as follows.

Stage 1 is the Learning Deficit. The first stage is where minority groups face educational disadvantages, which are particularly and negatively related to the use of the minority language. A transition to the majority language is promoted, while minority language use is openly discouraged. In addition, schooling takes place in and through “submersion” in the majority language. The minority students attend the majority language school while they familiarize their mother tongue. As a result, this issue is viewed as a language deficit. In short, the majority language is advocated, whereas the minority language is discouraged.

Stage 2 is the Socially Linked Learning Deficit. This stage sometimes happens at the same time as Stage 1. It acknowledges that a minority group may face educational disadvantages due to their family’s unfavorable socio-economic status. It can perpetuate a cycle of lower opportunities for their children in adulthood. As a result, supplementary programs for minority parents to improve their social skills are recommended. In short, adjustment policies and initiatives are promoted for minority people to take part in a majority society.

Stage 3 is the Learning Deficit from Social/Cultural Differences. This stage supposes that minorities face difficulty with learning deficits, specifically in the education system. It is most commonly connected with multiculturalism or multicultural education. In practice, the minority educational disadvantage comes from the majority society’s failure to identify, accept, and value the minority culture positively. Although there is a multicultural approach, minority people tend to speak the majority language without respecting the minority language.

Stage 4 is the Learning Deficit from Mother Tongue Deprivation. The support of minority languages is necessary to be recognized at least as a transitional intervention. There is an emphasis placed on transitional bilingual education programs, which use a minority language in the early years of schooling to ease the ultimate transfer to a majority language. This stage acknowledges the importance of supporting the minority language as a transitional measure, while still relying on the concept of linguistic deficit. It states that linguistic deprivation of children’s mother tongues is a major factor in the learning difficulties among linguistic minorities.

Stage 5 is the Private Use Language Maintenance. Making sure that minority languages and cultures are not replaced by the majority languages and cultures requires respect for the rights of national and ethnic minorities to preserve and enhance their languages and cultures in their personal lives. For example, minority languages are preserved for usage primarily in private social, religious, and family contexts. The most common policy solution is to maintain bilingual education programs that use a minority language throughout schooling.

Stage 6 is the Language Equality. This stage has been reached when minority languages are completely recognized and accepted as official languages in public institutions. The recognition of minority languages means that they are applied separately and equally at a variety of public institutions, including schools, and are widely acknowledged and used in a variety of social, institutional, and linguistic contexts.

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The Six Stages is an indicator to analyze minority language recognition among members of OECD countries. However, this research intentionally applied it to the Rovieng district case in Cambodia due to the following reasons. First, it is an indicator that can be applied to multicultural communities. This means that it can also analyze the Rovieng district case because it is a multilingual and multicultural community. Second, it was developed for the expansion of educational opportunities for minority languages. Therefore, the six different stages of the Six Stages would showcase the level of the Kui ethnic minority language development and recognition in the Rovieng district through the MLE program. Third, there are six different stages of language recognition in this policy, meaning each stage would help the stakeholders understand the different levels and challenges of Kui language recognition. Therefore, the analysis of each stage would explain the current situation and challenges of the Kui language recognition so that it would be beneficial for establishing policies and projects for supporting the Kui ethnic minority language and culture in the Rovieng district.

In general, language recognition is essential in terms of multiple language usage in multicultural regions, especially in the languages of marginalized groups. Ethnic minority populations are facing a trade-off: they must choose between having access to more opportunities and giving up their languages and cultures (Secada & Lightfoot, 1993; May, 2013). In northeastern Cambodia, ethnic minority children must study in a majority language upon graduation from the MLE program to get access to education. Consequently, how Cambodia runs the MLE program is called a transitional language program. In line with the objective of the Six Stages, their language recognition is a significant indicator that should be reviewed and examined to initiate development policies and projects for minority communities that truly support minorities.

In northern Cambodia, little previous research has been conducted on minority recognition and MLE. Ball et al. (2019) researched the “Evaluation of Multilingual Education National Action Plan 2015-2018 (MENAP)” to evaluate how the MENAP was implemented to advise future strategic direction. This study is one of the main inputs to the Multilingual Education Action Plan 2019-2023. In addition, the Charay language was studied due to the limitation of using ethnic minority languages in the MLE program. Sokha et al. (2021) conducted a study focused on evaluating the possibility of integrating the Charay language into MLE programs and the transformation of community multilingual preschools into standard ones. There is another study concerning “the effectiveness of policy development and implementation of first language-based multilingual education in Cambodia” by Benson and Wong (2017). It aims to present and analyze the findings of ongoing research in Cambodia on MLE policy and practice. According to Wong and Benson (2019), the study “Language as a Gatekeeper for Equitable Education: Multilingual Education in Cambodia” aims to show how the MLE policy and practice have impacted ethnic minority communities that use the Kreung language in Ratanakiri Province. In the opinion of the above studies, there is a research gap in terms of focusing on the recognition of ethnic minority languages for the development of educational opportunities for minority populations. Consequently, there is a gap in the study of ethnic minority language recognition.

## 2. Objective

This article aims to analyze the level of the Kui ethnic minority language recognition in the Rovieng district based on the Six Stages of Policy to Minority Languages and Education (Six Stages) by Stacy Churchill (1986). The research results can contribute to the recognition of multiple languages and cultures in Kui ethnic minority communities in the Rovieng district.

## 3. Materials and Methods

This research employed a qualitative research approach to collect data by conducting in-depth interviews, joint interviews, and observations. It employed a narrative technique to gain a solid understanding of how the Kui language is used in multicultural settings. It was conducted in mid-September 2023.

The sampling group of the research consists of 52 people, 44 of whom are Kui ethnic minority people, with the remaining 8 being of Khmer ethnicity. The respondents are from the Office of Early Childhood Education of Preah Vihear Provincial Department of Education, Youth, and Sports, the Rovieng District Office of Education, Youth and Sports, commune chiefs, heads of villages, school principals, preschool teachers, Kui parents, and young Kui children. The research was mainly based on Svay Damank Chas, Svay Damnak Thmey, Bangkern Phal, Trapang Tontem, Srae Thnong, O’Pour, and Chi Ouk villages. Each village has a multilingual preschool. The research was done with 22 in-depth interviews, 8 joint



interviews (16 respondents or there are two respondents in a joint interview), and 14 observations of young Kui children.

The respondents participated in this research voluntarily. They were free to decide whether or not to participate in this research. They could consult with their family before making a decision. They could ask questions about the research. The author explained the details of the study to them and answered questions until they understood. The personal data, information, and privacy of respondents in this were kept confidential. Their names and contacts were not shown in the report without their agreement.

The analysis followed qualitative coding to organize and group the data in four steps. First, after collecting data from fieldwork, recorded data from the in-depth interview and joint interview was transcribed into Khmer based on the voice record and memo, and it was then translated into English. The data were analyzed by telling stories about the use of the Kui language in the Rovieng district. Second, the data emerged as themes and categories. Third, a qualitative coding method was applied to organize the data into a limited number of themes and categories. Finally, the results from the categories were analyzed by connecting them to the research objective. Some of the interviewees' words were quoted in the findings to show the real views of the Kui communities and explain their meanings.

#### **4. Findings and Discussion**

This section is divided into two parts. First, the findings of the research are introduced based on the Six Stages. Second, the findings and theory (Six Stages) are discussed to establish whether the Six Stages can be an applicable model to analyze the Rovieng district case.

##### **4.1 Findings**

In this section, the Six Stages is used as a tool to respond to the objective of the article. This section introduces six different stages of the Kui ethnic minority language recognition in the Rovieng district based on the Six Stages.

According to Churchill (1986), Stage 1: Learning Deficit is where minority groups face educational disadvantages. It is particularly and negatively related to the use of the minority language. In this stage, a transition to the majority language is promoted, whereas the use of the minority language is openly discouraged. Consequently, the majority language submerses the minority language throughout schooling.

Based on the data, the Rovieng district has passed Stage 1 because the majority language (Khmer) does not submerge the minority language (Kui) throughout schooling. Khmer and Kui have been applied as languages of instruction in the MLE program at the preschool level. In the Rovieng district, there are seven multilingual preschools in seven villages. The MLE program has been implemented in two ways based on community conditions. First, the languages of instruction in Svay Damnak Chas Preschool, Svay Damnak Thmey Preschool, and Bangkern Phal Preschool have been divided into 80 percent for the Kui language and 20 percent for the Khmer language. Most Kui children in the three preschools can only understand Kui because it is used as a medium language of communication in their villages. Second, 20 percent of the Kui language and 80 percent of the Khmer language have been applied as languages of instruction in Trovang Tontem Community Preschool, Srae Thnong Preschool, O'Pour Preschool, and Chi Ouk Preschool. The four preschools have used Khmer over Kui because the Kui children understand Khmer over the Kui language.

Based on the collected data, the Kui students access preschool education through the MLE program. Upon graduation from preschool, they start primary education in a general program (Khmer is used solely in the teaching and learning process). There is no MLE program at the primary school level in the Rovieng district. Consequently, this case does not agree with the statement of Stage 1 because the Khmer language is not used throughout schooling and it is employed at the preschool level in combination with the Kui language in the MLE program.



The use of the Kui language in preschool education varies among different Kui communities. Since the majority language is not used as a single language of instruction throughout schooling according to the statement of Stage 1, the use of the Kui language in the Rovieng district has passed Stage 1. The analysis of the data shows that the majority language (Khmer) has not been employed throughout schooling in the Rovieng district. Rather, it is only used in the MLE program at the preschool education level.

In Stage 2, Socially Linked Learning Deficit, minority people may face educational disadvantages due to their families' socioeconomic status, which can lead to limited opportunities for their children in the future (Churchill, 1986). Churchill proposed that additional programs and initiatives should be promoted to enable them to improve their social skills to support the socioeconomic status of minority parents.

The Rovieng district case slightly differs from the idea of Stage 2. The findings found that there are no programs for developing the socioeconomic status of Kui parents in the Rovieng district. However, they attempt to develop their status by learning and speaking Khmer to seize more opportunities. For example, one of the Kui parents who participated in a joint interview in Svay Damnak Chas village said that she had a grocery shop and had to speak in Khmer to order products from the city (Srey & Phal, 2023). She continued by saying that Khmer was essential for her business. For another example, a school principal at Svay Damnak Chas and Svay Damnak Thmey Preschools reported that he was in a managerial role and always communicated to other people or institutions by either face-to-face or administration methods (Sokea, 2023). He stated that using Khmer was a requirement for his job. Although the Kui people want to preserve their language and keep their community authentic, they need to understand Khmer to be involved in society.

The Kui ethnic minority language has been preserved in Svay Damnak Chas, Svay Damnak Thmey, and Bangkern Phal villages. The Kui people in these villages use Kui as a primary means of communication (speaking). However, Khmer is also a required language for them to survive in society. Kui parents from Svay Damnak Chas said that the Kui parents in their village could speak both Kui and Khmer. They used the Kui language in the community, while the Khmer language was used for communication with outsiders.

"In our village, villagers always use Kui for communication. To preserve our language, we think that we must train our children to speak our language. However, the older people could also speak Khmer. For me, I use Khmer for talking with Khmer ethnic people. For example, I use it when I go to other villages or the city" (Srey & Phal, 2023).

The Kui language is preserved in two ways. First, the Kui language is used as a medium of communication in the community. Second, Kui parents are actively involved in transferring the language to their children. However, Khmer is also important for the Kui people when they engage in the majority society. Outsiders could not understand the Kui language. Therefore, they had to use the Khmer language to communicate with them. As a result, the Khmer language assists the Kui people in adjusting themselves to the majority society.

According to Churchill (1986), Stage 2 occurs when policies and initiatives are implemented to develop the socioeconomic status of minority individuals. In Cambodia, the Kui population is a small group (MoP & MRD, 2021). In addition, the findings found that this small group adjusts themselves to majority society by learning and speaking Khmer to seize opportunities: business, employment, and education.

There are no programs that work directly for the socioeconomic enhancement of the Kui people in the Rovieng district, as Churchill (1986) suggested. However, the Kui parents have developed their status by learning and speaking the Khmer language so that they could seize more opportunities (business, work, and education) in society. As a result, the situation in which they have developed their socioeconomic status is slightly different from the idea of Stage 2. However, learning and speaking the Khmer language by the Kui parents directly and indirectly benefits the enhancement of their economy as well as their children's education.

In Stage 3, Learning Deficit from Cultural/Social Differences, a multicultural approach may be implemented, but without respecting the minority language, minority individuals tend to adopt the majority





language (Churchill, 1986). In addition, in terms of education, minority children face difficulties when they are integrated into the transitional language program to improve their ability in the majority language.

In Svay Damnak Chas, Svay Damnak Thmey, and Bangkern Phal villages, the Kui language is promoted and well-preserved. It is the main language in the multilingual preschools and communities. However, Khmer is used as a medium of communication in the other four villages. Although the majority population of the four villages is the Kui people, Khmer is used as a medium of communication in the villages. In Tropang Tontem village, Khmer is used as a general communication language, while Kui is less preferred. The Kui people can speak Kui, but they mostly use Khmer for communication in the village, which is why their children are proficient in Khmer. Based on an in-depth interview, the head of Tropang Tontem village explained the reasons why the Kui people in his community have changed to using the Khmer language.

“The Kui language is used infrequently in this village because the villagers have changed to speak Khmer since there are many immigrants who have come to the village and the community is more developed. The Kui people are shy to talk in Kui in public because they used to be looked down upon and discriminated against by Khmer ethnic people” (Nga, 2023).

The decline in usage of the Kui language can be attributed to a combination of factors, including a language shift from the Kui language to the Khmer language, Khmer immigration, and social factors. Similar to Tropang Tontem village, the head of Srae Thnong village revealed that Kui is also barely used in his village (Mao, 2023). Young Kui children now do not speak the Kui language because their parents have not taught it to them. Furthermore, the number of Khmer ethnicity people in the village has increased from year to year. Therefore, the Khmer language has become a major language in Srae Thnong village instead of their mother tongue.

The O’Pour and Chi Ouk villages have also faced this challenge. The head of O’Pour village said that his village used to speak only one language, Kui, in the past (Kong, 2023). After some industries came to the village, there was a large number of immigrant workers who moved to the community. Most of them are the Khmer ethnicity people who are from many different provinces. Two Chi Ouk parents said that the industries brought not only immigrant workers but also Khmer businessmen (Yeb & Him, 2023).

“There are many immigrants of Khmer ethnicity who came to our community to work in the industries and to do business. They came from Kampong Cham Province, Kampong Thom Province, or Phnom Penh. That is why we always use Khmer in the community. As a result, only the old Kui people can speak and understand Kui” (Yeb & Him, 2023).

The shift to the Khmer language over the Kui language was also found during observations of Kui children in Tropang Tontem, Srae Thnong, Chi Ouk, and O’Pour villages. For instance, while observing three Kui children, there was a Khmer girl who suddenly joined them; they were talking to each other in Khmer (Chan et al., 2023). It was a pleasant conversation, and both the Kui children and a Khmer girl seemed happy. This interaction suggests that the Kui children could understand and use Khmer fluently, even when speaking with native speakers. To sum up, Kui children are familiar with and capable of using Khmer.

The Kui language in the four villages faces language disadvantages in maintaining its usage due to three factors: (1) There is an increase in the prevalence of Khmer among Kui villagers; (2) there is a rise in Khmer immigrants to the community and the community’s development; (3) the Kui people tend to avoid speaking Kui in public due to past experiences of discrimination by the Khmer people. Churchill defined Stage 3 that minority people prefer the majority language even though the multicultural approach is applied to their community. As the four Kui villages have changed to use Khmer, instead of preserving their language. Thus, it can be concluded that the circumstances of the Kui language in the four villages align with Stage 3.

Stage 4, Learning Deficit from Mother Tongue Deprivation, highlights the necessity of recognizing the support of minority languages as a transitional intervention (Churchill, 1986). According to the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports (MoEYS) (2019), the Multilingual Education (MLE) program in Cambodia refers to teaching literacy skills in the mother tongue initially, followed by introducing a second language (Khmer) using appropriate methods to transfer literacy knowledge from the mother tongue. The process gradually transitions from using the mother tongue as the primary language of instruction to using both languages through a multilingual approach. As reported by MoEYS (2019), the MLE at the preschool level



is a one-year program. In semester 1, minority students learn in their mother tongue 100 percent, after which they learn 80 percent of their mother tongue and 20 percent of the Khmer language in semester 2.

In practice, the languages of instruction for the MLE program in the Rovieng district have been implemented in two patterns (see Table 1).

**Table 1** Languages of Instruction for the MLE Program in the Rovieng District

Multilingual Preschools	Languages of Instruction	
	Khmer (%)	Kui (%)
Srae Thnong Preschool O'Pour Preschool Chi Ouk Preschool Tropang Tontem Community Preschool	80	20
Bangkern Phal Preschool Svay Damnak Chas Preschool Svay Damnak Thmey Preschool	20	80

Source Data collected by the author

First, Bangkern Phal Preschool School, Svay Damnak Chas Preschool, and Svay Damnak Thmey Preschool divide their languages of instruction into 80 percent Kui and 20 percent Khmer in both semesters. In contrast, Tropang Tontem Communities Preschool, Srae Thnong Preschool, Ou Pour Preschool, and Chi Ouk Preschool apply 20 percent Kui and 80 percent Khmer in both semesters. Even though there are different patterns for Kui language usage at the preschool level, it illustrates that the case study has reached Stage 4 because the minority language (Kui) is recognized throughout the education system (MLE).

The Rovieng district has reached Stage 4 of the Six Stages since Kui was recognized in the MLE program. The Kui students start preschool education with a combination of the mother tongue and the national language in the teaching and learning process.

Churchill (1986) stated that Stage 5, Private Use Language Maintenance, focuses on maintaining minority languages and cultures to prevent them from being replaced by majority ones. The most common solution is to implement bilingual or multilingual education programs that apply minority languages throughout schooling.

According to the data, the Kui ethnic minority language in the Rovieng district is employed in the educational system. It is applied to the MLE program in preschool education. It is used in combination with Khmer in the MLE program (please see Table 1). The Kui students can access preschool education in their mother tongue and Khmer for one academic year or two semesters. In short, the use of the Kui language is restricted to preschool education.

On the other hand, Churchill (1986) mentioned that the minority language in Stage 5 is used throughout schooling, but the Kui ethnic minority language in the Rovieng district is limited only to the preschool education level or one-year program. As a result, the circumstance of Kui ethnic minority language usage in the Rovieng district has not yet reached Stage 5 of the Six Stages.

Stage 6: Language Equality is also in the same situation as Stage 5. Churchill (1986) states that this stage has been reached when the minority language is completely acknowledged as an official language. Minority languages are separately and equally used at a variety of public institutions and are widely acknowledged in a variety of social, institutional, and linguistic contexts.

Based on interviews with the Early Childhood Education Office of the Preah Vihear Provincial Department of Education, Youth and Sports, and the Office of Education, Youth and Sports in the Rovieng district, the Khmer language is a single official language in administration, while the Kui language is not used (Chenda, 2023; Soniya, 2023). They explained that the Kui language is used only for speaking among the Kui ethnic minority people. Furthermore, there is no Kui script. Therefore, the Kui language cannot be implemented as an official language in administration work or used publicly in the Rovieng district.

Minority languages in Stage 5 are used throughout schooling. However, Kui is only used at the preschool level in combination with Khmer. As a result, the Rovieng district has not reached Stage 5. In addition, it has also not stepped up to Stage 6. The Kui language has no script and it is only used for speaking among the Kui people. It cannot be acknowledged as an official language in the Rovieng district.

**Table 2** Summary of findings

The Six Stages	Findings	Status
Stage 1: Learning Deficit	The Khmer language does not submerge the Kui ethnic minority language throughout schooling.	Passed
Stage 2: Socially Linked Learning Deficit	There are no programs to improve the social skills of Kui parents. They have developed their socio-economic status through learning and speaking Khmer to develop their business, work, and education.	Slightly different
Stage 3: Learning Deficit from Social/Cultural Differences	Although Kui ethnicity is a major population in Srae Thnong, Tropang Tontem, O'Pour, and Chi Ouk villages, Khmer is used as a medium of communication, not Kui.	Aligned but only in the four villages
Stage 4: Learning Deficit from Mother Tongue Deprivation	The Kui language is recognized in the MLE program at the preschool level. It is used as one of the languages of instruction, combined with the Khmer language.	Reached
Stage 5: Private Use Language Maintenance	The Kui language in the Rovieng district is only applied as one of the languages of instruction for the MLE program in preschool education. It is not used throughout schooling.	Not reached
Stage 6: Language Equality	Kui is not recognized as an official language in the Rovieng district. It has no script and it is only used for speaking among the Kui people.	Not reached

In conclusion, based on Table 2, the study found that the Rovieng district has currently reached Stage 4 due to the implementation of the Multilingual Preschool Education program in the district.

#### 4.2. Discussion

The implementation of assimilation policies or initiatives has resulted in ethnic minority groups facing a dilemma between preserving their languages and cultures or pursuing greater opportunities. This trade-off necessitates the sacrifice of their languages and cultures to access more opportunities (Secada & Lightfoot, 1993; May, 2013). However, Churchill (1986) identified six distinct stages of policy response to address the educational and linguistic needs of minority groups in the OECD countries. While Churchill (1986) acknowledges that the Six Stages are not always clearly distinguishable, he proposes a categorization based on the degree to which minority cultures and languages are recognized and integrated into policies and practices, called the Six Stages of Policy Response to Minority Languages and Education (Six Stages).

Although the Six Stages is a tool to apply to the OECD country members, research concerning the case of the Kui ethnic minority language in the Rovieng district, Cambodia shows that the Six Stages is applicable to analyze the minority language recognition in developing countries. Yet, the application is not simple but complex. According to the findings, the case supports three stages of the Six Stages, but it does not support the other three stages.

The case of the Rovieng district can confirm Churchill's Stages 1, 4, and 5. First, Stage 1 states that the majority language is used throughout schooling. The findings indicate that the case aligns with the statement of Stage 1 before the presence of the Multilingual Preschool Education program in the Kui communities. However, the Rovieng district case passed Stage 1 because the majority language (Khmer) submerges the minority language (Kui) throughout schooling. Both the Kui and the Khmer languages are employed as languages of instruction in the Multilingual Education (MLE) program at the preschool education level. As a result, the Rovieng district case supports Stage 1 of the Six Stages.

Second, the Rovieng district case supports Churchill's Stage 4. In this stage, minority languages are recognized at least as a transitional intervention. Based on the findings, both the Kui and Khmer languages were used as languages of instruction in the MLE program after the program was introduced to the Kui ethnic minority communities. Therefore, the Rovieng district case agrees with Churchill's idea of Stage 4 as the Kui language is recognized in the education system (MLE program) in the Rovieng district.

Third, the Rovieng district case also supports Stage 5 of the Six Stages. Churchill thinks that minority languages are used throughout schooling in Stage 5. However, the findings suggest that the minority language (Kui) is only used in the MLE program at the preschool level. The majority language (Khmer) is not replaced by the Kui language throughout schooling. It is only applied in the MLE program for one year





or two semesters. Consequently, it means that the Rovieng district has not yet reached Stage 5 of the Six Stages. As a result, Stage 5 can be confirmed as a model to analyze the case because, despite being used throughout schooling, the minority language (Kui) is used in the MLE program.

Overall, Stages 1, 4, and 5 are applicable to analyze the Rovieng district case. These three stages focus on the use of majority and minority languages in the education system. The findings suggest that both Kui and Khmer are used in the MLE program. As a result, Stages 1, 4, and 5 of the Six Stages can be confirmed as a model to analyze the Rovieng district case.

Stages 2, 3, and 6 of the Six Stages are not applicable to analyze the Rovieng district case. First, Churchill's Stage 2 mentions that the socio-economic status of minority people influences the education of minority children. Therefore, he thinks that some programs and initiatives are proposed to develop the social skills of minority parents to generate a better future for their children. In contrast, his statement failed to apply in this case. The findings suggest that there are no programs to develop the social skills of the Kui people. However, they develop their status by using the Khmer language as an indicator of developing their business, work, and education prospects. As a result, Stage 2 of the Six Stages is not applicable in the Rovieng district case with these conditions because there are no programs to improve the social skills of minority parents.

Second, Churchill's Stage 3 states that minority children face difficulties (language barrier) when they are integrated into the transitional language program to improve their ability to the second language (majority language). In contrast, the findings suggest that the Kui children in Tropang Tontem, Srae Thnong, O'Pour, and Chi Ouk villages can understand and use Khmer well because of the decline in the use of Kui in their communities. The language shift from Kui to Khmer in the four villages is due to the immigration of Khmer ethnic people to Kui communities, and social factors (community development and minority ethnicity discrimination by majority people). As a result, the Rovieng district case does not agree with the idea of Stage 3 of the Six Stages because the majority language (Khmer) is not a barrier to the Kui children.

Third, the Rovieng district case does not agree with the statement of Stage 6 of Churchill's Six Stages. In Stage 6, the minority language is completely acknowledged as an official language. It is separately and equally applied at a variety of public institutions. It is used in a variety of social, institutional, and linguistic contexts. However, the findings suggest that the Kui ethnic minority language in the Rovieng district cannot be recognized as an official language. The main reason is that the Kui language has no script and it is only spoken among the Kui people, making it difficult to be recognized as an official language. In short, the Rovieng district case does not confirm this model in Stage 6 because the Kui language has no script and is only used among the Kui people.

In the end, the Rovieng district case is not compatible with Stages 2, 3, and 6 of the Six Stages. First, it does support Stage 2 because there are no programs or initiatives to develop the socioeconomic status of minority parents to improve the education of their children. In contrast, they attempt to develop their status by utilizing the Khmer language to improve their business, work, and education prospects. Second, it does not agree with the idea of Stage 3 because the majority language is not a language barrier to the Kui children in the four villages. Third, it is impossible to follow the statement of Stage 6 because there is no Kui script and it is only used by the Kui people.

As the Six Stages was initiated for analyzing the educational and linguistic demands of minority groups among the members of OECD nations, the research findings are affected by this limitation. As a result, the findings show that the Six Stages are partly compatible with the Rovieng district case. However, the analysis of the Kui language case in the Rovieng district, Cambodia based on the Six Stages of Churchill (1986) can generalize that all minority communities are unique. Therefore, the model should be flexible based on the real-life circumstances of the minority communities.

## 5. Conclusion

This research provides empirical evidence concerning the level of Kui language recognition in the Rovieng district based on the Six Stages. The findings suggest that the Rovieng district case has currently reached Stage 4 due to the recognition of the Kui language in the MLE program for preschool education. The Rovieng district case cannot go further to Stages 5 and 6 because the Kui language is only used at the preschool education level. Further, it has no scripts and is only used among the Kui people. Based on the

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findings, it can be generalized that the Six Stages can be partly confirmed as an applicable model for analyzing the recognition of ethnic minority languages in developing countries through education intervention. However, all minority communities are unique. Therefore, the model should be flexible based on real circumstances in minority communities. Based on the findings of this research, the levels of Kui language recognition in the Rovieng district should provide a basic background for further studies. It is suggested that future studies go beyond this research and look deeper into potential methods or strategies to promote and recognize the Kui language as an official language since it lacks a written script and is only used among the Kui people.

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