

Issues And Challenges in Teaching Mother Tongue Education in The Primary Grades: The Experience of Teachers Of Balutakay Elementary School

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Abstract — With the introduction of the new K-12 program, in 2012 the Department of Education of the Philippines implemented the teaching of the Mother Tongue- based Multi-lingual Education among the kindergarten, Grades 1 to 6 learners. This study determined the issues and challenges faced by teachers in the four skill areas namely; reading, writing, speaking and listening, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of teaching mother tongue. The study utilized the qualitative approach and the data collection consisted mainly of group discussions and intensive interviews. The findings showed that the issues raised by the participants for listening focused on the unavailability of audio materials that can strengthen the listening skills of the learners while the challenge is the limited Sinugbuanong Binisaya (local dialect) vocabulary of the teachers and the unfamiliarity of the words. As to speaking, the participants find it hard to speak fluently in Sinugbuanong Binisaya. The challenge is that teachers previously taught the different subjects using the second language which is English. As to reading, the participants have problems on the limited reading materials available for teaching. The issue of understanding profound Sinugbuanong Binisaya terminologies is challenges to them. And, as to writing, the participants lack resources which could enhance their writing skills. The challenge in spelling of the Sinugbuanong Binisaya lies in the fact that some words are long and difficult to spell. On the other hand, the teaching of Mother tongue revealed advantages in teaching such as: learners were able to express their thoughts and ideas resulting to high participation in class discussions; learners become independent in their choice of expression, and the use of mother tongue facilitates in explaining the meaning of some English words. The disadvantages are all linked to the scarcity of instructional materials which hinder the enhancement of the reading, listening, speaking and writing skills of the learners. Added to these is the lack of training to prospective teachers to teach mother tongue.

Keywords — *Mother tongue, Sinugbuanong Binisaya, issues, challenges, perspectives*

I. Introduction

In the Philippines, the introduction of the new K-12 program ushered in the implementation of the use of the Mother Tongue or the learners' first language in the classroom. The implementation brought issues and challenges among teachers who are not properly trained to

teach the discipline. Training programs were conducted, however, many felt inadequate to teach the subject due to the lack of instructional materials and fluency in speaking the mother tongue. This is because they were used to teach either in English or Filipino in almost all of the subjects assigned to them.

With the shift in the medium of instruction used, the government hopes through the Department of Education to facilitate lively classroom interaction as well as facilitate self-expression of every learner since they will speak in their native language. On the part of the teacher, several issues and problems cropped up due to the preparation they need in order to cope with the demands of the subjects they are teaching.

The researcher's evaluation of teachers' perspective on the teaching of mother tongue will be the initial move in understanding this gigantic reform in the country's language policy. Pursuant to Section 4 and 5 of Republic Act No. 10533, basic education shall be delivered in languages understood by the learners as language plays a strategic role in shaping their formative years of learners. This novel reform in language policy introduces mother tongue as the language of instruction (LOI) and as a distinct course, carrying the descriptive title of teaching lessons in basic education using the first language of the learners. This will be utilized in teaching all subjects except Filipino and English from the first grade to the third grade. The feedback as regards the implementation of the program will inform policy makers in introducing the needed reforms to improve the process of refining it. Great lessons will be extracted from this study considering that it is evaluated after two years of its implementation.

The study gathers the perspectives of stakeholders of Balutakay Elementary School in Managa, Bansalan, Davao del Sur. Only teachers of the elementary grades will be involved.

This study examined the ways in which stakeholders understand and enact mother tongue in one school in Davao del sur. It provides a comparative look at the differences between and among the elementary teachers.

The main objective of this study was to determine the issues and challenges in teaching mother tongue as a subject in the primary grades. Specifically, the study aimed to determine the following: First, identify the issues in teaching Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education in terms of the following skills, namely; listening, speaking, reading, and writing ; Second, determine the challenges in teaching Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education when classified according to the following skills; listening, speaking, reading, and writing ; and Third; determine the advantages and disadvantages in teaching Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education.

The study is guided by the following questions:

1. What are the issues in teaching Mother Tongue in listening? speaking? reading? and writing?

2. What are the challenges in teaching Mother Tongue in listening? speaking? reading? and writing?
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages in teaching Mother Tongue Based-Education?

Mother tongue is the first language that a person learned. It is generally accepted that in teaching and learning processes, the child's mother tongue is of utmost importance. For one thing, it categorizes a large part of the child's environment, that is, it has names for most of the objects, actions, ideas, attributes and so on that are so important to him (Oluwole, 2019). This no doubt will go a long way to foster proper and adequate communication between teachers and pupils, and further promote learning as the child feels more comfortable to express himself in a language he/she understands and can identify with.

As many school practitioners in different parts of the world advocate the use of the mother tongue as a medium of communication and instructions in early years of learning, there are several studies pointing out that it is still unclear whether schooling in children's native language is an effective approach to improving their learning abilities (Beller, 2021).

With the introduction of the new K-12 program, in 2012 the Department of Education of the Philippines implemented the teaching of the Mother Tongue- based Multi-lingual Education among the kindergarten, Grades 1, 2 and 3 learners. This paper determined the issues and challenges faced by teachers in the four skill areas namely; reading, writing, speaking and listening, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of teaching mother tongue.

The study utilized the qualitative approach and the data collection consisted mainly of focus group discussions, intensive interviews and participant observation. The findings showed that the issues raised by the respondents for listening focused on the unavailability of audio materials that can strengthen the listening skills of the students while the challenge is the limited Hiligaynon (local dialect) vocabulary of the teachers and the unfamiliarity of the words. As to speaking, the respondents find it hard to speak fluently in Hiligaynon. The challenge is that teachers previously taught the different subjects using the second language which is English. As to reading, the respondents have problems on the limited reading materials available for teaching. The issue of understanding profound Hiligaynon terminologies is challenges to them. And, as to writing, the respondents lack resources which could enhance their writing skills. The challenge in spelling of the Hiligaynon lies in the fact that some words are long and difficult to spell.

On the other hand, the teaching of Mother tongue revealed advantages in teaching such as: learners were able to express their thoughts and ideas resulting to high participation in class discussions; learners become independent in their choice of expression, and the use of mother tongue facilitates in explaining the meaning of some English words. The disadvantages are all linked to the scarcity of instructional materials which hinder the enhancement of the reading,

listening, speaking and writing skills of the learners. Added to these is the lack of training to prospective teachers to teach mother tongue.

Currently, DepEd uses 19 languages in MTB-MLE: Tagalog, Kapampangan, Pangasinan, Iloko, Bikol, Ybanag, Sinugbuanong Binisaya, Hiligaynon, Waray, Bahasa Sug, Maguindanaoan, Maranao, Chavacano, Ivatan, Sambal, Akianon, Kinaray-a, Yakan, and Sinurigaonon. The MTB-MLE is implemented in two modules: 1) as a learning/subject area and 2) as medium of instruction. (GovPh, 2019).

Developmentally appropriate. As a subject, mother tongue education focuses on the development of speaking, reading, and writing from Grades 1 to 3 in the mother tongue. As a medium of instruction, the mother tongue is used in all learning areas from Kinder to Grade 3 except in teaching Filipino and English subjects.

Filipino is introduced in the second quarter of Grade 1 for oral fluency (speaking). For reading and writing purposes, it will be taught beginning in the third quarter of Grade 1. The four other macro skills which are listening, speaking, reading, and writing in Filipino will continuously be developed from Grades 2 to 6.

The purpose of a multilingual education program is to develop appropriate cognitive and reasoning skills, enabling children to operate equally in different languages – starting with the first language of the child. (GovPh, 2019).

Researchers have proven even during our education with the Thomasites that the child's first language really facilitates learning, as emphasized by Dr. Monroe, that we should be educated in our mother tongue. This gave birth to the Iloilo experiment and the result of that study was very remarkable.

Major Findings of the Three Language-Teaching Experiments. The results of first Iloilo Experiment (1948-1954) along with the experiments in Rizal (1960-1966) and Iloilo (1961-1964) reflected the value of holistic approach to language in combination with other languages.

The MTB-MLE strengthens the development of the appropriate cognitive and reasoning skills enabling children to operate equally in different languages—starting with the mother tongue.

Language Development. Students will establish a strong educational foundation in the language they know best; they will build a good “bridge” to the school language(s), and they will be prepared to use both/all of their languages for success in school and for life-long learning.

Cognitive Development. School activities will engage learners to move well beyond the basic questions of who, what, when, and where to cover all higher order thinking skills in the learners' language of thought.

These higher order thinking skills will: (1) transfer to the other languages once enough Filipino or English has been acquired to use these skills in thinking and articulating thought; and (2) be used in the process of acquiring English and Filipino more effectively.

Academic Development. Students will achieve the necessary competencies in each subject area and, at the end of the program, they will be prepared to enter and achieve well in the mainstream education system.

Socio-Cultural Development. Students will be proud of their heritage language and culture, and respect the languages and cultures of others; they will be prepared to contribute productively to their own community and to the larger society.

Furthermore, students will learn and develop holistically. When learners are first instructed in the language they know best, they are able to build a good “bridge” toward learning another language. Multilinguals also enjoy benefits that go beyond linguistic knowledge. They are also able to learn with more flexibility.

Teachers' testimonies

At first, a teacher of Pasig Elementary School, who has been teaching Grade 3 Mathematics for 17 years, was apprehensive to use the mother tongue. She was mainly worried about how mathematical concepts and terminologies could be translated to the mother tongue.

However, this concern was negated by the more active participation of the children when they started using the mother tongue in her classes. She noticed that the children became more confident in conceiving and explaining content, and more articulate in expressing their ideas. She saw how using the mother tongue enables her learners to immediately construct ideas, explain without fear of making mistakes, and add new concepts to those they already know.

Another teacher, a Grade 3 Science teacher of 12 years, had the same apprehensions. “It was a very unwelcome idea to use the mother tongue in teaching Science. It seemed difficult. I also thought of the extra effort I might need to exert in using terms that would match the exact translation of scientific terms in the mother tongue.”

However, when we started teaching in the mother tongue, we were surprised by how effective it was. The pupils were more attentive in class discussion. They are also able to explain their answers well when responding to questions. Furthermore, it makes them more confident to converse,” added this teacher.

The present study is anchored on UNESCOs (2020) factors in the success of mother tongue-based multilingual education program implementation based on Bensons (2020), Danbolts (2019) and Malones (2019) inventory of implementations in mother tongue-based multilingual education.

UNESCO (2020) emphasized that the effectiveness of mother tongue-based multilingual education necessitates thorough planning and commitment. The planners need to take into consideration measures to ensure that the program is effective. These factors are language model, teacher recruitment and preparation, materials development and production, parental support, and education sector alignment.

These factors guided the researcher in framing the research questions for the study. They were considered and were modified by the researcher to fit the present study. The researcher came up with teachers' mother tongue knowledge/assessment, instructional materials, and attitude towards the program as the three main aspects to be considered in investigating the challenges that stakeholders faced in the implementation of the mother tongue-based multilingual education.

Benson (2020) mentions that one challenge that may be faced in mother tongue based schooling is human resource development. This means that human resource development is on the teachers training. These trainings should not be carried out without appropriate in-service and pre-service training. Along with this challenge is the difficulty to find teachers who are competent in the L2. In consequence, unqualified teachers with less training are hired especially when nationwide implementation is done. Another challenge according to Benson is on linguistic and materials development. She says that special attention should be given to time and resources in the implementation of mother tongue- education. Educators and people in the community should have time to work together with linguists to be able to produce materials in the L1. Benson stressed that there are problems in the implementation sometimes because people who are involved in the implementation fail to reach a consensus on the allocation of resources.

Moreover, Danbolt (2019) cited another challenge and that is on the attitude towards the language which is very important in learning to use one or two languages. Learning a language goes with attitudes of its users and of persons who do not know the language. When one has a positive consideration towards the language being used, a feeling of belongingness and identity exists. Skutnabb-Kangas and McCarty (2019) supports this idea by saying that positive attitude towards language is in relation to the feeling of being at home with the language. Benson (2020) posed that the use of the mother tongue in the classroom makes students feel good about school and their teacher. This happens because they are becoming knowledgeable in a language familiar to them. This makes them be encouraged to demonstrate what they know and participate in their own learning and eventually express themselves.

Malone (2019) as cited by Kadel (2020) mentioned seven challenges in planning, implementing and sustaining an excellent mother tongue-based education. These are multiple languages with multiple dialects, absence of concrete orthographies, shortage of mother tongue speakers with teaching materials, scarcity of written literature, various mother tongues, large class sizes, and deficiency of curriculum and instructional materials. Kadel also pointed out that challenges may also be faced on poor coordination among government agencies, misconception and differences in the knowledge about mother tongue-based multi-lingual education, confusion

of parents about the notion of mother tongue-based multilingual education, qualms among teachers in the government schools due to the apprehension of losing their jobs, eagerness of parents to send their children to go to schools with English as medium of instruction, making mother tongue inclusive for all since it aims for the utilization of non-dominant languages speaking children only, and the unfair allocation of financial resources from the agencies.

II. Methodology

Qualitative research design was utilized in this study because it focused on the experiences which are related to professional practices of teachers in teaching the mother tongue. One school is the venue of the research using the qualitative-phenomenological design.

For the purpose of this study, one school in the Davao del Sur region of the Philippines was selected as the site of interest. For the teachers, fifteen (15) were chosen to be interviewed for this study. The selection criteria from which participants were chosen included level of engagement in the group, willingness to participate in the interview, and ability to express ideas. Participants with divergent views were purposefully selected in order to hear the spectrum of opinions. Participant-teachers numbering 15 were given codes to protect their identities: P1 to P15 were used in identifying their quotes.

The interview method was used because it presents a life-like environment in which the respondents were allowed to have group discussions about their perspectives on the implementation of mother tongue. A total of eleven (11) interviews across selected stakeholders were conducted. This study complied with the requirement in conducting interviews pegged at three interviews in order to properly compare and contrast data across groups. Semi-structured, open-ended questions were constructed based on the research questions. Analysis began during the data collection period. Each day, the collected first-hand information was reviewed, synthesized, and documented in order to keep careful and detailed notes. Themes that emerged from transcribed interviews were noted and analyzed comprehensively.

Thematic analyses were used to analyze the recorded and transcribed responses of the participants. It requires more involvement and interpretation from the researcher. Thematic analyses move beyond counting explicit words or phrases and focus on identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas within the data, that is, themes

III. Results and Discussion

Issues in teaching Mother Tongue in listening, speaking, reading, and writing

Four important elements in teaching Mother Tongue have been spoken to by the participants. Several issues were raised in the four elements: *listening – inadequate learning*

materials, use of flashcards, inadequate repetition, dictation and reading aloud; speaking – inadequate teaching materials, mispronouncement, and limited communication; reading – limited books, knows reading but limited identification; and writing – insufficient resources, limited vocabulary, and incorrect spelling.

Challenges in teaching Mother Tongue in listening, speaking, reading, and writing

What are the challenges encountered by teachers in teaching Mother Tongue in terms of listening, speaking, reading, and writing? Their responses in the form of narratives have been gathered and analyzed: *listening – difficulty in understanding mother tongue, limited vocabulary, cannot identify the stress; speaking – cannot speak mother tongue fluently, inadequate training & seminars; reading – difficulty of learners in understanding, inadequate background knowledge & language; writing – incorrect spelling of words, laziness of learners, and limited vocabulary.*

Advantages and disadvantages in teaching Mother Tongue Based-Education

Although the mother tongue is seen as necessary for the learners, there are advantages and disadvantages seen by teachers, parents and other stakeholders of the community: *advantages – intellectual development, personal development, cultural development, commercial benefits, communication skills, ease in making study material, ease for the teacher, strong family bonds, strong foundation for learning skill, confidence and awareness of oneself; disadvantages – lack of resources, materials, books; hindrance in learning English, limited training and workshops.*

Discussion

Many youngsters from corner to corner in the booming world are learning quite less in school, a truth that may be connected to teaching that is in a language they do not fully perceive. It is a drill that ends up in inadequate or non-existent learning and acquisition of information and skills, distancing experiences, and high drop-out and repetition rates. To develop the standard of education, language policies need to acquire the use of mother-tongue learning. Structures of learning that disregard the native language within the first years are unfruitful, unuseful and have an antagonizing impact on children's learning. Mother-tongue teaching in the early years can enable the effective jobs of teachers and learners. For too long, mother-tongue education has been largely unremarked by the policy makers.

Mother tongue is crucial because of several reasons. Mother tongue is vital in shaping the intellect and feelings of a person. Learning to speak in the native language is very important for children thorough development. Being swift with the mother tongue helps the child in a number of ways. It resonates with his culture, guarantees good comprehensive development, and holds up for the learning of other languages. A child first grasps what surrounds them through the language they listen to their family conversing in from before they are born.

Whereas there are cheering signs that the policy pendulum has started to swing towards a larger understanding of the benefits of mother-tongue learning, there is still a long way to go. Policies and programs are being developed to take hold of mother tongue in the early stages of learning, but there still prevails a need to present better policies, make sure better preparation for the teaching of second languages and make it a point that huge amounts of resources are set aside. All we hope to do is to encourage the education givers to take in account the need to introduce *mother tongue* as a medium of learning in the beginning stages of schooling.

The present study looks at the experiences of English teachers' perception about the use of mother tongue and their perceived effectiveness of it. It also attempted to find out the way they deal with the learners' having poor proficiency in English.

The study revealed positive perceptions of teachers towards judicious use of *mother tongue*. They believed that totally banning *mother tongue* and excessively using it might not be a better idea. However, they tend to use *mother tongue* whenever they feel the requirement and necessity of using it in the class. They believed that using *mother tongue* helps the students understand the difficult concept and enhance participation in interaction.

There are several occasions where use of *mother tongue* is proved to be a better solution to deal with the students having poor background in English. There are, of course, pros and cons of using *mother tongue* in the class, it depends on when and in which situations it is used.

In fact, several studies that have been carried out in different contexts previously have supported judicious use of mother tongue and no studies recommend the excessive use of it as it reduces the opportunities to get exposed to target language. The study suggests that if *mother tongue* is used judiciously, there is no harm, but it helps develop students' participation in interaction.

The study has several limitations that should be noted. Research findings are limited to a public school. Similarly, the study has only used interview and participant observation to collect data for the study and it is not supplemented by learners' experience and perception. There might be mismatch between what the teachers said and what the learners actually experienced regarding the issue of mother tongue use in the English classes.

However, the present study could be useful for the teachers teaching English. They could gain insights into the controversial issue of either to use or not to use mother tongue in their classes. Similarly, the study could be helpful for the researchers who want to study about issue of mother tongue use and learners' participation in public school classes.

IV. Conclusion

In teaching mother tongue-based multilingual education the issue in terms of listening is on the scarcity of audio instructional materials used for listening. The challenges are; the learners' unfamiliarity with profound Sinugbuanong Binisaya words and limited vocabulary.

In teaching mother tongue-based multilingual education the issues in terms of speaking are; students are not exposed to several words or terminologies in Sinugbuanong Binisaya and most of them mispronounce some Sinugbuanong Binisaya terminologies. The challenge consists of teachers finding it hard to speak fluently in Hiligaynon since they lack adequate training and seminars for them to be equipped in teaching the subject. Additional to that, the fact that most teachers are teaching other subjects which are mainly taught in the second language which is English.

The main issue in teaching mother tongue-based education in terms of reading is the lack of instructional materials. There are limited reading materials for students to develop their reading skills. The challenge is that students have difficulty in understanding some words they are not familiar with.

In terms of writing the main issue is the limited resources for teaching writing Sinugbuanong Binisaya, while the challenge is that most of the learners are lazy to write especially longer words in Sinugbuanong Binisaya and they are poor in spelling as well.

The advantages in teaching mother tongue-based education are: students are able to express their thoughts and ideas resulting to high participation in class discussions; the learners feel independent in their choice of expression; mother tongue can facilitate in explaining the meaning of some English words through translation thus help the students learn English easily. The disadvantage is that because of limited resources or learning materials, the students' knowledge of vocabulary words in Sinugbuanong Binisaya is also limited. The capacity of the student to learn is not utilized maximally and the inadequate teachers' training negatively affects the performance of both the teachers and students.

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AUTHOR'S PROFILE



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Nancy never intended to be a teacher. She discovered her passion by experiences, as a job order at Provincial Capitol of Davao del Sur and Sunday School teacher assistant in our Church. She is fierce and bold to turn her experiences into reality.

Presently, she is actively pursuing a Master's degree in Educational Management at Rizal Memorial Colleges Inc. in Davao City, Philippines. Nancy's education and experiences have provided many opportunities for her to give back to the pupils and help them achieve something great in life.