



Revisiting the Implementation of Mother Tongue Based-Multilingual Education: Voices of Teachers Beyond the Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The implementation of MTB-MLE has always been marred with challenges. This qualitative study aimed to determine the implementation of Mother Tongue Based-Multilingual Education beyond the pandemic. Teachers from Kabacan South District served as the informants of the study. Criterion based sampling was used in their selection. Thematic analysis was used in identifying the significant themes from the responses. Finding showed that the presence of multilingual learners, limited learning resources, and non-native speaking teachers brought challenges to teachers. It appeared that provided instructional materials, searched topics on the internet, and switch their language to Filipino. They suggested that there should have enough references which can be utilized in the teaching of MTB-MLE and the amendments of the curriculum. Implications are indicated to further explain the significant findings.

INTRODUCTION

The implementation of Mother Tongue Based-Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) has been marred with a lot of challenges. One of which is the mismatch of teachers assigned in a community where their first language is the not the language spoken by the children. Another, is the availability of instructional materials which is unique to the variety of language spoken by the community.

Similarly, the Philippines is a multilingual country. Teaching the first language to children could have an impact on their grasp of knowledge and skills (Perez, 2019). In Japan, children could best learn the lessons when these are taught in their native language. With the sense of pride and nationalism, Japan is leading in Science and Technology (Hatori, 2005). This is also happening to countries in the South East Asian Region.

By looking into the significance of MTB-MLE in the Philippines, it has able to promote inclusivity of all languages. Hence, children could best learn the bodies of knowledge first before they could transfer it to the target language which is English. Knowing as well that the Philippines speaks English as a Second Language, hence, it is also intensively being taught to learners. As they said, Filipinos are one of the best speakers of English in the world (Gempeso & Mendez, 2021).

In the study of Adriano et al. (2021), teachers still prefer to teach their students using the English language. Thus, it impedes the country's policy on its implementation. Despite the fact that there are numerous studies related to MTB-MLE (Anudin, 2018; Apolonio, 2022; Parba, 2018; S Rosales, 2022), but these did not tackle the issues in the contexts of teachers in the local setting. This gap, motivated the researcher to conduct the study in the Kabacan.

Moreover, this study will not just listen to the voices of teachers regarding the implementation of MTB-MLE beyond the pandemic. However, this will navigate as well on their teaching strategies which helped enhanced the implementation of this program. Indeed, different standpoints will be considered in this study.

Statement of the Problem

This study aims to determine the implementation of Mother Tongue Based-Multilingual Education beyond the pandemic. Specifically, this will answer the following research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of teachers in the implementation of MTB-MLE beyond the pandemic;
2. What teaching strategies do they apply in enhancing the implementation of MTB-MLE beyond the pandemic; and
3. What should be improved in the implementation of MTB-MLE beyond the pandemic?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The researcher applied the essence of qualitative-phenomenology in this paper. Qualitative can be defined as the study of the nature of a certain phenomenon and it answers the question why it is observed. Also, it assessed complex and multi-component interventions and focusing on its improvement. The data are collected through document study, observation, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups (Ezzy, 2013). These data are transcribed in order to see the emergent themes (Hayes, 2013).

Conversely, this study is phenomenology. It is more concerned on the lived experiences of humans. This carried out the observable fact which is extraordinary. By using this method, the phenomenon would be understood profoundly and thus, an appreciation of its occurrence (Connelly, 2010; Norlyk & Harder, 2010).

Truly, the use of qualitative can make this study search the meanings of the experiences of the teachers on the implementation of MTB-MLE beyond the pandemic. Moreover, this looked into the strategies they have used in order to cope with the challenges that they have experienced. All of these were interpreted by understanding their narratives or responses to the phenomenon.

Locale of the Study

The researcher conducted the study in the Municipality of Kabacan, Province of Cotabato. This town is one of the six municipalities that covers the Third Congressional District. It is situated near the Rio Grande de Mindanao and the Kabacan River. These bodies of water make the town as the rice granary of the province. Majority of its people are Maguindanaon and Ilocano. The latter migrated from Ilocos Region.

In the context of the study, elementary schools in Kabacan South District were the core of the data gathering. These were the Kabacan Pilot Central Elementary School, Cuyapon Elementary School, Osias Elementary School, and Lower Paatan Elementary School. It is the biggest in the Municipality of Kabacan in terms of the number of enrollees.

Research Instrument

The research instruments were important in the gathering of the data. One of which was the informed consent-to-participate form. This was given to the informants related to their participation. Another is the recorder which was used in the recording of their responses. Likewise, I used the notebook and pen for observation lists.

Sampling Procedure

The researcher used the purposive sampling (Denieffe, 2020) in the selection of the Focus Group and Key Informants. In particular, the criterion-based sampling (Gentles et al., 2015) were the basis for the selection. Hence, the following criteria were observed:

1. A master teacher holding a permanent item;
2. A master teacher of kindergarten and Grades I-III; and
3. At least three years in teaching experience of MTB-MLE.

Data Gathering Procedure

In order to provide a clear understanding of the gathering of the data, the following procedures were observed. A letter was first sent to the dean of the graduate school about the conduct of the study. The same letter was sent to the Schools Division Superintendent, District Supervisor, and School Principal. Their approval gave the researcher the signal to proceed to the data gathering.

Next, the researcher wrote a letter to the target informants and participants. They participated in the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and Key Informant Interview (KII). The informants were interviewed individually, while a round table discussion for the participants. Their responses were recorded. Prior to this, they were asked to affix their signature in the consent-to-participate form.

Thereafter, the results of the interview were transcribed. Themes were identified by the data analyst and thorough discussion was followed. Member checks were done by the colleagues. Their comments and suggestions were considered. More importantly, the debriefers were asked to validate the interpretation of the findings as well as the flow of the data gatherings.

In the like manner, the researcher returned to the informants for the confirmatory of the analysis and interpretation. Of course, the researcher had given them a token valuing their total participation in the study. Themes and core ideas were presented in tabular form.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was done in identifying the themes. However, the MAXQDA software was used in identifying and grouping of the emergent theme from the responses of the informants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter provides the themes which resonated the research questions. The discussion indicates the richness of the experiences of the informants relative to the implementation of the program.

Themes and Core ideas on the challenges faced by teachers in the implementation of MTB-MLE beyond the pandemic

The first research question determines the themes and core ideas on the challenges faced by teachers in the implementation of MTB-MLE beyond the pandemic. There are three emergent themes. These are the presence of multilingual learners, limited learning resources, and non-native speaking teachers.

Presence of multilingual learners. It cannot be denied that the Filipino children can speak different languages at home. With the presence of different media platforms, they are into learning these languages and eventually used them in communication. Eventually, in the teaching of MTB-MLE, this caused a predicament on the part of the teachers since they do not know what should really be strengthened on the students' end. In the same manner, this problem reverberates the multilingual landscape of the Philippines.

This was shared during the interview by the informant. She said that:

"Some learners used language 3 (English) instead of language 1 (Mother Tongue) and language 2 (Tagalog)." (Informant 1)

The variations of languages are also present in the class which caused a major problem for teachers.

"Learners have different mother tongue and with different places of origin (lack of ability to teach the mother tongue in different languages)" (Informant 2)

Also,

"There is variety of dialects inside the classroom." (Informant 5)

In support, multilingual learners may need to transition from their mother tongue to the languages of instruction as they progress through their education. This poses difficulties as students need to adapt to new linguistic and academic demands, which may affect their comprehension and learning outcomes. Therefore, there is the dire need for teachers to undergo trainings in order to respond to this problem (Cansino, 2023).

Limited learning materials. The limited learning materials means that teachers may not have access to appropriate and relevant materials that would align with the approaches of MTB-MLE. Basically, this hinders the effectiveness of instruction and the implementation of the curriculum. This in turn leads to the struggle of teachers to find resources that cater to the linguistic and cultural needs of their learners.

This was expressed by informant 2 in the interview. She unveiled that:

"Limited learning materials (lack of teachers references, lack of instructional materials)"

This sustains the finding that the lack of learning materials in the mother tongue of learners' results in a language discrepancy between the language of instruction and the language used in available resources (Gempeso & Mendez, 2021). The program aims to embrace diversity of learners. But then, the limited availability of learning materials that cannot cater the needs of diverse learners in a particular community (Arispe et al., 2019).

Non-native speaking teachers. Not all teachers assigned in a specific community know how to speak the language of their learners. For example, in the context of Kabacan, the presence of diversity is a normal sight. There are Ilocanos, Ilonggos, Maguindanaons, and etcetera. Then, these teachers who would be assigned in these communities do not know how to speak their language would feel being ineffective in the delivery of the lessons. Indeed, the diversity of does not only happens among learners but to teachers as well.

Furthermore, they have limited proficiency in their learners' mother tongue as a language of instruction. In turn, this affects their ability to communicate, provide clear explanations, and facilitate language development. In addition, it impacts understanding of learners' linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Thorough the interview, it was stated that:

"I am not fluent in speaking the major Mother Tongue of learners which is Maguindanaon." (Informant 5)

Similarly, non-native speaking teachers are greatly challenged in understanding and embracing the cultural nuances and contexts of the learners they are teaching with (Medilo Jr., 2016). Likewise, this results to the limited knowledge of local customs, tradition, and values. Supposedly, this affects their ability to establish meaningful connection in order to create culturally diverse learning environment.

Table 1. Themes and Core ideas on the challenges faced by teachers in the implementation of MTB-MLE beyond the pandemic

Themes	Core Ideas
Presence of multilingual learners	The learners speak different language at home
Limited learning materials	There are no sufficient materials to be used in teaching MTB-MLE
Non-native speaking teachers	Teachers are not native speakers of the learners of the community they are teaching
	Teachers' language is different from their learners.

Themes and Core ideas on the responses of teachers to the predicament they experience in the implementation of MTB-MLE beyond the pandemic

Table 2 shows the themes and core ideas on the responses of teachers to the predicament they experience in the implementation of MTB-MLE beyond the pandemic. It appeared that provided instructional materials, searched topics on the internet, and switch their language to Filipino.

Provision of instructional materials. Teachers always make a difference in the delivery of the lessons. They made it sure that every learner in their respective classes would never go out of their classrooms empty handed. From the four corners of their classrooms, they assure that even the midst of uncertainties and the difficulties that they experienced with the implementation of MTB-MLE teachers remained resilient. This can be justified by the mere fact that they developed their own materials that catch the attention of their learners.

The informant showed how she did this to her learners.

"I gave/send Tagalog stories for them to read and used vocabulary if they don't understand the word. In this way, they can familiarize the words and later they can talk to them in Tagalog." (Informant 1)

In this manner, teachers are manifesting that they are familiar with the needs of their learners, as well as strengths, and preferences (Tenorio, 2022; Cansino, 2023). By developing their own instructional materials, teachers can actually address the specific needs of the learners, differentiate instruction, and accommodate different learning styles. As such, they align it with the needs of their learners in order to engage in the learning process, leading to increased motivation and improved learning outcomes.

Search topics on the internet. Since there is a problem in the availability of the materials, this also results to the problems on the topics that best suited to the needs of the learners. Talking about contextualization, teachers can see the needs of their own learners. Of course, they can connect it to the how things are being seen in the community. Undeniably, with the complexities of languages being used in the instructional materials, teachers themselves can rarely relate with it. How much more can they share it to the learners.

An informant said that:

"I search on the internet/ google and printing reading materials and activity sheets." (Informant 2)

Searching topics on the internet allows teachers to have an access to vast array of up-to-date information and resources. Through this, it is easy for them to find materials that are relevant to the local context, considering the specific mother tongue spoken by the learners. This ensures that the lessons are grounded in the lived experiences of the learners in order to make them meaningful (Williams et al., 2014).

Switch to Filipino language. Teachers whose mother tongue is different from their learners tend to switch to Filipino. A Tagalog-based language which is highly understood by the locals. Instead of forcing themselves to learning the local languages, they prefer to use a language that can deliver the lesson right to the hearts of the learners. This only proves that teachers are doing their best to further gain grounds in the teaching of MTB-MLE.

This was the experience of Informant 4. She stated that:

"Instead of using Maguindanaon in teaching the Mother Tongue subject, I preferred to used Tagalog as my medium of communication in teaching." (Informant 4)

To code switch allows teachers to bridge the language gap (Gaylo, 2020) between the learners' mother tongue and the language of instruction (Williams et al., 2014). It helps them to have the profound understanding in making connections between the concepts and ideas presented in the classroom. By doing so, teachers can clarify complex topics, provide explanations, and ensure comprehension among diverse learners (Parba, 2018).

Table 2. Themes and Core ideas on the responses of teachers to the predicament they experience in the implementation of MTB-MLE beyond the pandemic

Themes	Core Ideas
Provision of instructional material	Teachers provided learners with varied tools which are crucial for their learning development.

Search topics on the internet	Teachers looked for topics on the internet which would substantiate the implementation of MTB-MLE
Switch to the Filipino language	Teachers code switch to the national language which is Filipino for the easy delivery of the lessons.

Themes and Core ideas on the things to be changed in the implementation of MTB-MLE

Table 3 reveals the themes and core ideas on the things to be changed in the implementation of MTB-MLE. They suggested that there should have enough references which can be utilized in the teaching of MTB-MLE and the amendments of the curriculum.

Provision of enough resources. As mentioned, these resources played an integral role in the development of every learner. The delivery of MTB-MLE to diverse learners can be further strengthened when there will be enough instructional materials which would widen learners' perspectives. Eventually, the learners will develop the love for reading which strengthens their comprehension skills. It can be noted that the mother tongue is the soul which connects to learning another language.

This informant believed on the availability of the resources instead of its removal.

"Not change but give a complete and enough references, teaching materials/instructional materials both teacher and pupils." (Informant 2)

Correspondingly, adequate resources provide opportunities for students to develop and strengthen their language skills in their mother tongue. Resources such as books, reading materials, audiovisual materials, and interactive learning tools support vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, writing proficiency, and oral communication. These expose learners to a variety of language forms and genres, helping them build a solid foundation in their own language (Dagalea et al., 2022; Rosales, 2022).

Amend the curriculum. Amending the curriculum is one of the themes which emerged in this study. Even before the implementation of this program, parents and teachers alike were pessimistic with its timeliness and effectiveness. According to them, it is a waste of time, money, and effort that the government has poured in. A program would always have its weaknesses. In-depth study should be carried out in order to respond to this predicament. Most likely, teachers should have to be optimistic in the teaching of MTB-MLE because it connotes national pride.

As quoted in the interview:

"Amendments of the K-12 Curriculum should be done by the DepEd Curricularists." (Informant 4)

The curriculum should be revised to align with the specific linguistic and cultural context of the learners. By incorporating local languages, traditions, and cultural practices into the curriculum, it reflects that learners can relate to the content and find it relevant to their everyday lives (Fillmore, 2014). Thus, an amended curriculum exemplifies the unique needs and realities of the community in such a way that it strengthens connections between education and learners in general (Sumalinog, 2018),

Table 3. Themes and Core ideas on the things to be changed in the implementation of MTB-MLE

Themes	Core Ideas
Provision of enough references	There should be enough resources which would be used by teachers in the teaching of MTB-MLE.
Amend the curriculum	The curriculum specialists should look into the weaknesses of the program and look for better solutions.

IMPLICATIONS

Implications for Practice

The implementation of MTB-MLE in the Philippines has major drawbacks. One of which is the failure of those who designed the program on the diversity of learners. If they modeled it from Japan or from monolingual countries, then the situation could be far different. It should be remembered that every community has its own distinct language which we called dialect. Though, there is the sense of intelligibility, but then, in some other aspects they are not.

In the same manner, the purpose of this program is to strengthen the foundation of language development among children. Before they could learn a second or a foreign language, they should have the necessary skills in their own language. This perspective is actually the best in the contexts of MTB-MLE. We are promoting inclusivity and identity among the learners. At one hand, the bigger challenge is always looming in the horizon. This is always the experiences of every teacher. The mismatch of their assigned place has a detrimental effect on the implementation.

On the other hand, this study enabled language designers to study further into and consider the loopholes of this program. Instead of imposing a language which many do not know, why should a training be conducted. There should have a validation of the needs of every teacher since the program itself is monumental and could have a positive impact in total development of the country.

In the long run, a big change could be savored by every MTB-MLE teachers in the Department of Education. Additionally, they can strengthen the pillar of this program to elevate the quality of education in this country in particular. In the end, teachers are partners of the government and they deserve the best to provide the best for the future of the Philippines.

Implications for Future Research

Since there are negativities with regards to the implementation of MTB-MLE in the Philippines as a whole, the following points should be considered by future researchers. First, there should have a strong partnership between teachers and the Department of Education. They should have the voice to express their sentiments so that immediate action can be taken into consideration. Problems will not be left untouched. Researchers, can interview as well those in the authority to listen to their side of the story.

Second, researchers could have to conduct this study in different parts of the Province of Cotabato to further see the experiences of other teachers. Wider perspectives can be captured. Different stories can be recorded which incorporate different significant themes. Indeed, these aspects should be done in order not to be one-sided in the presentation of every story.

Third, since this study is qualitative in nature, therefore it is a must for them to conduct the same endeavor in quantitative specifically the mixed methods. I believe the best model for the implementation of this program can be taken into consideration. Hence, the implementers will be guided properly.

Finally, this study is timely and relevant. As such, it is crucial for future researchers to continue with the search for answer that may improve the implementation of MTB-MLE in the local setting. Partnerships with private sectors and higher educational institutions should also be looked forward.

Concluding Remarks

As a teacher, I saw the value of MTB-MLE. I never regretted embarking in this program since I myself appreciated how this changed the worldviews of my learners. Many say that the English-speaking capabilities of the learners dwindled because of this, but I must say that learners should learn first their language. It should be noted as well that enforcing them to speak the language that they do not own is a crime against humanity.

Gone were the days that schools implemented the English Only Policy or the Filipino Only Policy. Learners were not allowed to express their own language in responding to questions. This leads to the lack of comprehension as well as the poor performance of the learners.

We always aimed for the betterment of our learners. However, as teachers we should have to find ways how to answer the problems. We should not rely solely to the government. Our ways can be a greater value to bring back the glory of education in the Philippines.

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