

Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education: Implications on Teacher Readiness and Student Literacy

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Abstract—The Department of Education, through its various divisions of city schools, strictly implements the mother tongue based-multilingual education (MTB-MLE) in pursuance to the shift of the Philippine educational system. *This paper was made to assess the MTB-MLE curriculum in selected public elementary schools in a school division in the Bicol Region, Philippines. The study determined the level of teacher readiness and the effectiveness of MTB-MLE in the localized context. Both the descriptive and evaluative methods were utilized in the research to confirm and validate the data gathered. The use of structured questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussion (FGD) assessed how the teachers from the selected elementary schools were faring in the MTB-MLE as a learning subject. Results show that teachers are ready for the implementation of MTB-MLE and that, it is effective in improving the academic achievement of the pupils in terms of comprehension, social interaction, articulation, sentence structure, and scientific and mathematical skills. This is supported by the data analysis taken from three successive school years. This paper shows that limited resources were the major problem encountered in implementing the MTB-MLE. The data gathered brought forth the conclusion that a sufficient supply of instructional materials is needed to fill the gap in the use of MTB-MLE in the schools. Moreover, the continuous support from the government is highlighted to achieve its goal of producing highly equipped 21st-century learners.*

Keywords –Bikol, Education, MTB-MLE, K to 12 Curriculum

INTRODUCTION

Language serves as a channel in transferring knowledge, skills, and attitude. It contributes a significant role in raising the literacy standard and cognitive development of learners [1].

Early childhood education lays the foundation for lifelong learning and overall child development [2]. With this, Republic Act 10157 was implemented. It is also called the Universal Kindergarten Act. It requires 5-year-old children to start school as a kindergarten. And during this period, they will be using their mother tongue to learn from school. [3].

The mother tongue is the first language spoken by a child at home. In the global context, learners are seen to be more participative in engaging in school activities if they use the language they know. They also develop better language skills which later lead to improved knowledge acquisition.

In a study by Young [4], it was observed that languages and cultures affect the instructional materials preparation and learning outcomes in the school setting. This was supported by a UNESCO report stating that an individual's educational development should not lose his or her culture and language for sustainable national development.

However, students whose mother tongue differs from the national language, frequently find themselves at a disadvantage [5]. This is particularly the case with most ethnolinguistic groups in a culturally diverse country like the Philippines.

The educators have studied the reasons for poor academic performance in the country and have found out that language plays a major role in the decline. Language used in the classrooms that are not native to the students causes intimidation to both the students and the teachers. It was then noted that perhaps, second language should not be used to young learners. Instead, MTB-MLE was pushed to further improve the country's literacy level [6].

The country faces many challenges in following the MTB-MLE policy. MTB-MLE is geared towards global education. However, each step taken was not easy and that each process needs careful considerations on the part of the school and the

learners. This study explores the teachers' proficiency in using MTB-MLE in the curriculum and its efficacy in the learning process. Moreover, it covers the learning progress of the students in the old and new curriculum to better understand how the new policy should affect them and the education system.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aims to evaluate the use of the Mother Tongue Based-Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) curriculum in selected public elementary schools in a city in the Bicol region. Specifically, it sought to (a) determine the level of teacher readiness in implementing MTB-MLE; (b) assess the effectiveness of MTB-MLE among Grades I and II pupils; (c) compare the learners in the old and new curriculum, and (d) identify the problems that affect the teaching-learning process.

METHODS

The researchers utilized methods that will answer the research problems regarding the teachers and students in the MTB-MLE curriculum.

Research Design

The descriptive and evaluative methods were used in this research. It focused on teacher readiness and effectiveness of the new MTB-MLE curriculum. The attributes and other data will be gathered from MTB-MLE teachers and the Grades I and II pupils of selected public elementary schools in the city division.

Participants

This research includes 5 out of the 7 public elementary schools under the Division. All the teachers in these schools participated, which totaled 45.

Instrument

The instruments used a researcher-structured questionnaire and checklist. The respondents answered two parts which comprise their profile and a self-assessment of their readiness to the new curriculum which contains four items, which were scored on a 5-point Likert Scale with the following verbal description: 4.51 – 5.00: Very Ready; 3.51 – 4.50: Ready; 2.51 – 3.50: Somewhat Ready; 1.51 – 2.50: Slightly Ready; 1.00 – 1.50: Not Ready.

The questionnaire was carefully crafted by the researcher through various available references.

Ethical Considerations

With permission from the principal of each of the public elementary schools, the data-gathering and analysis were done. The teachers were also informed and were asked to sign in the consent form before getting their basic profile and answering the questionnaire.

Data Gathering and Analysis

The general averages of 6 classes were compiled: one class for each of the school years 2009-2010, 2010-2011 and 2011-2012, and from school years 2016-2017, 2017-2018, and 2018-2019. The information represented the data before the implementation of MTB-MLE and the present data where it is implemented in the new curriculum. There is a total of 220 students who participated in the study. Of which, 101 are from the old curriculum while 119 are from the new one. The data was taken from the grade 1 and 2 levels of the respective school years. The teachers were also subjected to an interview to gather more data.

This study both utilized the secondary and primary data whereas the researchers gathered directly from the respondents through the questionnaire while other information was gathered from the different research articles and related reading materials.

The data were statistically interpreted using weighted mean and ANOVA. They were analyzed, tallied, and tabulated systematically.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data gathered comprises information regarding the use and effects of MTB-MLE in the teaching and learning process. The result will show whether the Grades I and II pupils increased knowledge acquisition with the new curriculum.

Teacher Readiness

The Department of Education (DepEd) is at the forefront of implementing MTB-MLE. Training and seminars are continuously provided to the teachers. It is the aim of the education department to ensure readiness and competency among educators especially that this new curriculum has also taken place [7].

Table 1 shows the numbers for the level of teacher readiness when it comes to the use of MTB-MLE in the Grades I and II classrooms.

Based on the result, the teachers were “very ready” with a mean of 4.80 in terms of familiarity with the mother tongue language of students which is

Bikol. In terms of practicing/using mother-tongue of the students a mean of 3.82 is obtained which means that teachers are “ready” in using Bikol language in instruction. Teachers were also “very ready” (4.75) with seminars and training they have attended. With a mean of 2.75, teachers are “somewhat ready” with the instructional materials like books and references available for teaching using the mother tongue.

Table 1. The level of teacher readiness for MTB-MTLE curriculum implementation

Readiness	Mean	Description
Familiarity	4.8	Very Ready
Practices/Uses mother tongue	3.82	Ready
Attended seminars and trainings	4.75	Very Ready
Instructional materials availability	2.75	Somewhat Ready
Total	4.03	Ready

Overall, the teachers were ready in implementing the mother-tongue based multilingual education. However, there is a lack of readiness on the availability of instructional materials that were written in the Bikol language, which can be used in implementing the mother tongue (Bikol) as classroom instruction.

The comments were collated and according to the teachers, the lack of instructional materials and references is due to the conflict on what language should be adopted as a medium of instruction. Teachers were still debating on what to use between the Bikol Legazpi or Bikol Naga as the medium of instruction.

The government also expects that teachers should take the initiative to facilitate the making of instructional materials using the local language they are in. Attending the training and write-shops on instructional material preparation is deemed necessary to respond to the lack of materials needed to facilitate classroom instruction.

Table 2. Effectiveness of MTB-MLE

Item	%
Comprehension	80
Social Interaction	95
Articulation (speech)	100
Sentence Structure (written skills)	75
Scientific & Mathematical skills	75

Table 2 shows the effect of the use of the mother tongue in the teaching and learning process. At 80%, the teachers agreed that its use improves

comprehension skills. 95% of the teachers said it progresses the social interaction of the students with its peers; 100% of the teachers said that the new curriculum improves the students’ articulation in expressing their thoughts and ideas; 75% of the teachers declared that using mother tongue in classroom instruction helps the students construct grammatically correct sentences, and 75% of the teachers said that the students’ scientific and mathematical skills have improved upon using the Bikol language as the medium of instruction.

However, pupils were not yet familiar with the grammatical sentence structure in Bikol, since there is no standardized language that should be used in classroom instruction. As for scientific and mathematical skills, currently, there is no available translation of scientific and mathematical jargon in Bikol due to its complexity of the terms.

Based on the findings, the MTB-MLE implementation of the Division of City Schools was effective. The teachers observed that the use of the mother tongue (Bikol) at class provides a better learning environment. The students are more participative since they are more confident to express themselves in the language they are most familiar with.

The teachers noticed a significant improvement in the four basic communication skills of the students. These are speaking, reading, writing, and listening. The students’ writing has improved preferably in the constructions of sentences to their scientific and mathematical skills. Teachers also observed that with the standardized test, students who are taught using the Bikol language have higher scores than those classes they handled through the years. However, the teachers still encountered difficulties in translating the language to another language which some of the students use other than Bikol.

Table 3. Summary of means and variances of the two groups of learners from before and during the implementation

Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
Prior	101	7926	78.47525	13.49188
During	119	9399	78.98319	13.89802

Table 3 shows the summary of means and variances of the two groups of learners. The data was taken before and after MTB-MLE implementation. The following table presents the gathered data using ANOVA. The said data was also taken from the two

groups before and after the MTB-MLE implementation.

Table 4. ANOVA table for the two groups of learners from before and during implementation

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	14.096	1	14.096	1.028	0.312	3.884
Within Groups	2989.16	218	13.712			
Total	3003.25	219				

In Table 3, it is shown that the average mean of the general averages is similar. In Table 4, the difference between the two groups is presented. This quantitatively explains the teachers' perceptions as presented in Table 3. For the problems encountered, as shown in Table 5, most of the teachers agreed that the scarcity of resources (40%) is topmost on the list. While 30% said that human resources are one of the problems in implementing the curriculum, 20% have encountered parental resistance in using the Bikol language in the classroom instruction and only 10% have encountered political ambivalence in implementing the MTB-MLE.

Table 5. Problems Encountered on MTB-MLE implementation

Item	%
Limited Resources	40
Community Resistance	20
Human Resources	30
Political Ambivalence	10
Total	100

It was observed that on the MTB-MLE implementation, resources like instructional materials and references were not given ample consideration and subsidy in implementing the new educational curriculum. Hence, developing instructional materials and references in Bikol language should be given ample attention and priority.

Instructional materials are necessary for the learning process. It broadens their knowledge and critical thinking skills while achieving the lesson's learning objectives [8],[9]. Thus, the teachers are encouraged to provide creative ways of presenting their lessons and promote interesting ways of learning acquisition [10].

Moreover, in the implementation of MTB-MLE, resistance from teachers and parents were observed. They have their mindset with the old curriculum,

which the languages used for classroom instruction are English and Filipino.

In terms of human resources, constraints were encountered due to lack of fluency and proficiency of teachers with the Bikol language and still, teachers are debating between Bikol Legazpi or Bikol Naga as the medium of instruction. The implementation encountered some political ambivalence because some officials were still not convinced of the current shift in the educational program in the Philippines.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The improved academic performance of the learners is arguably a significant result in determining the effectiveness of implementing MTB-MLE in the curriculum. It shows that acquiring knowledge at a young age is better when using a language known and used by the learners. Not only their idea on the topic broadened, but their articulation is also enhanced paving the way to higher self-esteem and confidence. The success of the teaching and learning process lies on teacher readiness. The results show a well-prepared set of teachers who use MTB-MLE in the classroom. The only drawback is the lack of instructional materials that would augment the learning process inside the classrooms.

Since instructional materials are deemed necessary in all modes of learning, it is recommended that the government provide ample financial support in the integration of MTB-MLE in the school curriculum. The teachers are expected to be well-versed in using the mother tongue as a medium of instruction. This can be achieved through the conduct of various training and seminars. Such events provide update on instructional materials design and preparation. A well-planned material reflects the ability of the teachers to impart knowledge to the students effectively. This is the only way for them to ensure that they are not only prepared mentally but also creatively. At present, the teachers are maximizing the limited resources they have to adapt to the new curriculum.

The problems of other students whose first language is not the one used in class is also a challenge to the teachers who have to exert more effort in translating the lessons for them. This boils down to the issue of learning new knowledge while learning a new language [11].

The study is limited to the Grades I and II pupils without the consideration of their backgrounds such as ethnicity, citizenship, and residential status [12]. The

teachers in this research are also natives of the province where this study was conducted. It was not considered whether they originate from another place, which will give rise to another issue of whether the teachers have the same mother tongue as the students.

The Philippine government's vision to produce learners equipped with 21st-century skills is grounded on the principle that learning young in one's native tongue is the best way to acquire knowledge [13],[14].

These are the noted recommendations for future research with the same focus of study: 1) Conduct a training/workshop for the creation of Bicol-Tagalog dictionary to better facilitate the teaching and learning process; 2) Conduct periodic conferences for the K-3 teachers to know more about the best practices and methodologies being employed in the lessons, and 3) Hold annual training or seminar-workshops about instructional materials design and preparation.

The purpose of MTB-MLE is to provide learners the opportunity to gain knowledge using their own language and therefore not sacrificing their cultural identity. Even with the challenges of its implementation, the benefits are boundless when it comes to the teaching and learning process. It contributes to the preservation of one's own language. With sufficient support from the stakeholders, the said move will bring not only literacy but also social, economic, and political development.

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