

# Appropriateness of Mother-Tongue Based Multi-Lingual Education (MTB-MLE) in Urban Areas: A Synthesis Study

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**Abstract:** *This paper examines the appropriateness of the Mother-Tongue Based Multi-Lingual Education (MTB-MLE) policy when applied in urban development contexts in the Philippines. Its “practicality” was assessed based on the demand for competent English language proficiencies in the workplace and on the benefits of English language fluency and usage. This paper also delves on the 2015 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and its role in influencing the worldwide movement for the MTB-MLE advocacy. Sparse case studies in the Philippines where MTB-MLE served its purpose and produced satisfactory results that further strengthened DepEd’s proposition to implement this policy nationwide were also discussed. Furthermore, the role of language in development and the principles in language acquisition were analyzed. These bring to light some gauging factors that reveal the flaws of MTB-MLE when applied in urban contexts through an analysis of: learners’ exposure to the English and Filipino languages; lack of mother-tongue based multi-lingual educational materials; and the varying language needs and challenges from each region. In addition to this, discrepancies on the research findings that MTB-MLE advocates used to base this educational principle were examined. The research results mostly cited as bases for MTB-MLE were incidences of primary enrollment drop-outs, low performances in other subject areas such as Mathematics and Science; and teachers’ struggle to communicate in language students do not understand. All these bring significant findings for Department of Education (DepEd) and Congress to reconsider vital revisions in the K+12 curriculum where MTB-MLE is concerned.*

**Keywords:** Mother-Tongue Based Multi-lingual Education (MTB-MLE), 2015 Millennium Development Goals, English language proficiency, development communication.

## 1. Introduction

The Aquino administration implemented a very drastic change in the educational system of the Philippines. The 10-year basic education has been transformed to K+12 education and the full, nationwide implementation of the latter started on June 2012. The former requires only 6 years in elementary and 4 years in high school. Meanwhile, in the new system, kindergarten is compulsory before students can enroll in Grade 1. The number of years in elementary are the same; however, there are two divisions in high school—4 years in junior high school and 2 years in senior high school. Alongside with these drastic changes in the educational system is the implementation of the “mother-tongue based multi-lingual education (MTB-MLE)” policy.

The Department of Education (DepEd) on March 2012 in a press release said that, MTB-MLE in the K+12 educational system entails the teaching of a child’s mother tongue as a subject and as a medium of instruction from kindergarten until the third grade. Since there are more than a hundred languages/dialects in the Philippines, DepEd adapted only 12 major regional languages to be regarded as the “mother-tongue” for learning in the first four years of a child’s basic education. These languages are Tagalog, Kapampangan, Pangasinense, Iloko, Bikol, Cebuano, Hiligaynon, Waray, Tausug, Maguindanaoan, Maranao, and Chabacano.

(Source: [www.deped.gov.ph](http://www.deped.gov.ph))

## 2. Significance of the Study

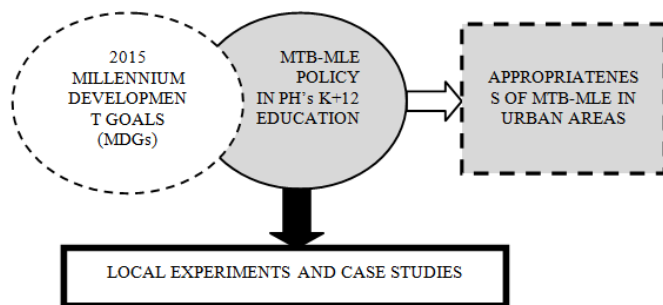
The benefits and effectiveness of MTB-MLE as shown in the experimental case studies in the Philippines cannot be disregarded. However, there are factors that must be taken into consideration when the same policy is applied nationwide, specifically in urban areas where English language proficiency plays a major indicator in the nation’s capability to compete in the global workplace. This paper aimed to explore how appropriate would MTB-MLE be where the usual or daily language used is English and Filipino. It would also lend credence to the possibility of reviewing the implementation of the K+12 curriculum where language as a subject matter and as a medium of instructions are concerned.

## 3. Objectives

This paper aimed to:

- Delve on the foundations where MTB-MLE has been founded: namely, the 2015 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the experimental case studies in the Philippines
- Investigate the appropriateness of MTB-MLE policy in urban contexts
- Analyze some of the discrepancies on the assumptions where MTB-MLE has been founded.

#### 4. Framework of the Study



**Figure 1:** Framework of the Study

The four figures in the framework show the relationships of each variable in the study. The MDGs was placed inside the circle with broken lines and overlaps with the circle for MTB-MLE policy in the Philippines' K+12 Education. The broken lines on the first circle represent the influence of this variable in the formulation and nationwide implementation of the policy indicated on the second circle. The second circle which bears the MTB-MLE policy also stands on the positive premises drawn from local experiments and several case studies where MTB-MLE has been implemented and produced promising results. Hence, this is represented by a full heavy line. From the second circle, a full arrow is drawn toward a box with broken lines bearing the significance of this study where the appropriateness of MTB-MLE in urban contexts is investigated.

#### 5. Scope and Delimitation

All information in this synthesis is based on several books on language acquisition and second language teaching. The online resources for MTB-MLE include: reliable government web sites, published journals downloaded online, credible educational blogs, educational forums, online news from well-known newspaper companies, and position papers or written reports from international organizations.

This study, however, is limited to assumptions based on logic and theories alone. The "urban context" described on the findings refer to the Tagalog region only since it is where Filipino and English are the dominant languages. The "urban context" referred to in this study does not cover other urban areas (like Cebu, Davao, Olongapo, etc.) where other dominant languages exist.

The actual assessment of whether MTB-MLE is effective or not when applied in urban contexts can only be proven or measured after around 6-12 years from when this synthesis study was undertaken. This is due to the fact that only after such time can the first batch of students who have studied under the MTB-MLE policy graduate from elementary (6 years) or high school (12 years). Only then can the actual assessment on their English language proficiency and other academic performances be fully measured and correlated to the languages used in classroom instructions.

#### 6. Discussion

##### 2015 Millennium Development Goals

In September 2000, 189 world leaders assembled for the Millennium Summit at the United Nations' headquarters in New York City. They established the Millennium Declaration which identified their commitment to address the following 7 key points:

- 1) Peace, Security, and Disarmament;
- 2) Development and Poverty Eradication;
- 3) Protection of Common Environment;
- 4) Human Rights, Democracy, and Good Governance;
- 5) Protection for the Vulnerable;
- 6) Meeting the Special Needs in Africa; and
- 7) Strengthening the United Nations.

This declaration was a fine extraction from the discussions in UN Summits and Conferences from the 1990s. There were three complimentary initiatives that proposed the over-all strategies for achieving these goals, namely: The Millennium Project, The Millennium Reports, and The Global Millennium Campaign.

In 2002, the UN Secretary-General presented to the UN world leaders findings and recommendations of these three initiatives. The resulting set of goals, numerical targets, and quantifiable indicators for evaluation became known as the 2015 Eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These goals are:

- 1) Ending Poverty and Hunger;
- 2) Universal Primary Education;
- 3) Gender Equality;
- 4) Child Health;
- 5) Maternal Health;
- 6) Combat HIV and AIDS;
- 7) Environmental Sustainability; and
- 8) Global Partnership.

Goal Number 2 reads: Achieve Universal Primary Education stating to: "ensure that by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling with the following indicators:

1. Net enrolment ratio in primary education;
2. Proportion of pupils starting Grade 1 who reached Grade 5; and
3. Literacy rate of 15-24-year-olds."

(Source: [www.un.org/millenniumgoals](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals))

#### 7. MTB-MLE: An International Advocacy

Concurrent with the United Nations' declaration of the MDGs, findings from published research studies of independent organizations such as SEAMEO, UNESCO, the World Bank, etc. indicated the role that language plays for children to succeed in early education. These researches revealed that the majority languages or national languages are used as the medium of instruction in early education; thus, many children fail their subjects/courses, stop schooling, and altogether lose academic interest.

A compilation of studies published by SEAMEO in 2009,

entitled: “Mother Tongue as Bridge Language of Instruction: Policies and Experiences in Southeast Asia” reported on the current situation of language policies in Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. It also contains reports on how MTB-MLE is being implemented in sparse, experimental case-to-case basis.

Findings and recommendations from reports and studies such as these and together with the support of 2015 MDGs, the notion to expand the use of mother tongue as the language of instruction in early education was established. This movement specifically focused on third world countries, the Philippines included where many languages of minorities exist.

### Language Policies in Classroom Teaching

There has always been a dilemma on policy-making regarding the medium of instruction to be used in the Philippine classroom setting. This is because there are many languages in the Philippines and there are different estimates to their number. In 2005, Ethnologue, an online database, recorded that there are 171 living languages in the Philippines while McFarland in 1993, reported 120 languages. However, both reported the same eight major languages as having the most number of speakers and are geographically spread all throughout the archipelago. These languages are Bikol, Cebuano, Hiligaynon, Ilokano or Iloko, Kapampangan, Pangasinense, Tagalog, and Waray. Due to their popularity, they are identified as the Meso Philippine languages.

What are the implications of having so many languages in one small country? President Manuel L. Quezon saw the need that for the Philippines to unite and be established as one country, a major language should be chosen and be declared as the official language of the nation. This language will be used to unify Filipinos to ensure effective communication in politics, education, business, etc. He issued Executive Order 134 s 1937 that proclaimed the search for such language that can be developed, adopted, and used in the whole country.

The National Language Institute which was commissioned by the National Assembly, the law-making body at that time, recommended that Tagalog be used as the National Language. Tagalog was renamed to Pilipino and later changed to Filipino to adapt the different vocabularies from other dialects and other foreign languages such as Arabic, Spanish, and English. (The influence of the Arabic language may not seem to be that widespread, but a lot of Moslem Filipinos use vocabularies from this language as they interpret the Quran.) The “Filipino” language also expanded its alphabetical characters to adapt these foreign vocabularies. These characters are: c, f, j, q, v, and z.

The Philippines has implemented the Bilingual Education Policy (BEP) since 1974 when then Department of Education, Culture, and Sports (DECS) issued Dept. Order No. 25 titled: “Implementing Guidelines for the Policy on

Bilingual Education.” This policy signified the use of both Filipino and English in education.

The 1987 Constitution retained and further strengthened this policy through Department Order No. 53, s. 1987, entitled: “The 1987 Policy of Bilingual Education.” This policy aims for Filipino citizens to achieve competence both in English and in Filipino. It states that, “The aspiration of the Filipino nation is to have its citizens possess skills in Filipino to enable them to perform their duties and responsibilities as Filipino citizens and in English in order to meet the needs of the country in the community of nations.”

Furthermore, the Bilingual Education Policy aims to: 1) enhance learning through two languages; 2) propagate Filipino as the language of literacy; 3) develop Filipino as a linguistic symbol of national unity and identity; 4) cultivate and elaborate Filipino as a language of scholarly discourse; and 5) maintain English as an international language for the Philippines and as a non-exclusive language of science and technology.

As a result, there were two languages used inside the classroom—Filipino and English. The Filipino language is used in subject areas such as Social Studies, Social Sciences, MAPE (Music, Arts, and Physical Education were combined) and the English language was used in Science, Mathematics, Technology, and English itself where it is taught as a subject.

The general impression and/or observation of foreigners that Filipinos are good in English compared to other nationalities from Southeast Asian counterparts can be attributed to this policy. Since Filipino and English are the languages used in the Tagalog region, students from this area do not need to learn in a foreign language once they begin their formal education. On the other hand, there have been issues on these languages used in the classrooms from regions where tribal and regional languages exist. One of these issues is when students do not comprehend the textbooks and other educational materials printed in English and Filipino.

Thus, the newly-introduced K+12 curriculum attempts to solve these issues by integrating mother-tongue based multi-lingual education in the system.

### 8. Foundations of MTB-MLE in the Philippines

The Philippines is not a neophyte in the Mother Tongue-Based Multi-Lingual Education (MTB-MLE) advocacy. Long before the advent of the United Nation’s 2015 Millennium Development Goals and the widespread popularity gained by MTB-MLE advocacy during the past decade, there have been experiments that compared the performance of students who were taught using the mother tongue and those who have been taught in English.

As early as 1948-1954 in Iloilo, an experiment was conducted to compare the performance of students taught in Hiligaynon from those taught in English. Results showed

that those who were taught in Hiligaynon outperformed those who were taught in English at the end of the first year on subject areas such as Reading, Social Studies, and Mathematics.

The First Language Component Bridging Program (FLC-BP) 1986-1993 experimented on the use of Tawali as a medium of instruction in the Ifugao Province. This six-year pilot project hypothesized that, "Children who acquire reading and writing skills in first language, accompanied by structured program of language arts that provides 'bridge' to Filipino and English—will be more competent in all areas of study than those who learn in the two official languages." Results proved this hypothesis as true and correct.

From 1991-2001, DepEd launched the "Lingua-Franca Project" which aimed to define and implement a national bridging program to develop initial literacy. The experimental groups consisted of the three lingua franca were Tagalog, Cebuano, and Ilokano. The control groups on designated areas used English and Filipino as provided in the Bilingual Policy.

Results from this experiment showed that the experimental groups got higher mean scores in Mathematics, Science, Sibika at Kultura, and Filipino except in English. Another change observed in this experiment was the attitude of parents and the community. There was an increased support from parents in the preparation of educational materials and increased concern in the monitoring of their children's progress.

Other lingua franca projects had been launched since the '70s and the '80s. These were primarily sponsored by the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL)—Philippines, Translators Association of the Philippines (TAP), and other NGOs. These projects developed instructional and supplementary educational materials catering to the different languages in far-flung regions of the Philippines.

One of these projects (sponsored by SIL) is the on-going Lubuagan MLE Program which begun in 1998 and continues to present. The goal is to ensure higher achievement in students' performances, stronger English and Filipino acquisition, and lower drop-out rate. This project started when the survey results, back then, showed that this school is the lowest performing school in major subject areas such as English, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies. Since the program implicates the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction in the learners' early education, this entailed considerable funding for a total revision of the curriculum, material development, and teacher training. The program was very encouraging and promising after results showed dramatic improvements on students' scores on the same subject areas.

All these small-scale cases of MTB-MLE implementation proved to be successful in terms of improving students' performances in major subject areas such as Mathematics, Social Sciences, Science, etc. After all, MTB-MLE is concerned with the cognitive development of learners and

not on the improvement of their English language proficiency. Simply put, MTB-MLE advocates effective and long-term knowledge assimilation through a language that students understand and not to acquire fluency in using the English language.

## 9. The Role of Language in Development

Influential language experts such as Suzanne Romaine and Daniel Nettle (2000) on their book, "Vanishing Voices" pointed out the direct correlation of language to the preservation of ethnic identity, cultures, and knowledge. When a language dies, these things also disappear. Law (2007) gave a very vivid example on how knowledge can also disappear along with a language.

"In the Micmac language, for example, trees are named after the sounds they make in the wind. The names change as the sounds change, so, if an elderly Micmac speaker remembers that a certain kind of tree used to have one name, but is now called something else, this can reveal the effects of acid rain on that species. Lose Micmac and you lose that insight."

Law (2007) furthered that there are at least two languages that die every month and of the 6,500 languages of the world, half of them are expected to vanish within the next century. She attributes this to two main reasons why languages die. First, is when the younger generation does not learn it; secondly, is when speakers become bilingual and mixes the two, the minor or weaker one eventually loses to the more dominant language.

If one would stand by the proposition to preserve the world languages, then the MTB-MLE advocacy can serve as a means to prevent the deaths of such. However, this sobering reality is affected by "globalization".

Technology made globalization flourished at a faster rate over the last few decades. Globalization demands effective communication in a language, a universal language that most nationalities are expected to understand. Chinese Mandarin topped the world's most spoken language followed by English. However, the number of people who speak Chinese is rather concentrated in one area/country or nationality or both whereas English, on the other hand, is spoken either as a native language or a second language of different nationalities all over the world. In addition, English is the language of the Internet, the most popular medium of global communication on the 21st century. These facts then make English as the "regarded" global language.

Hence, even if there are concerns to save the world's languages and MTB-MLE can be one means to achieve this goal, there is a more nagging demand to learn to use the English language fluently. In the light of the persistent globalization that first finds its way in urban development context, why is it important then to be fluent in English?

## 10. English Language Proficiency in the Workplace

In the Philippines, an impressive English proficiency seems



to be the key to landing a good job, both local and abroad. For instance, the booming Business Process Outsourcing (BPOs) e.g. call center industry provides lucrative jobs for thousands (including high school graduates) without having to leave the country. Aside from this, opportunities for Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) have been extended from the humble domestic helpers and skilled workers a few decades back to those in the professional fields such as nursing, engineering, teaching, information technology (IT) experts, etc.

For a long time, there has been a general impression that Filipinos are good speakers of English and are the best ones in Southeast Asia. However, reports from English proficiency tests and results of academic performance proved otherwise. Take for example the 2011 International English Language Testing System (IELTS) Report on the scores of test takers from the top 40 countries.

The top ten performing countries out of the top 40 countries that took IELTS in 2011 shows that Malaysia and Romania topped the notch with an overall mean score of 6.9. France and Germany placed 2nd with a tie on 6.8 mean score. The Philippines, placed on the 3rd spot, is tied with two other countries—Brazil and Kenya—with a mean score of 6.7 in the IELTS band.

**Table 1:** 2011 Mean Scores of Test Takers in IELTS Band

Country	Listening	Reading	Writing	Speaking	OVER-ALL
Malaysia	7.2	7	6.2	6.6	6.9
Romania	7.2	7	6.2	6.8	6.9
France	6.9	6.9	6.3	6.8	6.8
Germany	7	6.6	6.4	7.2	6.8
Brazil	6.8	6.9	6.2	6.9	6.7
Kenya	6.7	6.1	6.6	7.2	6.7
Philippines	7	6.6	6.2	6.8	6.7
Mexico	6.7	6.8	5.9	6.5	6.6
Spain	6.7	6.9	6	6.5	6.6
Russia	6.6	6.6	5.9	6.6	6.5

(Source: [http://www.ielts.org/researchers/analysis\\_of\\_test\\_data/test\\_taker\\_performance\\_2011.aspx](http://www.ielts.org/researchers/analysis_of_test_data/test_taker_performance_2011.aspx))

From the same report, the Philippines placed 2nd only after Malaysia among other Asian countries (Table 2).

**Table 2:** 2011 Mean Scores of Test Takers in the IELTS Band

Country	Listening	Reading	Writing	Speaking	OVERALL
Malaysia	7.2	7	6.2	6.6	6.9
Philippines	7	6.6	6.2	6.8	6.7
Hongkong	6.7	6.4	5.9	6.2	6.4
Indonesia	6.6	6.3	5.9	6.3	6.4
Sri Lanka	6.6	6	5.9	6.5	6.3
India	6.4	5.6	5.8	6.2	6.1
Nepal	6.3	5.8	5.7	6	6
Taiwan	5.9	6	5.5	5.9	5.9
Vietnam	5.9	6.1	5.6	5.7	5.9 Bot tom of Form
Bangladesh	5.9	5.6	5.6	5.9	5.8

(Source: [http://www.ielts.org/researchers/analysis\\_of\\_test\\_data/test\\_taker\\_performance\\_2011.aspx](http://www.ielts.org/researchers/analysis_of_test_data/test_taker_performance_2011.aspx))

The IELTS Band of 7.0 is described as “Competitive” proficiency while 6.0 and points in-between are described as “Modest” proficiency. Testing one’s English proficiency is gauged in four macro-skills in language acquisition such as: Listening, Reading, Writing, and Speaking. The “overall” mean score is the average of all these four macro-skills. Professionals, specifically nurses, are required to get an overall band score of 7.0 in order to qualify for a job position abroad.

This has not been the first time that the Philippines placed below the first spot. The IELTS Reports since 2008 showed a constant decline in English language proficiency of Filipinos. In an article written by Rainier Allan Ronda for The Philippine Star in November 2009, Andrew King, country director of IDP Education Pty. Philippines stressed that this decline in English language proficiency should be taken seriously since countries where Filipinos wish to migrate consider it important. Hence, they seek for people with high English quality skills.

A study commissioned by the Department of Education, Employment, and Work Relation was conducted by Arkoudis, S., Baik C., Hawthorne, G., Hawthorne, L., O’Loughlin, K., Leach, D. Bexley, E. (2009) from the University of Melbourne. They researched on the impact of English language proficiency in the employment of international students versus their Australian counterparts. They found that although English language proficiency is not the only factor, it played a very vital role in job promotion.

Nigro (2011) from the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) USA team wrote for [www.amideast.org](http://www.amideast.org) on how English language proficiency affects employment in USA. Cultural diversity at work brings fresh ideas and new perspectives; however, there are many immigrants who are underemployed due to lack of English language communication skills. Even if these immigrants are degree holders, and are smart, they cannot function in the job they deserve because they cannot communicate. In fact, those with lesser English language

fluency are given less hours of work because employees' communication skills have a huge impact on the success of businesses.

Countries abroad are not the only ones who demand for a competent English proficiency skills. In the Philippines, aside from the call center industries, other companies especially corporations are following suit in requiring employees to improve their English proficiencies. Universities and colleges are also revisiting and redesigning their curricula to address this challenge.

For instance: a fledgling sister school of MAPUA, Malayan Colleges Laguna is taking this challenge seriously to all its employees and students. English language teachers are required to take IELTS and obtain a band score of at least 7.0 or better, before they qualify to apply for job tenure. On the other hand, content professors had to undergo a localized version of an English proficiency test called MCL ELT (Malayan Colleges Laguna English Language Test) developed by the English cluster and had to pass a certain band score before qualifying for a job tenure. In helping them prepare for MCL ELT, they are required to fulfill a considerable amount of time studying English through Rosetta Stone, a software that gives exercises on all four macro skills.

The students, likewise, are pushed to enhance their English proficiencies. As freshmen, they have to take the MCL ELT and their scores are part of their student portfolio labeled as the "Entry-level" English proficiency score. Then, they are required to enroll 9 units of "English for Academic Studies" courses and 3 units of laboratory courses in "English in the Workplace." Before they graduate, they have to take MCL ELT again to receive their "Exit-level" score. They are expected to improve in the exit-level score compared to that of their entry-level score.

Corporations, nowadays, require not only highly-skilled workers but also workers who are proficient in English. A look at job advertisements for good-paying professions includes acceptable proficiencies in English as part of the requirements. This indicates a strategy of companies in strengthening their human resources with employees capable of using the English language profitably. Meanwhile, companies would also invest on language/communication training for their employees who are just high school graduates.

Companies seek out the help of experts from colleges and universities for training. There are also independent bodies on the rise that offer training programs to improve the English proficiencies of those in the industries. British Council, for example, has added suitable programs to meet such needs from the industry. Other companies/organizations that extend English language proficiency enhancements programs are TOEIC, Future Perfect, IDP, etc.

It is therefore very important for people living in highly industrialized areas to be exposed and be highly proficient in using the English language because it will affect their future

professional performance or job tenure in the workplace. Hence, the delay of English language teaching in elementary education asserts the uncertainties on the future of the generation/s that will be affected by the MTB-MLE policy that advocates the use of mother tongue in classroom instructions.

In the light of what these data revealed, the question now is: Is MTB-MLE a solution to improve the English proficiency of Filipinos? How appropriate is this policy when it hinders benefits (e.g. improved academic performances, faster English language acquisition, etc.) that it claims?

## 11. Findings

This investigation discovered some inconsistencies in the MTB-MLE policy (more so in the K+12 educational system). It has been fully implemented nationwide; however, these findings are based on the context of the Tagalog region only where Filipino and English are the dominant languages. The appropriateness of MTB-MLE policy was based on an analysis of: learners' exposure to the English and Filipino languages; lack of mother-tongue based multi-lingual educational materials; and the varying language needs and challenges from each region. Discrepancies on the research findings that MTB-MLE advocates used to base this educational principle were also examined. These are incidences of primary enrollment drop-outs, low performances in other subject areas such as Mathematics and Science; and teachers' struggle to communicate in a language students do not comprehend.

### Learners' Early Exposure to the English Language

Children from birth are already exposed to the English and Filipino languages long before they go to school. Radio programs, TV advertisements and shows are in both Filipino and English languages. The surrounding environment is filled with visual representations usually expressed in English. For families who can afford, the available educational toys and books they buy for their babies, toddlers, and preschool children are mostly in English. Hence, schools and parents from the Tagalog region cannot isolate their students or learners into the mother-tongue, which is Tagalog, alone because Filipino and English languages are used on a daily basis.

### Lack of Mother Tongue-Based Educational Materials

Educational materials printed in Tagalog (not Filipino) are very old and rare. Most are printed in Filipino but using these as instructional materials would be counterproductive to the policy itself that mandates the use of the mother tongue. (In fact, there are many Filipinos, teachers included, who do not know the difference between Filipino and Tagalog.) Most educational materials are printed or produced in Filipino and English rather than in Tagalog.

Language acquisition theories evolve through the years. These can be summed up into four: behaviorist, cognitivist, humanistic, and constructivist. These theories do not

necessarily disagree with each other but builds on each other's strengths and patch up each other's weaknesses or fallacies. From all these theories, it can be gathered that a constant exposure to a language is vital for acquisition to take place. Exposure, as used here, refers to not just the environment where speakers use the language but the learning materials which are also used either in formal education or supplemental learning. In the case of MTB-MLE policy implementation, the learners will not learn their mother tongue in the formal way if educational materials printed in these languages (Tagalog, in this case) do not exist substantially.

Filipino and Tagalog do not differ much. In fact, the Filipino language could never have existed without Tagalog. However, pure Tagalog words are more limited than Filipino. For example, in areas of Science, Mathematics, and Technology, Filipino and English languages come in handy because there are many terminologies without Tagalog word equivalent. Sometimes, English words are transliterated or are turned into Filipino by changing the spelling (e.g. connection becomes koneksyon). The Tagalog alphabet lacks letters C, F, J, V, and X in the alphabet thus limiting the additional vocabulary words it can adapt.

Furthermore, the MTB-MLE implies an over-all change of all the educational materials written from Filipino and English to Tagalog ones. And since Tagalog vocabulary is limited, there are only two possibilities that can happen. It is either the Tagalog region cannot fully and strictly follow the MTB-MLE policy because Filipino and English will still be used or the learning of students from Kindergarten to Grade 3 will be limited to that which the Tagalog language can accommodate.

### **Different Needs and Challenges**

The proposition of mother tongue-based multi-lingual education is based on studies and research done abroad and on isolated cases in the Philippines. What may work on one region or one place may not be applicable to all other places with different environments, demands, and needs that must be met. For example, young learners from tribes on far-flung areas need to learn four languages: their tribal language, their regional language, and then Filipino, and English. Wherein the young learners in urban areas (Tagalog region) are already exposed to Filipino and English since birth; therefore, they do not find these languages as strange.

The learners in rural areas may not even find learning Filipino and English as useful if they plan to stay in their place of birth forever so the MTB-MLE policy will work well for their situation. On the other hand, learners in urban areas must learn both languages fluently in order to survive and be globally competitive.

Language fluency is important for both settings but differ in some ways. For those in rural areas, language may serve merely as means to communicate and function on a daily basis. On the other hand, in urban areas, language serves not only as means to communicate and function on a daily basis.

Language fluency is also a reflection of educational background, intellect, and professional capability which are deemed important in the global workplace. Thus, in urban areas, Filipino and English must be taught once learners start their formal education to ensure fluency in both languages in which they are exposed to since birth. Teaching them in just Tagalog for the first few years of their early education is impractical.

### **Disregarded Reasons for Drop-out Cases**

Background research and studies, where MTB-MLE policy has been founded, have linked the language of instruction to dropout cases in the primary level. However, there are other factors that were disregarded such as poverty with all its super-inordinate effects such as hunger and difficult transportation (a.k.a. far distance of school from the learners' place in remote areas and would require learners to walk for many hours). The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) ([www.unicef.org/philippines](http://www.unicef.org/philippines)) reported that in the Philippines, for every 10 five-year-old children, only six have access to education. Enrollment in primary education is relatively high all over the country but drastic decline happens in high school when students would rather work than study to augment the family income.

Most of the research used by MTB-MLE advocates focused solely on the language factor to favor the MTB-MLE advocacy but disintegrated away from other factors that are equally causing the phenomenon of primary enrollment dropouts.

### **Insufficient Reference to the Language Factor**

MTB-MLE advocates also linked the language of instruction to the results of students' academic performances in Mathematics and Science. It is true that language skills play a part in the rest of the students' academic performances. However, it is unfair to zero-in on the language factor alone when there are other factors that affect the learning process of these two subject areas. For instance, Science courses need laboratories and equipment that most schools both in urban and rural contexts lack.

Another obvious factor in the Philippine setting that is equally influential in students' academic performance is the competence of teachers. In elementary and high school, there are schools that allow teachers to teach a subject matter that is not their area of expertise. For example, a Science teacher handles all types of subject areas in Science such as Biology or Physics when his/her area of expertise is Chemistry. This practice can thus lead to underrated student performance results as reported by Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS).

The reports from this institution indicating the low scores of Filipino students in Mathematics and Science is one among many others that Rep. Magtanggol Gunigundo used as bases for pushing House Bill 162, entitled: "The Multi-lingual Education and Literacy Act". This bill proposes eight years of MTB-MLE instead of the four years that DepEd has embedded in the K+12 curriculum. It aims to strengthen

students' acquisition of their mother-tongue before they learn any other language. This means that the learning of students in their mother-tongue will be constrained for a longer period of time and they will be refrained to learn many other things that they could learn if they know other languages.

This House Bill, if approved, will pave the way towards an educational path that other countries like Malaysia are trying to veer away from. Pandian and Ramiah (2004) from the Universiti of Sains Malaysia have cited the struggles of Malaysian teachers as a new policy on teaching Mathematics and Science in English has been imposed starting January 2003. They have imposed the policy of teaching these subjects in English in order to keep abreast with the latest developments in these fields which were mostly recorded in the English language.

Philippines have indeed gone way ahead of other Asian countries in implementing the Bilingual Policy in order to gain English language fluency which other countries are now starting to adapt. However, with the MTB-MLE policy, the Philippines seemed to have gone a step backward.

Still, is it reasonable then to point to the language used as medium of instruction as the main culprit for poor student performances in Mathematics and Science?

### Teachers' Communication Skills

MTB-MLE advocates are quick to assume that due to Bilingual Policy, teachers really deliver their lessons in the languages specified in the Constitution—Filipino and English. This assumption leads to a conclusion that puts teachers in a very bad light: don't they know how to connect and communicate with their students?

This conclusion is faulty, though, because English teachers in online forums have noticed other teachers' practice as the opposite. They observed that content teachers usually do not speak in English when teaching Mathematics and Science that's why when students take the test (which is in English) they have a hard time comprehending especially the word problems because the lessons were discussed/taught in another language. Ironically, this issue strengthens the proposition that students should learn English at an earlier age to gain mastery and fluency. This will give them advantage in knowledge transfer in other subject areas and post-basic education.

In the seminar, themed as "Content Language Integrated Learning, (CLIL)" presented at the British Council's Teacher's Club on July 2008, an attendee who happened to volunteer in a school outreach program to Aeta tribe shared, based on observation and experience, that local teachers would usually translate the textbook in the vernacular, would code switch, etc. to get the message across to the learners.

Based on these observations, it can be logically assumed that teachers try their best to communicate to students in a language that both parties can understand even to the extent of translation method or approach in teaching. Even though

at times, there are instances where there could be misinterpretations that get lost in translation. This can lead to not a fluency in a single language (Filipino or English) but a habit of code-switching in two languages.

## 12. Summary

This paper acknowledges one of the goals of the United Nations 2015 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which pushes for universal primary education as one of the core foundations of the MTB-MLE advocacy. It does not disregard the importance of MTB-MLE and the right of children to learn in their own language. In fact, long before United Nations' MDGs, and even before DepEd embedded MTB-MLE in the new K+12 curriculum, there have been experiments in different places in the Philippines that proved how effective MTB-MLE is in the learning process.

However, this study discovered some inconsistencies in MTB-MLE that questions its appropriateness when applied in urban development contexts particularly the Tagalog region:

First, learners in the urban context, particularly the Tagalog region in the Philippines are exposed to the English and Filipino languages at a very early age; therefore, there is no need to withhold them from learning these two languages for later education where the grammar and syntax are taught to enhance fluency in these languages.

Second, materials printed in the mother-tongues are insufficient for children to enjoy a variety of learning materials.

Third, there are different needs and challenges in geographical areas; thus, the needs of learners in rural areas are different from those in urban areas. For instance, those in urban areas must obtain a near-native language speaker fluency in the English language in order to qualify for better opportunities in the workplace. Thus, learning in the English language at an early age may help meet this demand.

Fourth, MTB-MLE advocates seem to pinpoint at language factors as the main reason why students dropped out of school; however, they failed to address other factors which are more confounding such as lack of classrooms and teachers.

Finally, insufficient reference to language factor as the reason behind poor academic performance in other subject areas such as Mathematics and Science may be baseless. This claim put aside the other factors that are equally affecting academic performance such as teacher competence, lack of materials, and insufficient facilities among many others.

Furthermore, this study establishes the importance of language in development. It emphasized the fierce demand of English language fluency in order to survive in the urban context as well as the global workplace.



### 13. Conclusions

It is important to contextualize an educational idea or principle before it is applied or implemented in a large scale. The government, DepEd particularly in this case, is exhausting all means to improve the country's scores in the 2015 MDGs' indicators including the goal of increased enrollment in primary education. However, even Nolasco (2012) in his opinion column in the Philippine Daily Inquirer, entitled: "Make Haste, Lay Waste" commented that "DepEd is risking far too much in this haphazard approach to implementing MTB-MLE." There has been a lack in pretesting measures and preparation for the full scale implementation of MTB-MLE and this can be attributed to the fact that there is very short amount of time left before United Nation's full evaluation of the country's performance in attaining the MDGs by 2015.

English and Filipino are the languages of the National Capital Region (NCR) and the Tagalog Region such as Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, Quezon (CALABARZON), and Bulacan. Therefore, implementing MTB-MLE policy to delay the acquisition of these two languages for learners in these regions may no longer be necessary. Children are already exposed to both Filipino and English at a very young age: logically, these should be the languages in which they should be taught in order to gain mastery and fluency. This has been the practice in the Bilingual policy, and the reason why a lot of students are not fluent in either of the two depends on other factors and not on the fact that students have not learned their mother tongue Tagalog well.

### 14. Recommendations

Language policy-makers should not hastily implement a policy without valid and reliable pretesting measures. From the flaws of MTB-MLE discussed in this paper, the following are recommended for DepEd officials and policymakers (Congress) of the Philippines:

Instead of House Bill 162, entitled: "Multilingual Education and Literacy Act" proposed by Rep. MagtanggolGunigundo, a bill that authorizes regional DepEd directors to implement whatever language of instruction they deem best in their jurisdiction should be proposed and passed in Congress. This will give freedom to all regions and areas to choose what they think are best for their citizens.

Better yet, private schools should be given the academic freedom in choosing what language they deem best to use in their curriculum. This will give parents an option where to enroll their children. For example, if parents want their children to learn English, they can choose a school that uses English as the language of instruction in the major subject areas. For some parents who may think that English would be too hard for their children to understand, they can choose another school that uses a language that suits their needs.

Anyone is capable of acquiring any language. Therefore, authorities should not focus on the language factor as the main culprit for low academic performance of students. They should concentrate more on solving other critical educational

problems such as lack of classroom facilities, lack of teacher training and competencies, lack of materials, etc.

The language policies in classroom instructions should be ratified in the Philippine Constitution. Otherwise, changes can happen again after the current country's president finishes his term of office as well as the secretary of DepEd.

If the suggestions above seem too radical, then by all means, those in the Tagalog Region should just stick to the Bilingual Policy as ratified in the Philippine Constitution because it has been effective over the past years. If there has been a decline in students' academic performance at present, there must be other contributing factors that must have caused this phenomenon. The budget allotted for translating and/or producing educational materials from Filipino and English resources to a particular mother tongue (in this case, the Tagalog language), can be spent instead on additional classroom facilities, teacher-training, student empowerment, etc. that will surely help improve the educational system and students' academic performances.

For future researchers, there are many things to find out in the implementation of the MTB-MLE policy. Here are a few suggestions:

1. Attitudes of teachers, parents, and students towards this policy;
2. Production and sufficiency of educational and supplemental materials; and
3. Effectiveness of MTB-MLE in helping students acquire other languages; etc.

Truly, the MTB-MLE policy calls for a very drastic change. It is recommended in this paper to assess the expense this policy incurs and see if it would be better to allot the budget at other things such as infrastructure, teacher-training, development of educational materials, etc.

The analyses in this paper are not only applicable in the urban areas mentioned in the Philippine context. Other urban areas both in the Philippines and other countries facing the same challenges brought about by MTB-MLE can also derive principles pertaining to language education and development goals in this paper.

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