Evaluation of the Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education Policy

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Photos taken during the FGDs with Key Stage 1 Teachers of Deped Bicol and DepEd Bukidnon

The implementation and integration of the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education was a significant shift from the bilingual system in the Philippines. The MTB MLE Language Policy aimed to use mother tongue as the mode of instruction for Key Stage 1 (K – 3) learners. However, its rollout faced challenges due to several factors which were identified by this research. Through qualitative descriptive design for an in-depth, detailed, and comprehensive analysis and assessment of the MTB MLE Policy, the Thematic analysis of the data identified three themes namely: Challenges and Issues in MTBMLE (Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education), Teacher Training and Pedagogical Knowledge, and Cultural and Social Consideration which reflected the experiences of Key Stage 1 teacher–participants that will serve as input for policy formulation and implementation.

Introduction

The Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB MLE) initiative in the Philippines, is a significant shift from the Bilingual System towards the use of the mother tongue. The policy, implemented in 2009 (DepEd Order 74) and 2012 (DepEd Order No.16), mandates the use of the mother tongue as the primary medium of instruction from kindergarten to the third grade to facilitate the smooth transition to Filipino and English while preserving linguistic heritage and addressing the language diversity in language inclusive learning settings. The approach is based on research showing that children learn best when taught in a familiar language (Cummins, 2001; Lartec et. al, 2014; Estremera, 2017) by incorporating culturally responsive pedagogies and materials, incorporating indigenous knowledge systems, local traditions, and community resources. The integration of the MTBMLE in the K-12 Curriculum covers language development, cognitive development, academic development, and sociocultural awareness. Gempeso and Mendez (2021) explain that L1 is mandated to be continuously used as MOI in a transition or bridging process through grade three; L2 shall be introduced in the first semester of grade one and have the four macro skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) continuously developed from grades two to six; and, L3 shall be introduced during the second semester of grade one and the four macro skills shall be integrated and developed starting from grade two until grade six.

However, the successful rollout of the MTBMLE policy in the Philippines faces challenges that concern the lack of standardized orthographies, inadequate teacher training, limited culturally appropriate materials, and assessment among others have hindered its successful implementation (Espino, Gonzales, & Martin; 2021)..

The MTB MLE Language Policy

Several studies, such as the Lingua Franca Project (1999-2001) and the Lubuagan Project (1999-present), led the government to initiate policies that will connect the learners from their native tongue to other languages – Filipino and English (Dekker & Walter, 2011). Executive Order # 74 Series of 2009, institutionalized MTB MLE in the Philippines. This was strengthened by the approval of Republic Act 10533 in 2013 which states that the learner's first language is the language of instruction from kindergarten through grade 6. Filipino and English were to be taught as second languages from grade 1 which gradually increased from grades 4-6. Senate Bill 3286 was also passed in 2013 instructing the Department of Education to implement the MTB MLE policy.

One of the MTB MLE language policy's main goals is to have an impact on the learners in the four domains of child development, thus, incorporating it into the K–12 Basic Education Program.

The four domains include linguistic development, cognitive growth, academic development, and social awareness. Goldstein and Naglieri (2011) define language development as "a higher-level cognitive skill involving auditory and oral abilities in humans to communicate verbally about individuals' wants and needs". It provides a solid foundation for academic success which is influenced by environmental, biological, and neurological factors. Cognitive development refers to the mental processes and abilities involved in acquiring knowledge, understanding concepts, solving problems, and processing information. One key aspect of cognitive development includes higher order thinking skills (HOTS), which are classified according to various learning taxonomies such as Bloom's taxonomy. Under HOTS, critical thinking is the process of actively and skillfully assessing and interpreting information, arguments, and evidence to form reasoned judgments and make well-informed decisions (Watson, 2017). Academic growth is the progress and development that students achieve in their academic tasks over time. It involves literacy, numeracy, critical thinking, problem-solving, and subject-specific competencies to be mastered in all learning areas. Sociocultural awareness refers to the recognition, understanding, and appreciation of the cultural, social, and historical factors that mold individuals, groups, and societies. In the multilingual classroom, the teacher develops the awareness of the students to their cultural backgrounds, beliefs, values, customs, and traditions which influence the students' behaviors.

In the implementation of the policy, DepEd provided guidelines in the implementation of Mother Tongue (L1). Gempeso and Mendez (2021) explain that " L1 is mandated to be constantly used as the MOI during a transition or Bridging method through grade three; L2 shall be introduced in the first semester of grade one, and have the four macro skills (hearing, speaking, reading, and writing) been constantly strengthened since grades two to six; and, L3 shall be introduced during the second semester of grade one and the fourth" (D.O. No. 28, Section 2013, DepEd, 2013).

Methodology

The research used the qualitative descriptive design to provide an in-depth, detailed, and comprehensive description to attain the study's objectives. It systematically described, analyzed, and assessed the MTB MLE policy as an input to policy formulation

and its implementation. In particular, it described the experiences and perceptions of the Key Stage 1 teachers on MTB MLE. Data on the teacher's attitudes and beliefs, pedagogies, and professional development were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, and focused group discussions. Preset questions were prepared to serve as interview guides to determine focus. With prompts, participants were asked to reconstruct significant experiences in conducting their lessons and thoughts on the implementation of MTB MLE.

Data were analyzed utilizing thematic analysis to identify the trends, patterns, and relationships of the various codes (Braun & Clark, 2006). To make sense of the data, interview results were transcribed, coded, and categorized to determine the emergence of themes. Coding the interview transcripts gained the following categories: a) challenges and issues in MTBMLE implementation; b) teacher training and pedagogy; c) cultural views in teaching MTB MLE. To be more efficient, the MAX Qualitative Data Analysis (MAXQDA) tool was used in managing and analyzing qualitative data effectively.

Results and Discussion

The thematic analysis enabled the identification of the themes in this study that reflect the experiences of the Key Stage 1 teacher-participants. The table below shows the teacher-participants' understandings, perspectives, and challenges in implementing MTBMLE.

Table 1. Summary of Themes

1.	Challenges and Issues in MTBMLE
2.	Teacher Training and Pedagogical Knowledge
3.	Cultural and Social Consideration

Aiming to improve the foundations of basic education in the Philippines, MTBMLE has been initiated to improve the learning outcomes of students particularly, in the Key Stage 1. In its implementation, MTBMLE faces a multitude of challenges and issues in its effectiveness and inconsistencies. In the table below, the teacher-participants identified the challenges and issues they have experienced.

Sub-theme 1. Teacher training and reduction of competencies

The issue of teachers' inadequacy of MTB MLE training and the reduction poses significant challenges to its effective implementation in Key Stage 1. The challenge comes from limited resources, inadequate teacher preparation, and given priorities to teachers in performing their jobs. Moreover, teachers are expected to be proficient both in the mother tongue of their learners and the language of instruction. This proficiency will effectively convey concepts, facilitate instructions easily, and give support to the students.

Most schools in remote areas lack resources that constrain the teachers to attend professional development opportunities for training in pedagogy and curriculum development. This results in inadequate teacher preparations to effectively implement MTB MLE approaches and methodologies in the classroom.

Sub-theme 2. Limited implementation and misconceptions

This sub-theme captures the misconceptions about the effectiveness and purpose surrounding MTB MLE policy. The limited resources and funding for instructional materials and teacher training constraints hinder the implementation of MTBMLE.

Moreover, inconsistencies in policy implementation are evident at the local and regional levels. Misconceptions about the MTBMLE's effectiveness, relevance, and impact on academic outcomes contribute to the resistance of various stakeholders as reflected in the response,

Furthermore, the limited awareness and advocacy efforts on the benefits of MTBMLE contribute to its limited implementation.

Sub-theme 3. Transition and bridging issues

This sub-theme focuses on the lack of a bridging system from L1 to L2 and transition to English. The transition process is critical considering the development of cognitive and linguistic abilities of the learners in the foundation years of learning. This transition involves the gradual shift in instructing the learners in their mother tongue to proficiency in the second language and English guaranteeing learning.

Sub-theme 4. Curriculum development and assessment

The lack of training and support for teachers to observe principles and practices in MTBMLE instruction in the curriculum is essential. Designing the MTBMLE curriculum is a challenge for teachers to accommodate learners with linguistic diversity ensuring that they comprehend lessons in each classroom. How the curriculum was designed, the limited resources and the use of the mother tongue in assessment have also been problems for the teachers.

Sub-theme 5: Cultural development and building nationalism

Relevant to cultural development and building nationalism, MTBMLE initiatives promote the linguistic heritage of the learners. It shapes the learner's identities towards their cultural identities and builds nationalism through their language.

Conclusions

The implementation of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education in the Philippines faces various challenges and issues that need to be resolved. These are interrelated issues and barriers such as pedagogical knowledge and teacher preparation, curriculum development and assessment, cultural development and social considerations, misconceptions about MTB MLE, transitioning from L1 to L2, to L3, and competency reduction of teachers. However, efforts are needed to address the implementation challenges to ensure its role in achieving the goals in the Key Stage 1 goals and objectives.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

To achieve the goal of MTBMLE, it is highly recommended that certain actions be taken:

Comprehensive teacher training. Teachers must be provided with professional development opportunities to understand the principles of MTBMLE, enhance their pedagogical knowledge and skills, and develop their language proficiency about the L1 of the learners.

Ongoing curricular review and adaptation. Align the curriculum to the local contexts, assessments, and language development objectives. Value the feedback from stakeholders to make the curriculum relevant and engaging to the learners. Incorporate the local traditions into the curriculum.

Production of quality instructional materials. The government should make available high-quality teaching materials, books, and supplementary materials in the various mother-tongue languages for more culturally and linguistically appropriate materials.

Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. A systematic collection of data on student performance outcomes, teacher performance, resource utilization, and support systems must be in place as input for improvement.

Policy support and advocacy. Provide clear guidelines for policy implementation.

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