

Curriculum Forum for

# Understanding Best Practices in Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) in the Philippines

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**RESEARCH AIMS AND JUSTIFICATION**

The implementation of Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE), as a part of the introduction of the K to 12 curriculum, represents a significant innovation in schooling in the Philippines. The potential reward of mother tongue instruction is the achievement of higher outcomes by children because they are learning in a language that is familiar to them. The consolidation of the children’s mother tongue provides a foundation for the development of literacy skills and the learning of the additional languages of Filipino and English.

Mother tongue education has previously been implemented in many South East Asian countries, including in some small communities in the Philippines (Kosonen & Young, 2009). The current study seeks to understand what is happening in the widespread implementation of mother tongue as the medium of instruction in Department of Education (DepEd) schools across the country.

**RESEARCH PLAN AND DESIGN**

The linguistic diversity of The Philippines means that mother tongues vary according to the size of their speech communities, and consequently, the extent to which teaching resources may be available. The nature of these languages, in terms of number of speakers, and status both locally and regionally, vary considerably, with some being very localized with less than a million speakers, and others such as Cebuano having over 15 million speakers. Some MTB-MLE programs are using dialects of Tagalog, which are closely related to Filipino. While one mother tongue is dominant in some schools and communities, there are also schools and communities where several mother tongues are used (Gonzalez 1998, Young 2011).

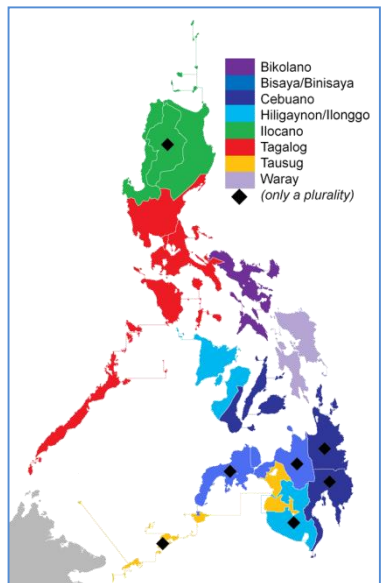


Figure 1. Retrieved from: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Languages\\_of\\_the\\_Philippines](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Languages_of_the_Philippines)

To account for this diversity, the following language contexts will be researched:

- Mother tongues with more than 2 million speakers (excluding Tagalog), such as Cebuano, Ilocano or Hiligaynon;
- Mother tongues with fewer than 2 million speakers
- Mother tongue programs teaching a dialect of Tagalog (that is distinct from Filipino)
- Mother tongue programs in linguistically diverse schools and communities (MTB-MLE programs in communities and schools where a number of different mother tongues are spoken).

The following questions guided the research:

1. What challenges have schools faced, and what strategies have successful MTB-MLE schools used, in implementing MTB-MLE?
2. How have challenges and strategies related to the context dynamics of the MTB-MLE program, such as the nature and status of the MT, community involvement and support?

Figure 2 shows the phases of the study with their different purposes, time-frames and focus.



Figure 2. Phases of the Study

**CONTRIBUTION TO GLOBAL RESEARCH**

This study will build on existing research into small-scale implementations of mother tongue education in the Philippines that have been strongly supported by communities and Non-Government Organisations. The study will investigate the challenges and successful strategies in regular Philippine schools in a variety of contexts across the country. It will also contribute to the implementation of mother tongue based education by documenting the way it is developing in the Philippines and how it compares with approaches in other countries.

**PHASE 1 METHODOLOGY**

Figure 3 shows the languages and communities in which data was collected in Phase 1 of the study.



Figure 3. Language Contexts

**Sample**

In each context a pioneer school and a school new to MTB-MLE were selected for study in consultation with DepEd division coordinators. In each school, questionnaires and interviews obtained information and perceptions of principals and teachers in mother tongue classrooms. Observations were made of mother tongue classrooms, photographs were taken to illustrate how children are exposed to different languages in their classrooms and schools. The data that were collected were analysed using the qualitative data analysis software NVivo 10. This allowed

the analysis of complex descriptive and visual data into categories that enabled identification of patterns and correlations.

Participating on the study were eight schools and school administrators, five MTB-MLE coordinators, 32 mother tongue teachers and 56 parents of mother tongue pupils.

## RESULTS

The data revealed that many challenges and strategies applied across all contexts. These can be divided into four categories:

- *Language* refers to the status and nature of the MT and all other perceptions and beliefs about it.
- *Materials* refers to the development and production of all kinds of lesson resources which include teacher-made or DepEd-provided materials and those produced by other publishers or individuals.
- *Instruction* refers to teaching and learning concerns, including teaching strategies and classroom practices. Comment on this may be made by administrators, teachers, parents or students.
- *Program* refers to program dynamics, logistics, and MTB-MLE implementation activities that are beyond the classroom level, such as teacher training, campaign mobilization, delivery of Learner’s Materials (LMs), and program monitoring.

Table 1 (refer to pages 8 and 9) provides an overview of the identified challenges and strategies across contexts presented in descending order of the frequency in which they were observed. The colors used to shade the challenges column have darker tones to represent a higher frequency and lighter tones to represent the lower frequency across the contexts. The letters L, S, T, LD (in parentheses) refer to the four linguistic contexts.

## **Particular Challenges and Strategies in the Four Language Contexts**

The data also provided insights into particular challenges and strategies that were evident in each of the four language contexts.

### **Large Language Context**

In the large language context a challenge arose because the Teacher’s Guides did not always match the Learner’s Materials. In addition, it was also learned that there were publications such as magazines and books that were used by teachers to enhance the students’ exposure to the mother tongue.

### **Small Language Context**

In the small language context a number of challenges related to perceptions that the mother tongue is less challenging to learn than Filipino or English. The language used in some learners’ materials was different to the mother tongue used in the school. Schools in small language contexts developed a wide range of strategies to meet the challenges they faced. These included school-level standardization of the mother tongue, repetition of the same content in different languages, and parents re-learning the mother tongue along with their children. Teachers used English for classroom management and students used code-switching to express their answers. Teachers also gave projects about math terminology in the mother tongue.

### **Tagalog Context**

In the Tagalog context challenges arose from the similarity between Tagalog and Filipino. Teachers saw overlaps between mother tongue and Filipino competencies and had difficulty identifying spiraling of learning outcomes in these subjects. Children were unfamiliar with some mother tongue orthography and some teachers felt that they had inadequate support and training. They also needed to accommodate migrant students whose mother tongue was not Tagalog. Their strategies included the use of their own money and time to develop and produce teaching materials. Schools shared the materials they produced. They also produced a Tagalog translation of the teacher guide, which was written in English.

## **Linguistically Diverse Context**

In the linguistically diverse context the greatest challenge was the limited development of a pedagogic discourse in the mother tongues. The strategies included parents hiring mother-tongue-speaking tutors for their children, teachers using pictures and realia, and the use of language mapping data to organize class sections and assign multilingual teachers.

The second research question, about how the nature and status of the mother tongue affect the nature of challenges and strategies in different contexts, can be answered in the following way: more efficient implementation of mother tongue education can be expected where mother tongues have a stable status and co-exist with Filipino and English.

The next phases of the study will explore the extent to which these challenges and strategies are found in a wider range of contexts across the country. The third phase will provide detailed study of good practices in MTB-MLE in each of the four language contexts.

## **Reflections and Issues**

The Phase 1 data raise questions about aspects of the implementation of mother tongue in the early years. The first of these is how perceptions about the limited utility of local languages, vis-à-vis Filipino and English, can be addressed. The second issue lies in the way some strategies, such as the use of translation, conflict with the rationale of MTB-MLE, which aims to maximize the use of mother tongue in the classroom. Another issue is the extent to which Tagalog/Filipino has become a mother tongue for children in traditionally non-Tagalog areas. There was also some evidence of some school administrators and teachers experiencing a feeling of 'forced compliance' regarding the use of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction. At issue here is how these teachers can take a more positive approach to their implementation.

The Phase 1 data suggests that the Philippines is in the early stages of implementing an approach to MTB-MLE that reflects the complex and diverse multilingual character of the country.



## REFERENCES

- Gonzalez, A. (1998). The language planning situation in the Philippines. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Studies*. 19, 487-525.
- Haddad, C. (ed). (2007). *Advocacy kit for promoting multilingual education: Including the excluded*. Bangkok: UNESCO Bangkok.
- Young, C. (2011). *Enablers and constraints of an effective and sustainable mother-tongue based multilingual education policy in the Philippines*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Bangor.

**Table 1: Challenges and Strategies by Dimensions and Contexts of the Study**

| CHALLENGES   | STRATEGIES  |
|--|---|
| <b>LANGUAGE</b>  |   |
| Limited use and value of the MT in areas outside the community (L, S, T, LD) |   |
| The community's higher value/regard for English (L, S, T, LD)                |   |
| Lack of standardization of the MT (L, S)                                     | School-level standardization based on spelling, pronunciation, and word choice of terms with several versions (S) |
| Some children's use of non-academic register of the MT (S, T)                | Teachers' use of on-the-spot correction and modeling (T)  |
| Limited MT pedagogic discourse (LD)  | Use of English for classroom mgmt, class routines, greetings, etc. (S)  |
| Parents' low proficiency in the MT (S)                                       | Parents' hiring of a MT-speaking tutor (LD)   |
|  | Parents' re-learning of MT along with their children (S)  |
| Perception that the MT is a less challenging language to learn (S)           |   |
| Preference for Filipino because of prestige or practicality (LD and S)       |   |
| <b>MATERIALS</b>   |   |
| Incomplete or late delivery of IMs in MT (L, S, T, LD)                       | Use of school funds (e.g. MOOE) for materials production (L, S, T, LD)  |
|  | Teachers' continuous production of IMs (L, S, T, LD)  |
|  | Teachers' asking for IM copies from friends and colleagues (L, T, LD)   |
|  | Coordinators' encouragement for big and small book production (L, S)  |
|  | Teachers' use of local magazine as additional MT resource material (L)  |
|  | Teachers' sharing of pool of resources in the same grade level (T)  |
|  | Organizing a school program for materials production (T)  |
| Non-contextualization of LMs (L, S, T, LD)                                   | School head's borrowing of materials from schools with more resources (LD)  |
|  | Teachers' substitution of unknown terms with MT words actually used in the community (L, T)                       |
|  | Teachers' do on-the-spot translation during instruction (T)   |
| Limited use of technology (L, S, T, LD)                                      | Teachers' use of texts/materials that pupils really know (T)  |
|  | Teachers' use of personal gadget and equipment for class if school has no/limited resources (T)                   |
| Time and expenses demanded by materials production (L, S, T, LD)             | Conduct of meetings for sharing of ideas and materials among MT teachers and supervisors (L, S)                   |
|  | Teachers' overtime work to produce materials (T)  |
|  | Parents' monetary contribution for materials reproduction (T)   |
|  | Parents' donation of books to school library (L)  |
| Teachers' use of own money to augment insufficient school funds (T)          |   |
| TGs are in English (L, T, LD)  | Teachers' translation of English TG to the MT (T)   |
| TGs do not match pupils' LM (L)  |   |
| Mismatch between children's MT and language used in LMs (S)                  | School heads' and teachers' request for LMs in Filipino (S)   |

| CHALLENGES   | STRATEGIES  |
|--|---|
| <b>INSTRUCTION</b>   |   |
| Long MT words for math (L, S, T, LD)   | Teachers' use of English terms for math (T)   |
| Limited use of the MT for academic purposes (L, S, T, LD)  | Teachers' use of English terms which pupils already know. (T)   |
| Teachers' low proficiency in the MT (L, S, T, LD)  | Teachers' reading of local magazine in the MT (L)   |
|  | Teachers' use of code-switching to get by inadequate MT vocabulary (L, T, LD)   |
|  | Teachers get practice by using the MT as medium of instruction (T)  |
| Parents' perception of children's difficulty in adjusting to the MT as MOI (L, T, S, LD)                             | Teachers' use of translation to deepen explanation (L, S, T, LD)  |
|  | Teachers' use of translation during assessment (L, S, T, LD)  |
|  | Teachers' use of Filipino for pupils who do not speak the MT yet (S, LD)  |
|  | Teachers' use of code-switching to avoid profound MT vocabulary (S, LD)   |
|  | Use of drills on MT terms for colors, shapes, numbers, etc. (S, LD)   |
|  | Teachers' translation of explanation to all languages of the pupils (S, LD)   |
|  | Parents' use of demonstration to explain math concepts (L)  |
|  | Students' use of code-switching to express answers (S)  |
|  | Teachers' use of realia (LD)  |
|  | Teachers' use of pictures (LD)  |
| Parents' hiring of a MT-speaking tutor (LD)  |   |
| Parents' perception that children lag behind in other languages (L, S, LD)   | School head's program monitoring (T)  |
| Pupils' perceived repetition of lessons in language classes (S)  | Teachers connect similarities of MT/English/Filipino to one another (S)   |
| Parents' preference for English as MOI in math (S)   | Giving projects on numbers in their corresponding MT equivalent (S)   |
| Teachers' difficulty to distinguish learning competencies and subject matter differences between Filipino and MT (T) | Conduct of meetings to identify similar competencies and modify activities and instructional materials for similar competencies (T) |
| Teachers' confusion about spiraling for MT and Filipino subjects (T)   | Conduct of workshops on teaching MT and Filipino by supervisors (T)   |
| Children's unfamiliarity with MT letters and sounds (T)  | Use of drills on MT vocabulary items (S)  |
| <b>PROGRAM</b>   |   |
| Teachers' feeling of forced compliance with the policy (L, S, T, LD)   |   |
| Limited program advocacy (L, S, T, LD)   | Establishing strong linkage among the school, division, and regional offices. (L)   |
|  | School head's use of people skills to encourage stakeholders (T)  |
|  | Conduct of more school projects to keep parents engaged/involved. (T)   |
|  | Conduct of a general assembly of parents and community officials (T)  |
| Mismatched MOI and MT (S, LD)  | Use of language mapping data to determine program MT (LD)   |
|  | Teachers' translation of LMs to the pupils' MT (LD)   |
| Weak stakeholder support (L, S)  | Giving of homework (S)  |
| Inconsistency between program policies and activities (S, T)   | Establishing strong linkage among the school, division, and regional offices. (L)   |
| Limited number of teachers sent to training (S, T)   |   |
| Inadequate support for MT teaching by provided trainings (T)   | Featuring teachers' felt concerns in locally organized trainings (T)  |
| Accommodation of non-MT speaking migrant students (T)  | Forming classes according to pupils' MT and assigning multilingual teachers (LD)  |

