

Mother Tongue Implementation in the Philippines: What Do Parents Say?

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Abstract: *The MTB-MLE curriculum in the Philippines has brought numerous changes which were noticeable even to the parents. This paper investigated the perspective of the parents as regards the challenges and gains that learners from Grades 1-3, whose first language was English, experienced as they learned their lessons using the mother tongue instruction. To get the result, the researcher utilized the qualitative research method, specifically the grounded theory approach by conducting an interview and a focus group discussion to fifteen (15) parents. After an intensive thematic analysis, these themes emerged: a) A Challenge to English Speakers; b) Too Much to Learn; c) Positive Impact on the Learners; and d) Relevance of the Curriculum. In conclusion, the implementation of the MTB-MLE has become a challenge to children whose first language was English because it entailed learning a new language. Despite the challenges, it still positively impacted the lives of the learners.*

Keywords: mother tongue, parents' perspective, grounded theory, challenges and gains

1. Introduction

The Philippines finally made a bold move towards internationalizing the state's educational system, the shift from the old practices to the adoption of the K-12 curriculum. Section 4 of RA 10533 mentioned, that the present and enhanced basic education curriculum is composed of thirteen (13) years. Kindergarten and Grades 1 to 3 shall be taught in the native tongue or first language of the learners. In consonance, Section 5 of RA 10157 insisted that the Philippines shall adopt the MTB-MLE method. Article IX, Section 7 of 1987 Philippine also mentioned that for the sake of instruction and communication, the languages used in the different regions shall become auxiliary media of instruction. In addition, DepEd Order 16, series of 2012 stated that there would be eight (8) languages to be utilized as the language of instruction. These are Tagalog, Hiligaynon, Kapampangan, Waray, Pangasinense, Waray, Iloko, Maguindanaoan, Bikol, Maranao, Chabacano, and Cebuano.

However, problems arose due to the being multilingual of the Philippines. The implementers met new challenges and new humps to fill for the smooth flow of the newly adopted system. According to Kadel (2010), there are a couple of challenges that many schools have been taking into considerations such as implementing the mother tongue to learners with multiple mother tongue in one classroom, lack of mother tongue teachers who are competent in the use of the language, and lack of sound curriculum and educational materials. In a study conducted in Uganda by Becker (2013), the mother tongue instruction in multilingual regions has been questioned as to what mother tongue to use. As a result, it was decided that the predominant language would become the medium of instruction. Meaning not everyone could be given appropriate instruction in their mother tongue, thus creating the word, "linguistic injustice".

As a result, the above dilemmas led to the crafting of this research which aimed at investigating the challenges and gains that learners earned which they faced as they acquire knowledge in this curriculum shift in our educational

system. These data were taken from the parents – the respondents.

2. Related Literature and Studies

The MTB-MLE's implementation had been challenged in many ways. First in the list, is deciding as to what mother tongue to use due to the different mother tongues that the learners use. This phenomenon may offend the minority language community and cause them discrimination and prejudice. In many parts of the region, many teachers were found incompetent in using the mother tongue, thus, their ability to teach has been doubted. In addition, there is also a shortage in the educational resources to be used (Ball, 2012). Wa-Mbaleka (2014) mentioned that the Philippines has been challenged due to its vast number of languages recorded – 185 languages to be exact, yet only a few were used. This clearly shows that scenarios like having students with several linguistic backgrounds meet together in one classroom. This linguistic variety isn't only true to learners, but also to teachers. It has been observed that some teachers teaching the mother tongue do not speak that target language. In addition, the Philippines has been successful in using English as it competes in the global market. With its English ability, it has sent out workers all over the world to work in English environments. Ironically, it strives to go back to learning the mother tongue again with the execution of the MTB-MLE.

Moreover, the MTB-MLE instruction has struggled in these categories: language, materials, instruction, program, and low regard to the mother tongue. In areas outside the schools, the society has a very high value for English which is only a second language. Since the mother tongue lacks standardization, the learners have also mistakenly used some non-academic register. In addition to the problem, the teachers have limited pedagogies in teaching the mother tongue, and the parents have low proficiency of it. Some learners also refuse to learn it and resort to learning English for prestige and practicality purposes. As regards the instructional materials to be utilized, it came out that the state had incompletely delivered them to the different schools. The materials are not-contextualized, the technology for mother tongue instruction was limited, and

the mismatch issue between the learner's native tongue and the language used in the learning materials can be found. With instruction, it has been observed that the learners struggle in using mother tongue words for Mathematics and Science. The teachers also have a very low proficiency of the mother tongue they are teaching. On the other hand, parents perceived the MTB-MLE medium of instruction and subject as difficult. Other challenges include the preference of the parents to use English as medium in teaching Math, the difficulty of the teachers in identifying some competencies and subject matter distinctions between Filipino and mother tongue, the incomplete understanding of the teachers on spiraling for mother tongue and Filipino subjects, and the unfamiliarity of the children with the letters and sounds in the mother tongue. In the aspect of program implementation, the teachers had the feeling of forced compliance with the policies. The mismatched mother tongue and medium of instruction, the inconsistency between the activities and policies and the limited number of teachers trained for MTB-MLE have also contributed to the problems (Ball, 2012). Consequently, Valerio (2015) said, that teachers were not fully convinced that the instructional materials that schools have at present were enough. It was because the materials were not locally translated to fit the mother tongue of the learners. Most of what we're used in schools were written in Filipino or in English. There were other learners who had no interests in learning the mother tongue for they saw it less important especially to those who had no intention of staying in their place for good. It had become a fact that many of the learners' venture to big cities and even abroad after getting a degree causing some of the learners to lose motivation.

In a separate study, Tupas (2014) emphasized, that countries in Southeast Asia are multilingual. This means that many languages are of equal value and importance resulting in refusal to be called as minority language which could not possibly become the mother tongue. So, they are forced to deal and learn with materials not written in their language. At present, the challenge has been anchored on tougher grounds due to the societies' fluency of the English language brought about by country's former status as colony of the English empires. English has also become the determiner of the families' and the societies' status whether economically or socially. In a bigger perspective, the learners have a bigger world around other than the corners of the classroom which required them to use English for communication.

For Mondez (2013), the learners have problems learning through the mother tongue because of their early exposure to the English language. This meant that they were more competent in English than in their mother tongue to the point that learning the mother tongue seemed like learning a foreign language for some of them. Cruz, P. & Mahboob, A. (2015) pointed out that the local languages that were identified to be mother tongues have been focused on local purposes and reasons. Though rare, cases involving the lack of registers of the mother tongues have been a serious issue. Implementers of the curriculum have missed developing the meta-language necessary in the teaching of the language.

3. Methodology

Research Environment

The researcher conducted the study in Cebu Normal University, Cebu City. The locale is a state university and a Center of Excellence in Education and Nursing courses. It offers both undergraduate and graduate programs with specializations in various fields. The university not only caters enrollees from Cebu Province, but also from the different parts of the Visayas and Mindanao islands.

Research Participants

The researcher used the purposive sampling procedures in determining the participants because the parents from which the data came from, were necessarily parents of at least one (1) or more children and were actively involved in their children's learning. Their children should currently be in Grades 1 – 3. Altogether, there were fifteen (15) parents who participated in the study, whose ages ranged from 36 years old to 47 years old. These parents were housewives, which means they personally had an idea about the experiences of their children as they learn through the MTB-MLE Instruction.

Research Sampling

A total of fifteen (15) parents underwent a face to face interview and a focus group discussion until the process reached the point of saturation. Mainly, the interview evolved around the advantages and disadvantages of the mother tongue instruction to the learners, as observed by the parents.

Research Instrument

The study used the qualitative research design, specifically the grounded theory approach. The researcher utilized a semi-structured interview, composed of researcher-made questions. It was composed of ten (10) questions. The set of questions was validated by two experts – Early Childhood professors from the university where the study was conducted.

Data Gathering

This researcher sought permission from the Dean of the College of Teacher Education through a letter. The same letter was forwarded to the Integrated Laboratory School (ILS) Supervisor, who had the full control of the Elementary Department, for further guidance. After which, a separate letter was provided to the parents. The interview happened inside the campus at around 4:00 pm as the parents idly awaited the dismissal of their children. The fifteen (15) parents willingly participated. The focus group discussion happened twice since the parents could not altogether be gathered in one place due to their differences in schedules. During and after the procedures, the parents were assured that the data they provided would not be used against them, and these would be kept with utmost confidentiality.

Data Analysis

The researcher used the thematic analysis technique in acquiring knowledge and insights from the gathered data. It helped determine broad patterns and induced them more into themes, which emerged after intensive analysis.

4. Results and Discussion

Theme 1: A Challenge to English Speakers

According to the respondents, the implementation of the MTB-MLE curriculum has become a great challenge to the learners whose first language was English. The children were exposed to the English language through social media and English TV shows, which in effect, developed into the children's first language or mother tongue. In most homes, parents found it joyful listening to their children speaking the language understandable by the world. As the parents personally involved in tutoring and assisting their children in their lessons, they noticed that learning the supposed mother tongue, which was the regional language, had become a challenge.

Participant 1 said,

"My son does not understand Cebuano, and so, he cannot do his homework on his own due to the difficulty of the language."

Participant 2 and 5 added,

"... the Cebuano is not even understandable to us, parents."

According to participant 7,

"My child speaks English at home and even to his friends. So, when taught in the mother tongue, my daughter just listens but does not understand everything."

Participant 8 commented on the materials saying,

"The level of difficulty of the language is not suited to the learners. Even if you will use it with those who speak and understand the language."

For participants 10 and 11,

"The mother tongue had been truly challenging because it was offered mandatorily to all the learners. It could have been optional for children whose first language was English."

Lastly, participant 15 clamored on the Mathematics area,

"The mother tongue terms which were substituted to their English equivalents were those that even them, parents of the children, have not heard before. The instruction in the mother tongue made learning too complicated."

Theme 2: Too Much to Learn

As parents immersed themselves deeply into the learning concerns of their children, they have negative experiences towards the instruction using the mother tongue. Besides wishing that MTB be optional, parents commented that it was too much for the learners to learn. Even if MTB-MLE has already been part of the new curriculum, the parents saw a point that needed modification as regards the teaching of Mathematics and Science in the mother tongue. They unanimously said that the inclusion of MTB as a subject should be enough.

According to participant 1,

"MTB as a subject should be enough for the learners because we are not moving backward. We are heading towards a world-wide community that promotes English as a language of understanding."

Participant 2 expressed,

"Introducing MTB as a subject to our children should be limited only to simple things using the Cebuano language that the present generation of children speaks, not the language of our forefathers."

Participant 6 commented,

"Teaching Mathematics and Science in the MTB way is a waste of time because, in Grade 4, the instruction to be used in these disciplines will be English again. Therefore, learning it is too much for them"

As per participant 9,

"Learning Mathematics and Science using the MTB instruction is too much because learners not only try to learn and understand the content, but also the language."

For participant 12,

"The learners exert too much effort adapting the language."

Participant 13, added,

"MTB is not needed by the learners. If the school wants the children to learn it, maybe they should translate them while they are discussing."

Supporting the idea, participant 14 said,

"The school can have translations for terms that are not understood in English, not that they will make it a subject and a medium of instruction."

For participant 15,

"During my time, we do not use MTB, yet we were able to learn faster and become literate. We focused on enhancing our English skills."

Theme 3: Positive Impact on the Learners

Despite the many debilitating impacts of MTB to the learners, which the parents have personally witnessed, parents admitted that the mother tongue instruction has also produced some desirable effects. These impacts had heightened their confidence that their children could connect to the community where they were part of.

Participant 1 commented,

"I am confident that my child cannot be totally deceived since he can understand a little bit of Cebuano."

For participant 2,

"I am happy that he can now comprehend conversations done in Cebuano, though he still can't speak the language."

Participant 5 jokingly said,

"At home, my son does not spend most of his time playing computer games during weekends because he gains friends, our neighbors who speak Cebuano fluently."

With almost the same thought, participant 6 said,

"My son has now learned to reach out to our neighbors by sharing his toys because he can already slightly understand them."

As per participant 8,
"I can already ask my son some simple favors like buying salt and sugar at the nearby stores."

Supporting the previous idea, participant 10 insisted,
"I notice that my son is not starting to have more friends in school because he already comprehends the language of his classmates. The MTB helps my child become socially active."

Similarly, participants 12 and 14 commented,
"MTB is not at all bad for our children."

Theme 4: Relevance of the Curriculum

Despite the bulk of advantages of the MTB instruction, parents questioned its relevance to the lives of the learners after completing Grades 1-3. They seemed not to see the long-term effect of the MTB for the learners. Varied were their opinions, but they all boiled down to doubting the positive impact of this educational change.

According to participant 2,
"MTB is not so relevant because after the Grades 1-3, the learners have to go back learning English. It will be forgotten."

Participant 4 expressed his opinion,
"After the child will have finished his studies, he will work in companies where English is used."

Participant 5 added,
"As early as Grades 1-3 children should start learning English to strengthen their foundation. What's the use of the MTB when transactions whether local or abroad require the use of English for common understanding?"

For participant 8,
"I don't see the need of using MTB because, after graduation, many of them will not stay in their localities. For sure, some of them will go abroad and work there. There, our regional languages will not be used, but English."

Participant 9 commented,
"The kind of MTB taught cannot be applied because it cannot be understood the learners and their peers. Only some of the elders can understand them. So, why learn the old and forgotten words?"

Participant 10 insisted,
"MTB is sometimes a waste of time because children try so hard learning the mother tongue, but when they go out from school, what they see anywhere are writings in English."

Another idea popped from participant 12,
"Honestly, I am one of those parents who will choose to let my child learn English than the mother tongue. It is because English has more useful benefits compared to MTB. With English, my child can connect to a bigger world, other than just his locality."

Lastly, participant 15 said,
"The mother tongue will only be temporarily remembered by the learners. After Grade 3, they will all forget those that they have learned because from Grade 4 until college, English, as well as Filipino, will be used. At home, parents enjoy talking to their children in English."

5. Conclusion

- 1) The curriculum shift, specifically the implementation of the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) has brought a great challenge and exhaustion to the learners whose first language was English, for they seem to be learning a foreign language.
- 2) The use of MTB-MLE has also provided the learners with positive impacts, as observed by the parents. These include rare chance of deception by strangers because they can comprehend though they couldn't speak, gained and interacted with new friends whose first language was Cebuano, and they could be asked to do simple favors since they could already understand and use simple vocabularies.
- 3) The parents were too doubtful of the long-term effect and relevance of the MTB-MLE instruction because the learners have to shift to learning English in Grade 4. As the parents assumed, the learners would someday go abroad and work in companies that used English as medium of communication. Moreover, the kind of mother tongue that was taught to them could not be applied because it was slightly different from the kind of mother tongue that the learners knew and spoke.

6. Acknowledgement

The author wishes to thank the parents who spared their time answering the questions for the benefit of those who undertake a research on MTB-MLE.

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