

Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education: The Attitudes and Challenges Faced By Elementary School Teachers In Marhaba School Of Davao, Inc.

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Abstract — The study illustrates the attitudes of elementary school teachers in Marhaba School of Davao Inc. of Lubogan, Toril, Davao City towards Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTBMLE) policy; the challenges they experienced that are attributed to it; and their suggestions in improving such language education policy. The study adapted the modified version of Ejie's (2019) questionnaire, such modifications were done by Tonio and Ella (2019) in their study for it to fit in the Philippine educational context. Using Chronbach's Alpha, Tonio and Ella's (2019) modified questionnaire garnered a 0.80 rating for reliability. The questionnaire was administered online, and the data were obtained from 50 elementary teachers of a private school. The data were analyzed using the frequency and mean computation as well as thematic analysis. The results indicate that generally, the teachers disagree that the MTB-MLE policy is in good principle as they believe that it will not make the lessons interesting to students, and that it will not enable them to understand their lessons easily. In addition, some of the most recurring challenges associated with the policy include reading and instruction comprehension difficulties, degradation of English language literacy and proficiency, language and/or communication barrier between the teacher and the students, poor vocabulary and other grammar issues, teaching difficulty in Math, and difficulty in learning a second language (L2). Some recommendations obtained from the participants include the call for additional funding and support to MTB-MLE teachers, abolishing the policy and switching to the old curriculum, and revising some aspects of the policy to better suit the linguistic diversity of the country.

Keywords — *MTB-MLE, teachers, attitudes, challenges, recommendations*

I. Introduction

This study investigates the attitudes of elementary school teachers who are at the receiving end of the MTB-MLE policy implementation. It also captures the challenges they face that are one way or another linked and related to the MTB-MLE implementation in the primary levels. Lastly, this research solicits suggestions and recommendations from teachers working in the frontlines teaching students who are products of the MTB-MLE policy from the bottom-up. Through this study, we aim not only to shed light on the attitudes of teachers but also to give a clearer picture

on their experiences in the grassroots. We aim to discover the effects of the policy in the secondary education sector and to prove the veracity of claims pertaining to the benefits of using mother tongue in instruction as mentioned in previous studies backing up the goals and objectives of the policy. At the point of finality, utilizing the study's findings along with respondent recommendations, the study aims to offer input to policymakers for consideration to improve the policy implementation and as guidance as they issue directives that would alter and radically change the course of the country's educational quality.

Teachers' Attitude towards Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education

Haugen (1956 as cited in Grosjean, 2019) argues that "whenever languages are in contact, one is likely to find certain prevalent attitudes of favor or disfavor towards the languages involved. These can have profound effects on the psychology of the individuals and on their use of the languages." Language contact and competitions in multicultural areas are some of the important phenomena that language attitude research takes into account as this sociolinguistic inquiry (Wang & Ladegaard, 2019) helps us understand the nature of language and the issues related to it, which include but not limited to maintenance or shift (Letsholo, 2019). The Philippines, like many other countries worldwide, is a country where linguistic power struggle is inevitable since more than 180 languages are found in different sociolinguistic settings. People in regions and provinces far from Manila, for example, have some level of resistance to Filipino, the national language (Wa-Mbaleka, 2019), partly because Tagalog is probably the source of more than 90% of Filipino words and only one-third of Filipinos are proficient in Tagalog (Smolicz & Nical, 2019). Language attitude plays a vital role in accounting for which languages are learned, used, and preferred by bilinguals (Grosjean, 2019); and in the determination of the status of a language and in institutionalizing language policies (Callan & Gallois, 2019). In addition, awareness of language attitudes in communities with multicultural contexts are proven to have a significant role in the appropriation of language policies. Lastly, Jones (2012) asserts that attitudes toward a language as well as its use as the LOI affects the implementation of any policy.

As the Philippine educational system underwent a radical shift in its language policy through the adoption of the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education wherein the language of instruction (LOI) was changed to mother tongue instead of Filipino/Tagalog and English alone (Philippines Department of Education, 2012), it is expected that this new language policy could afford Filipinos with a sustainable future (Gallego & Zubiri, 2019) through advanced cognitive development (Cummins, 2020; Mallozzi & Malloy, 2007 as cited in Burton, 2019), enhanced academic skills and achievement (Cummins, 2020; Thomas & Collier, 2019; Walter & Dekker, 2011 as cited in Burton, 2019), and improved literacy in gaining additional languages (Cummins, 2020; Thomas & Collier, 1997 as cited in Burton, 2019), among others, as mentioned in the previous part of the discussion.

However, Akinnaso (2019), in reviewing related literature and studies on programs based on the mother tongue, posits that positive results could not be guaranteed if the only consideration

is the use of mother tongue alone. This supports Nolasco's (2019) claim that in the Philippine context, the change in LOI alone will not be enough for the MTB-MLE policy to work and yield favorable results. The way in which policies are implemented should be taken into consideration in a local and national standpoint as scholars from anthropological traditions argue that in retrospect, top-down language policies give heavy footing and lean towards expert knowledge compared to local knowledge (Canagarajah, 2019; Rajagopalan, 2019). Although the majority of the studies mentioned earlier validate the use of MTB-MLE, it however, does not give consideration or account towards the understanding of language learning in a local scale (Burton, 2019). It is imperative to understand that context plays a crucial role in shaping the policies to be implemented, and those who work on the ground level have their own knowledge, based on hands-on and context-specific experience about the strategies, may it be effective or not, even though they are mostly unrecognized in scholarly literature (Canagarajah, 2019; Pennycook, 1989 as cited in Burton, 2019).

In the Philippine context of the MTB-MLE implementation, Nolasco (2019) cited community support as well as empowerment as one of the crucial conditions that needs to be met to ensure the success of the program, this was further supported by Fullan (2020) and Shohamy (2019) arguing that less attention has been given to the grassroots level where implementation of the program will actually occur. Naom and Sarah (2019) argues that the MTB-MLE policy implementation are faced with major drawbacks which include but not limited to teacher preparedness, resources, and attitudes along with challenges of having a multilingual classroom. Nolasco (2019) also added that the attitude of teachers, may it be positive or negative, toward the use of mother tongue as the LOI are one of the most recurring issues in the implementation process, taking into consideration that teachers and parents are one of the key stakeholder groups playing integral roles for carrying out and enacting the educational policy are often forgotten in the process.

Teachers play an enormously vital role as they stand as frontliners in the implementation of any educational policy (Berowa & Agbayani, 2019). Any institution or system of education cannot successfully operate if not because of them, and that without their support and participation, any policy will be rendered as a good as a failure (Stone, 2019). This goes without saying that teachers' attitudes toward MTBMLE should be given attention since they shape and directly impact their students inside the classroom, in essence, their actions can be constituted as the policy in itself (Sutton & Levinson, 2021).

Seeing the importance of identifying teachers' attitudes toward the mother tongue education policy, several studies have been conducted since the inception of the MTBMLE in 2012 to provide empirical data that would guide policymakers and individuals working in the education sector.

Burton's study in 2019 focused on the understanding, ideologies, and practices of both the teachers and parents as to how it correlates to the language policy of a national relevance being apportioned at the grassroots. In addition, it also analyzed the many challenges that teachers face

as to the implementation of the policy. The study took place in one of the school districts in Bicol, Philippines. Given that they were the only group who have implemented the MTB-MLE, the study focused on teachers in the Grade 1 level. The study discovered that teachers' and parents' perceptions of MTB-MLE were mostly focused on the policy's short-term benefits and long-term disadvantages. Aside from expressing the overwhelming benefits of the policy in terms of student learning, the participants also expressed concerns as to how learning Cebuano instead of English would implicate them in their children's futures. Additionally, she pointed out the choice that policy makers have, whether they would release top-down directives that oftentimes do not consider local contexts where teachers, parents, and other key stakeholders play critical roles, and where policy implementation takes place, or they can be involved in making decisions regarding which policy will be implemented and vetoed.

In 2019, Valerio conducted a study under the same light—to determine the perceptions of Grades 1-3 teachers regarding the mother tongue-based instruction in the country. The study gathered data from 64 elementary teachers from the province of Quirino, Philippines where a major number of respondents were Ilokano. The study found out that the teachers slightly agree with the statements regarding the MTBE. In addition, one of the key revelations stated in the study is the respondents' lack of confidence as to the instructional materials they presently have and use whether it can ascertain or not their appreciation of the policy since localized translations are mostly unavailable. They were also unsure if the use of mother tongue in instruction can improve and elevate academic performance.

Alieto in 2019 explored the language attitudes and willingness of pre-service teachers regarding the use of mother tongue as the LOI. His study found out that the respondents' 'slightly positive' attitude towards the policy can be understood as a development towards progress in the development of attitudes towards certain indigenous languages. He also pointed out the willingness of pre-service teachers in using their mother tongue as the LOI in the primary level of education. He further stressed the necessity of ensuring positive attitudes of key implementers to yield success in implementing the MTB-MLE.

In 2019, Berowa and Agbayani, as well as Tonio and Ella conducted similar studies on the attitudes of teachers and pre-service teachers. Berowa and Agbayani (2019) found out that teachers in the primary grades showed favorable attitude towards the MTB-MLE despite the myriad challenges they face in terms of instructional and learning materials. Their finding is quite synonymous to that of Tonio and Ella's (2019), as the former pointed out that pre-service teachers enrolled in Elementary Education veered positive attitude regarding the policy and that they are willing to undergo training in teaching using the mother tongue while implying support for the newly instituted language policy in education.

There is no doubt that indeed, it is important to determine the attitudes of teachers as to the LOI in both the teaching and learning process as it influences policy implementation (Jones, 2019), and that a common MOI is necessary in facilitating communication among the teacher and the

students (Ejeh, 2004) which contributes to success in terms of implementing the MTB-MLE policy. Therefore, there is a need to know what is happening at the bottom of the process in order to make sound decisions as to where the MTB-MLE program is headed since the key implementers are situated in the community level. However, previous studies like the ones mentioned in this chapter only focused on the attitudes and perceptions of teachers and pre-service teachers in the primary/elementary levels, thereby creating a gap in the general understanding of the attitudes of teachers in the country in general.

As the first few batches of learners taught in the mother tongue reach high school, it is important to seek the attitudes of teachers in the secondary level as it may give policy makers a glimpse of how the MTB-MLE policy is doing and how it impacted the current state of the educational system. It will also determine what the teachers in the secondary level feel and the challenges they face as the receiving end since the MTB-MLE policy is primarily implemented in the primary level. Although the policy has garnered quite a few recognitions and accolades since the country was able to follow the trail of the worldwide trend, it is also undeniably true that the opposing side of the implementation presents valid arguments. The current research will also try to delve deeper into that and see if there are teachers in the secondary level who oppose the policy implementation. Furthermore, it will solicit ideas and recommendations from the educators who have firsthand teaching experience of students under MTB-MLE in order to better implement the policy. This study will also address the paucity of literature regarding the MTB-MLE policy in the Philippine context and will guide the current language policy as to the areas that are in dire need of attention.

This section discusses the theoretical perspectives that will be used in analyzing the attitudes of elementary school teachers in Marhaba School of Davao City regarding the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE). This study is guided by two different frameworks: the Socio-Educational Model of Gardner (1985) and the Language Policy Theory of Spolsky (2019).

The Socio-Educational Model

Robert Gardner in 1995 constructed this model under the idea that learning a particular language is built upon the identity of learners themselves, which enables them in adapting and operating in new environments. In the model, four different but interrelated variables were presented, these include social milieu (which pertains to the culture as well as the environment of an individual), individual difference (like level of intelligence, aptitude, motivations, and unique environments), L2 acquisition context (may it be formal or informal), and outcomes (both linguistic and non-linguistic skills).

In social psychology, a learner's individual characteristics are considered of high value and significance in language learning, as the model suggests. Gardner (1985) posited in viewing motivation, a tripartite complex or perspective must be used, and that certain characteristics of

learners must be present to facilitate language learning including the learners desire towards learning, the effort they exert to learn, and a display of positive attitude towards learning. The model also postulates that attitudes deemed to be educationally and socially relevant can influence motivation. These attitudinal constructs can be best understood by looking at how learners display their attitude toward the learning situation and/or environment, particularly the classroom set-up or the school environment, textbooks and other course materials, assessment strategies employed by the teacher, and the assessment and evaluation of both the language teacher and the course. Additionally, this construct acknowledges the difference between a skilled teacher and a less skilled teacher in terms of the target language where the former has a good grasp and the latter with less proficiency (Tonio & Ella, 2019). The willingness, interest, and openness towards learning the target language in the community for socialization and cultural learning are reflected in the attitudinal construct of integrativeness (Berowa, 2019; Berowa, Devanadera, & David, 2019; and Lovato, 2011 as cited in Tonio & Ella, 2019). This gives clear emphasis on the learner's ability to understand the language as well as the culture of a community that the learner is unfamiliar with (Lovato, 2011 as cited in Tonio & Ella, 2019).

Furthermore, motivation and attitude and their interdependent relationship were also stipulated in the model. These two variables go hand in hand and have a direct or indirect influence toward successful language learning in both formal and informal settings (Gardner, 1995).

Language Policy Theory

Bernard Spolsky (2019) proposed a theory of language arguing that a language policy theory's goal must be built upon accounting the choices made by individual speakers based on patterns which are rule-governed and at the same time recognized by their respective speech communities. Circumscribed in the theory are three assumptions, one of which views language policy as a social phenomenon created in different domains like homes, schools, and the community. The second assumption assumes the presence of beliefs, practices, and management as three separate but interrelated components. The third assumption takes into account both internal and external factors affecting language choice. As per Spolsky's (2019) suggestion, these assumptions may come from different directions, either from within or outside the domain and may be language-related or not.

Building on this theory, Burton (2019) suggests that the three components of language policy must be given closer attention (Burton, 2019). Beliefs, sometimes interchangeably referred to as ideology, explain the values held by speech community members toward language and language use. Spolsky (2021) described it as — “what people think should be done.” Although a certain speech community possesses many beliefs, a dominant and common ideology favoring an approach to language is still present.

The language selections or actions that people make are referred to as practices. Practices are often described in terms of phonology (sound and sound patterns), morphology (word), syntax

(or the grammatical choices enacted inside the community), as well as the sociolinguistic aspect which include societal rules about when and where language varieties should be used. The interaction between language and social environment which is also known as the ‘ecology of language’ shapes the practices of a certain speech community (Haugen, 2019; Spolsky, 2021).

Efforts made either deliberately or not to influence language practices is referred to as management. It is also oftentimes called language planning, which gives emphasis on the interventions carried out to shape the way policies are enacted. This component of language policy is most associated with individuals or documents possessing legal authority. A written legislation supporting or obstructing a language policy is one of the many examples (Burton, 2019).

In conclusion, the socio-educational model clearly established the interdependent relationship between motivation and attitude and that both variables affect one another. Through this lens, the current study hopes to capture the attitudes of high school and senior high school teachers towards MTB-MLE by looking into the motivations that drive them to feel the way they do towards the policy, specifically, the study would illustrate and reveal the challenges that they face that are attributed to the implementation of the policy. On a different note, using Spolsky’s language policy theory, the study will try to elucidate how the three components of language policy namely beliefs, practices, and management come into play and how each component shapes every policy that is enacted or put into law. These theories will help in explaining the cause-and-effect phenomena that is happening in the education sector by delving into the experiences of educators who are handling students taught using the mother tongue during their primary years in education. Additionally, the recommendations that will be gathered through this study correlates to the management component of Spolsky’s language policy theory. If such recommendations will be taken into account and put into work, then it would act as an intervention that will shape the way the policy is enacted.

II. Methodology

To fully grasp and gather quantifiable and reliable data, a quantitative design was employed in the present study. Shank (2002) as cited in Ospina (2019) defines quantitative research as “a form of systematic empirical inquiry into meaning.” By systematic he insinuates “planned, ordered and public”, adhering to regulations agreed upon by delegates of the quantitative research community.

The respondents were selected using criterion sampling. Criterion sampling enables researching on conditions or with resolute participants in line with the specified criteria to stipulate rich related data (Patton, 1999). In this respect, the criteria included (1) being an elementary school teacher, (2) teaching at the identified private school, (3) teaching within the province. The study involved 50 elementary school teachers.

The survey questionnaire was adapted and modified from Tonio and Ella (2019) to fit the context of the present study, which they also adapted and modified from Ejieh (2020) to fit the Philippine context. Using Cronbach's Alpha, Tonio and Ella's (2019) modified version garnered a reliability rating of 0.80 and settled for a 4-point Likert Scale that contrasted from strongly agree to strongly disagree as a replacement for yes/no response. The survey questionnaire has three parts. The 13 statements were enlisted on the first part of the questionnaire. Part 2 is composed of statements listing possible challenges or problems teachers encountered in handling/teaching students using the policy, while Part 3 asked the teachers to rate three suggestions to better implement the MTB-MLE policy in the country.

The data obtained were tabulated, computed, and analyzed using descriptive statistics, particularly through the use of the mean (t-test) used in the study of Tonio and Ella (2019) to identify the attitudes of the participants if they strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree on the implementation of the MTB-MLE policy. A Likert scale with 4 score values was constructed by the researcher as a tool in analyzing the data.

For the thematic analysis, the teachers in interviewed teachers with the following questions:

1. What are your thoughts regarding the Mother tongue?
2. How do you use the Mother tongue in your teaching?
3. What are the challenges you encountered in teaching or using the Mother tongue?
4. Do you have any suggestions on improving the implementation of the Mother tongue in your school?.

III. Results and Discussion

Attitude of high school teachers to the implementation of MTB-MLE in the school

As presented, all the statements indicate that teachers in the elementary school levels have unfavorable attitude towards the implementation and use of the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) policy as each statement garnered a weighted mean ranging from 2.04 being the lowest value up to 2.76 as the highest value, respectively, which equates to a descriptive equivalent of "DISAGREE".

Problems/challenges that teachers faced in the secondary level in the implementation of the MTB-MLE

The data obtained in this study also illustrated the challenges that elementary school teachers faced and are facing in teaching students that are products of the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education policy in the primary levels. As can be seen from the findings above, the

primary challenge that educators in the secondary level face is the reading comprehension difficulties among students along with issues in the degradation of students' English literacy and proficiency, and translation issues and/or difficulties, among others.

Suggestions to better implement the MTB-MLE policy

Out of all the recommendations, three major themes were classified which include more support for MTB-MLE teachers, abolish the MTB-MLE policy, and revise and/or modify the policy to suit the varying needs of different educational locations in the country.

Discussion

MTB-MLE has always been a widely debated topic, it garnered accolades from supporters whilst receiving criticisms from its opposers, both the pros and cons side of the coin presents reasonable, arguable, and solid points. The current study captures the attitudes of the high school and senior high school teachers in various public high schools in Zamboanga del Sur, along with the challenges they face that are linked to the implementation of the said policy and their recommendations to improve it. It should be understood that the educational system is like a machinery where teachers play as the mechanical parts, without them, the entire system would collapse and shut down. Thus, without teacher support, any educational policy is doomed to fail. The present study clearly shows that the teachers have an unfavorable attitude towards the MTB-MLE policy, and to add to the myriad of things to think about, they are faced with several challenges that impede the way they deliver their services.

IV. Conclusion

Based on the findings, it is safe to claim that elementary school teachers disagree on the notion that the use of mother tongue as the language of instruction in Grades 1-3 is in good principle as they believe that it will not make the lessons interesting to students, and that it will not enable them to understand their lessons easily. This contradicts Gallego and Zubiri's (2019) idea that academic competence can be accomplished by means of utilizing the native tongue, and that of Naom and Sarah (2019) who opines that the exclusive use of language that is common and familiar to the learners, develops linguistic skills helping them to easily navigate academic activities and facilitate learning. In addition, the above-mentioned finding is very much antonymous to Sario, Guiab, and Palting's (2014 as cited in Medilo, 2019) study which found that using mother tongue in the classroom improved students' participation, interaction, and made them more active, it also gave them a sense of belongingness and enhanced their receptiveness.

the adverse effects of MTB-MLE on people's English literacy have been observed in a couple of studies wherein the ground for such a claim was laid out. Li and Majhanovich (2010 as cited in Namanya, 2019) postulates that MTB-MLE decreases individuals' amount of exposure to

the English language, thus adversely affecting their proficiency in English. On the same note, in countries like the Philippines and Indonesia where there exists quite a number of local languages, the number of materials utilizing the mother tongue is significantly low, which may pose a threat in the development of students' macro skills (Alberto, Gabinete, & Ranola, 2020; Wa-Mbaleka 2014b, 2015 as cited in Namanya, 2019).

Furthermore, teachers have to resort to English since many concepts lack equivalents in the diverse mother tongues in the Philippines (Medilo, 2019). Teachers also are deprived from training in providing instruction in the mother tongue which may alter the eminence of instruction provided to students (Medilo, 2019; Wa-Mbaleka, 2014a, 2014b, 2015 as cited in Namanya, 2019). In these cases, MTB-MLE may hinder individuals' attainment of skills and information. In an experimental study conducted by Namanya in 2019, it has been found out that MTB-MLE may indeed adversely affect children's English literacy which may affect their chances of fighting in the world of work. The findings of the aforementioned studies are synonymous to the present study. The following excerpts provide bases for this claim: Less English proficiency; Low English literacy; Some students will not be fluent in English in written and in oral form; Difficulty in explaining/defining/constructing ideas using English as the medium; [Difficulty] with transition to English instruction.

There is a need to look into the current resources that MTB-MLE teachers have in order for them to work and perform their duties effectively and successfully. The government, through the mandate of the Department of Education should align, allocate, and increase funds that will be used to purchase books and other learning materials that correlates to the objectives of the MTB-MLE policy guidelines.

Participants have expressed subtle issues with the implementation of the MTB-MLE policy along with some of their recommendations on how to implement the policy better, however, there has been no mention from the respondents of the aforementioned studies on the abolishment and stoppage of the implementation of the policy.

In order to improve the implementation, the respondents suggest using standardized materials in teaching mother tongue. This will ensure that the quality of knowledge that students will get are sufficient and are at par with the standards that will help them become equipped learners.

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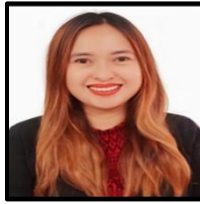
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