
STRATEGIES AND PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED BY TEACHERS IN IMPLEMENTING MOTHER TONGUE IN A MULTILINGUAL CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

The use of mother tongue in teaching in a multilingual setting affects the way pupils learn. A clamored and often supported place of Southern Mindanao, Matanao, Davao del Sur demands teaching strategies that not only adapt to the interplay of the different cultures and languages but give importance to them, too. Specifically, this paper analyzed the strategies of teachers in implementing Mother Tongue - Based Instruction in a Multilingual Classroom and identified some problems that teachers encounter in implementing them. The study used qualitative analysis with interview as the main data gathering tool. The respondents were teachers purposively selected from the suggested school of Mother Tongue - Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) in Marcelo H. del Plar Elementary School in Matanao, Davao del Sur. From the phenomenological analysis of the data, the findings showed that the 12 teachers used strategies such as translation of target language to mother tongue, utilization of multilingual teaching, utilization of lingua-franca, improvisation of instructional materials written in mother tongue, remediation of instruction, and utilization of literary piece written in mother tongue as motivation. Some problems encountered by the teachers in implementing mother tongue - based instruction include absence of books written in mother tongue, lack of vocabulary, and lack of teacher-training. Nevertheless, the study indicated that major attention and effort are still necessary to be given to the approach.

Keywords: Practices, mother tongue-based instruction, multilingualism, and multiculturalism

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the latest developments in the Philippine educational system is the Mother Tongue – Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE). MTB-MLE refers to the use of students' mother tongue and two or more additional languages as Languages of Instruction (LoI) in school. In other contexts, the term is used to describe bilingual education across multiple language communities—each community using its own mother tongue aside from the official school language of instruction. In South Asia, multilingual education usually follows the first definition, learning and using multiple languages in school. In some countries, MTB-MLE includes four languages—the students' mother tongue or first language, a regional language, the national language and an international language (Malone, 2007).

According to the official language policy of the 1987 Educational Act (revised in 2004), children in Grades 1 – 3 were to be instructed in their first language, while those in Grade 4 onwards are set to be instructed using a second language (L2), which is English. This language policy can be identified as a possible model for bilingual education (Borch & Tombari, 1997 as cited by Ndamba, 2008).

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Many studies have already revealed that teaching using the mother tongue in the early grades enhances children's ability to learn better compared to the use of a second or foreign language (UNESCO, 2003; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2003 as cited by Rai, et al., 2011). It has also been reported that if children are taught in languages which are different from their home language or mother tongue, they drop out from school, have low academic performance, and repeat classes due to a high failure rate. This state of affairs is still persistent in Nepal (Yadava, 2007; Awasthi, 2004 as cited by Rai, et al., 2011). Research on L2 acquisition shows that when a child masters the first language then learning another language becomes less problematic in the habits of speech, listening, reading, and writing (Maclaughlin, 1987; Krashen, 1995; Ndamba 2008 citing Cummins, 1981; Hawes, 1979; Obanya, 1985; & Dawes, 1988). Research that has been conducted on language education has also shown that children are quicker to learn, to read, and to acquire other academic skills when instructed in the language that they speak at home rather than taught in an unfamiliar language (Langer, et al., 1990; Unicef, 1999).

Recently, in the educational reforms in the country, the mother tongue in the regions plays an important role especially in the educational system. To strengthen this, the Department of Education (DepEd) has implemented the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction (DepEd order No. 74, series of 2009).

No research has been conducted on the effective strategies of teachers in implementing the MTB-MLE in a multilingual education. The city of Baguio (Philippines) is considered to be a home to many immigrants from other parts of the country and other countries. A significant population of foreigners and local people contributed to the diversity of the city's culture. The languages that are commonly spoken are Kankanaey, Ibaloi, Ilocano, Kapampangan, Pangasinense, Tagalog, English, Chinese, and recently Korean. Having different languages in the city has been a concern. The problems include what strategies can be employed by the teachers in successfully implementing MTB-MLE.

The researcher identified the school where she was teaching as the focus of her study. The teachers in Marcelo H. del Pilar Elementary School in Matanao, Davao del Sur was her participants. For reasons of proximity and familiarity with participants made her decide to embark on the study. Aside from this, the researcher has been peaked with interest on the experiences and concerns of teachers in the use of the Mother Tongue.

This study explored the strategies employed by the teachers in implementing the Mother Tongue and the problems that they have encountered. Their management insights are also included in the study to give opportunity for their voices to be heard and their thinking about the improvement in the use of Mother Tongue.

In the Philippines, the journey of the language of the home to the language of the school had not been smooth-sailing. Although MTs have always been used in the country as important LOIs, they have only historically occupied an "auxiliary" position alongside more dominant LOIs, such as Filipino and English, throughout the whole range of primary education. Through the Department of Education (DepEd) Order No. 74, the mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) program was institutionalized in 2009, a watershed moment in the country's language-in-education history. It was strengthened further as a key educational reform embedded in Republic Act 10533, also known as the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013. The Mother Tongue Mother Tongue policy reverses the century-old common practice among schoolchildren of leaving their home languages behind to study a second and a third language in school. Such practice not only denies children the right and the opportunity to learn in their own tongue, but also contravenes the sound pedagogical practice of beginning with what the learner knows to what the learner does not know. In the history of the country's language policy and planning, it was the first time that the language of the home is recognized as an efficient vehicle for the delivery of academic content by making it primary, instead of auxiliary, MOI in kindergarten to Grade III (K-3).

The Mother Tongue program mandates the use of the MT as the medium of instruction during the first four years of primary education in schools, while the students are learning Filipino and English as subject areas. English and Filipino will then be used as MOIs beyond Grade III. This program is expected to facilitate learning by eliminating children's difficulty in learning basic concepts in a language that they have yet to fully master. The literature highlights the advantages of adopting the MTB-MLE as a framework for making academic content more accessible to learners, especially among young students. Studies find that children are more likely to succeed in school when the MT is used, parents become more invested in their children's learning, and that effects of MT education are more noticeable among girls and disadvantaged groups, such as children from rural and indigenous communities (Ball 2010).

Strategies Employed by Teachers in Using the Mother Tongue

In 2009, the Department of Education (DepEd) recognized the benefits of teaching children using their mother tongue or first language. Local and international research has found that children learn to speak, read, and write more quickly in their first language, and can pick up a second and third language more easily if taught in their first language. In the same way, they acquire other academic competencies more quickly, particularly in science and math.

Through Department Order 94, DepEd instituted Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE), with the following major languages as languages of instruction in 2012-2013: Tagalog, Kapampangan, Pangasinense, Iloko, Bikol, Cebuano, Hiligaynon, Waray, Tausug, Maguindanaoan, Maranao, Chabacano, Ivatan, Sambal, Akianon, Kinaray-a, Yakan, and Sinurigaanon. Aside from their mother tongues or first languages, the children are taught English and Filipino as subjects focusing on oral fluency, starting in the first grade. From the fourth grade onward, Filipino and English are introduced as languages of instruction.

A dizzying variety. However, given the dizzying variety of languages in the country—over 170 languages spoken by various ethno-linguistic groups, with almost 50 of these spoken by various groups in northern Philippines alone—it's not unusual for a teacher to find herself handling a first-grade class in a public school consisting of children from

different linguistic backgrounds. This poses a challenge for the teachers: how do they make sure the students learn when they are not all equally competent in the language of instruction?

In her 2016 paper, “A Multilingual, Multicultural and Multidisciplinary Approach to MTBMLE: A Model for Northern Philippines”, Dr. Elizabeth Calinawagan, a professor of Filipino and Dean of the College of Arts and Communication, UP Baguio, gives three possible classroom scenarios a teacher may face.

In the first scenario, a school may have a strong community language as its mother tongue and the majority of its students communicating in this language. According to Calinawagan, this scenario is more common in rural areas. In her paper, she recommends that the teacher use a monolingual teaching-learning process, “Basic education [here] should be in the mother tongue. Then you’ll just be transferring knowledge through a lingua franca, and then English.”

In the second scenario, there are more students whose mother tongue is the regional lingua franca—for instance, Ilokano in northern Luzon—and the other students use their own community/indigenous languages as their mother tongue. This scenario is more common in densely populated cities such as Baguio City.

“In one classroom in a public elementary school, the students could have different mother tongues—Maranao, Kankayan, Pangasinan, Ilokano. This could be problematic. The DepEd chose Iloko [as the language of instruction], but teachers encounter difficulties because not all the students speak Iloko. Some are more fluent in Filipino, especially in urban centers.”

A bridge to learning. Calinawagan recommends that, in this case, the teacher use the regional lingua franca as the medium of instruction, but allot a special time to the speakers of other languages, using the regional lingua franca as a bridge to learning in other languages. The teacher would have to consult with the students and their parents to find out what language the child speaks at home, and to seek the cooperation of the parents in translating lessons into and creating learning materials in the child’s mother tongue.

In the third scenario, there could be a strong regional lingua franca, but the students’ linguistic profiles show that they are more competent in languages of wider communication such as English and Filipino. This is more common in private schools, where students are sometimes pressured by the school administration, teachers, and parents to use these languages. Calinawagan recalled a study conducted in San Carlos, Pangasinan, in which parents were asked why they spoke to their children in Tagalog at home instead of their mother tongue.

“The success of the MTB-MLE in the Philippines truly depends on the ingenuity and innovativeness of teachers in their pedagogy as well as their commitment to the program,” Calinawagan says. And from her observations of these teachers in the field, commitment will not be in short supply, especially once the students who are products of the MTB-MLE program grow older and begin to show the results of their mother-tongue learning. The country can then look forward to a generation of Filipinos who are multilingual but remain deeply rooted in their unique cultures.

Other strategies employed by teachers are the following:

Translation of target language to Mother Tongue. Translation is very beneficial to learning when it comes to learning through the use of the students’ mother tongue because it serves as a bridge to connect students to the lesson. Translation is sometimes referred to as the fifth language skill alongside the other four basic skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. “Translation holds a special importance at an intermediate and advanced level: in the advanced or final stage of language teaching, translation from first language (L1) to second language (L2) and from L2 to L1 is recognized as the fifth skill and the most important social skill, since it promotes communication and understanding between strangers” (Ross, 2000 as cited by Kavaliauskiene, 2009). It is commonly believed that translators are better at translating into their native language than into a second language.

Dickins (2005) as cited by Jabak (2013) said that translator training normally focuses on translation into the mother tongue, because higher quality is achieved in that direction than in translating into a foreign language.

Utilization of Multilingual Teaching. Multilingual teaching is when teachers use varied languages in the whole duration of teaching for the reason of accommodating students who do not speak a particular language and including them in the discussion. This is defined as speaking two or more languages in a growing worldwide phenomenon (Milambiling, 2011).

The concept of Garcia (2008) as cited by Milambiling (2011), that multilingual language awareness is a necessity for teachers of multilingual students. Besides knowing about languages, subject matter, and teaching methodology, teachers should have an understanding of the political struggles and social circumstances of pupils. This strategy also allows the students to explore and learn the language of others.

Milambiling (2011) further states that those who speak more than one language are also generally more aware of sociolinguistic variables and functions than those who speak one language, and they are adept at switching between different regional varieties, registers, and formal and informal language styles. This same author stated that the

advantage of being a multilingual is that it creates different kinds of connections in the brain, which gives multilingual individuals an advantage in some respects compared with monolingual individuals.

Utilization of Lingua Franca. Lingua-franca is a language that is widely used as a means of intercommunication among speakers of different languages. Seeing that the dominant language that is being used in Davao del Sur is Cebuano, the respondents prefer it as their medium of instruction since it is the language that is widely used by the learners in the school and at the same time at home.

According to Swadesh (1951), lingua-franca is a folk language; it can be used with all the advantages of any other mother tongue as an effective instrument of instruction in the areas where it is the folk language. The fact that the language may be pidginized will not detract from this value on the lower level of instruction; a pidginized mother tongue is nonetheless a mother tongue. For more complex purposes than elementary instruction, there may be problems of adapting the medium to the subject matter. Finally, using common language in a multilingual setting allows the learners to become active participants during class discussion and activities since they understand each other.

Improvisation of instructional materials written in Mother Tongue. Instructional materials are the basic channel of communication in the classroom for the purpose of bringing about effective teaching and learning. Instructional resources in teaching and learning make students learn more and retain better what they have been taught and that these instructional resources also promote and sustain students' interest. These resources also allow the learners to discover themselves and their abilities.

These instructional materials are entertaining at the same time educational and can cater to the different senses. This is one way of motivating the class to participate during the discussion. Instructional materials are vital to teaching-learning process (Sunday & Joshua, 2010).

Teaching can only be effective when adequate and relevant instructional materials are used (Afolabi, Adeyanju, Adedapo & Falade, 2006 as cited by Sunday & Joshua, 2010). With the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction, instructional materials should also be written in mother tongue to achieve consistency.

These instructional materials are prepared based on the interests and needs of learners. The poems, songs, and stories were translated by the teacher because there are no books written in the mother tongue. Thus, the use of instructional materials written in mother tongue enhances students' awareness of their own language which can lead to their proficiencies of the said language. This is also a way of appreciating their own language, using it in the class and making materials with it.

It was seen during the observation that there is signage everywhere written in the learners' mother tongue. There are also headings and letterings written in mother tongue and English equivalent beside them. This means that learners can better understand and follow the signs posted in the classrooms and school surroundings if they are written in mother tongue. Instructional resources in teaching and learning make students learn more and retain better what they have been taught and that they also promote and sustain students' interest (Abimbade, 1997 as cited by Sunday & Joshua, 2010). These instructional resources also allow the learners to discover themselves and their abilities.

Remediation of instruction. This requires pupils to stay after class hours for an extra learning especially for those pupils who have difficulty with the lessons and for those who are behind in their lesson. This means that the teacher will tutor to accommodate all the learners despite of their levels of intelligence. In conducting remedial classes, the teacher uses mother tongue as the medium of instruction.

The school thought of this as best for they know that it will help their pupils who are failing to excel or follow in the class. Having their proof that most of the class are always participating by the help of the mentioned strategy and that the discussion is more interactive, the teachers concluded that this strategy is an effective one for both the teachers and students.

A remedial class is a learner's opportunity to ask the teacher about his/her difficulties in understanding the lesson especially when the problem has something to do with the mother tongue the teacher is using during the class discussion. In this case, it will also help the pupils learn most, from utilizing their mother tongue.

Utilization of literary piece written in mother tongue as motivation. Literary pieces are used by teachers as a springboard to teach other concepts or ideas that are beneficial to the pupils. Teachers integrate literature within the discussion and these literary pieces are already translated in preferred mother tongue. There are four main reasons that lead a language teacher to use literature in the classroom namely: valuable authentic material, cultural enrichment, language enrichment, and personal involvement (Hişmanoğlu, 2005 citing Collie & Slater, 1990).

Literature of any kind can be important for children of other cultures and is a powerful tool to weaken and dissolve racism. Multicultural literature can also play a very important role for teachers. This serves as an instrument for the

teachers to see first in themselves the importance of being a multicultural person in order to appreciate the different cultures found or emanating from the literature that they are reading or they are teaching.

Through this, they can impart to their students the importance of having a multicultural literature so that in turn the students will also understand and appreciate different cultures. The teachers must be very keen in selecting the different literatures that can show the diversities of cultures of the pupils especially those that are found in the classroom.

Multicultural literature can be used as a tool to open pupil's minds. It helps to stimulate an understanding of diversity in the classroom and helps to build an understanding of and respect for people from other cultures (Boles, 2006). Also, multicultural literature can be used to eliminate racism (Colby & Lyon, 2004 as cited by Boles, 2006).

Problems & Challenges Encountered by Teachers in Mother Tongue

Some authorities outlined challenges in the implementation of the mother tongue-based multilingual education. This list of challenges was also taken into account by the researcher.

Benson (2004) mentions that one challenge that may be faced in mother tongue based schooling is human resource development. This means that human resource development is on the teachers training. These trainings should not be carried out without appropriate in-service and pre-service training. Along with this challenge is the difficulty to find teachers who are competent in the L2. In consequence, unqualified teachers with less training are hired especially when nationwide implementation is done. Another challenge according to Benson is on linguistic and materials development. She says that special attention should be given to time and resources in the implementation of mother tongue- education. Educators and people in the community should have time to work together with linguists to be able to produce materials in the L1. Benson stressed that there are problems in the implementation sometimes because people who are involved in the implementation fail to reach a consensus on the allocation of resources.

Moreover, Danbolt (2011) cited another challenge and that is on the attitude towards the language which is very important in learning to use one or two languages. Learning a language goes with attitudes of its users and of persons who do not know the language. When one has a positive consideration towards the language being used, a feeling of belongingness and identity exists. Skutnabb-Kangas and McCarty (2006) supports this idea by saying that positive attitude towards language is in relation to the feeling of being at home with the language. Benson (2004) posed that the use of the mother tongue in the classroom makes students feel good about school and their teacher. This happens because they are becoming knowledgeable in a language familiar to them. This makes them be encouraged to demonstrate what they know and participate in their own learning and eventually express themselves.

Malone (2012) as cited by Kadel (2010) mentioned seven challenges in planning, implementing and sustaining an excellent mother tongue-based education. These are multiple languages with multiple dialects, absence of concrete orthographies, shortage of mother tongue speakers with teaching materials, scarcity of written literature, various mother tongues, large class sizes, and deficiency of curriculum and instructional materials. Kadel also pointed out that challenges may also be faced on poor coordination among government agencies, misconception and differences in the knowledge about mother tongue-based multi-lingual education, confusion of parents about the notion of mother tongue-based multilingual education, qualms among teachers in the government schools due to the apprehension of losing their jobs, eagerness of parents to send their children to go to schools with English as medium of instruction, making MTB-MLE inclusive for all since it aims for the utilization of non-dominant languages speaking children only, and the unfair allocation of financial resources from the agencies.

Absence of books written in mother tongue. This is the condition of having no textbooks or dictionaries in the mother tongue that are needed to accommodate the needs of the learners having different mother tongues. Although one of the strategies in implementing MTB-MLE is the improvisation of instructional materials written in mother tongue, still teachers need books that are accurate and reliable.

Hall, (2010) as cited by Dekker, et al., (2008), that is, no teacher can teach effectively without appropriate materials that are based on two components: established government curriculum goals and pupil's prior knowledge, culture, and value systems. With few books available for most of the 170 languages of the Philippines, materials development appears a daunting task (Dekker, et al., 2008). Books are one of the most needed materials in the learning process of the pupils. Teaching and learning cannot be effective without adequate and relevant use of instructional materials (Grant, 1978 as cited by Sunday & Joshua, 2010). One of the respondents emphasized that in order to effectively implement MTB-MLE, curriculum should be updated and textbooks and teaching materials should be made available in advance.

Lack of vocabulary. This is considered to be the dearth of words to use when delivering a message or information. There is no wide range of the words or phrases used in discussing the lesson using mother tongue; therefore, it is considered as one of the problems being encountered by the teachers.

The teachers need to be a linguist and/ or polyglot in order to address the needs of the pupils. This makes their learning interactive and meaningful. This means that the task of educating children becomes much more difficult when teachers have to face a heterogeneous group with multilingual and multicultural background (Pai, 2005).

Lack of teacher-training. Lack of teacher-training includes unpreparedness of the teachers to teach their learners with the use of mother tongue as their medium of instruction considering that their pupils have different mother tongues.

Training and seminars are important for teachers who are teaching multilingual learners because they need to be oriented and guided on how to handle learners with different languages. Also, through training and seminars, the teacher's knowledge is enriched because they are being involved in the different workshops during seminars. Seminars and training also served as an opportunity for the teachers to learn from and interact with the different participants.

The sharing of the respondents lends support to Dutcher (2004) who stated the teachers need training in using first language in the classroom and that the materials have to be appropriate, available, and interesting to the pupils, as well used. If they are not being used learning is not progressive. Most teachers need training in methodology so that they can exploit the advantages of teaching in the language that children can understand (Dutcher, 2004). This means less emphasis on rote learning, repetition and copying, and more on peer-to-peer interaction and on encouraging students to think for themselves, read, and come to their own conclusions (Dutcher, 2004).

With pupils who are not all speakers of the same mother tongue, teachers have difficulty when they are not expert of the different mother tongues. In this situation, the teacher would rather use the language that is understandable to the pupils. This weakens the implementation of mother tongue.

From the study of Stone (2012), the following data from the study indicates that the three most common barriers to successful MTBMLE programming are: 1. education policies, 2. the structure of the education system itself, including the nature of the examination system, and 3. the role of teachers (Paulson, 2010b).

The following section examines these three barriers in the Philippine's context and, since the focus of this dissertation is on the teachers in mother tongue instruction, I will present a more detailed review of the research on the role teachers play in supporting or hindering mother tongue instruction.

Education policies: The Philippines already has a language policy that is supportive of mother tongue instruction (at least in the early grades). There is a well-established trilingual education system for starting with the local languages in the early grades and then transitioning into Filipino and English for the remainder of the educational cycle. Although the policy exists, there still has not been a country-wide push for implementation of MTBMLE in the early grades through teacher preparation and materials development.

The structure of the education system: Even though the policy supports mother tongue instruction, at least in the early grades, the rest of the Philippine's education system does not value mother tongue instruction, since examinations are entirely in Filipino and English, and all levels of education after grade three are conducted entirely in those languages.

The role of teachers: An education system cannot run without teachers, and an intervention cannot succeed if teachers do not believe in it or support it. Much of the evidence suggests that teachers have negative attitudes towards mother tongue-based education for various reasons. According to one expert, teachers act as a barrier to mother tongue education because they often don't read and write local languages (Paulson, 2010b). In order to teach effectively using the mother tongue, the "teachers have to be able to read and write in the language, and they also need all kinds of support," which currently they are not getting (Bender, as cited in Paulson, 2010b).

Aside from teachers being unable to read and write in their mother tongues, there is also the problem of the status and role of the teacher in the classroom, which has everything to do with "identity and power relationships" (Hartwell, as cited in Paulson, 2010b). According to Hartwell, teachers often believe that their goal "is to cover the syllabus. It's not their responsibility to make sure the children get it, just to get through it" (as cited in Paulson, 2010b). Hartwell also describes the relationship of the teacher and student as very authoritative. According to Bender, this comes from a "cultural conception of learning" which is "deeply engrained in parents, teachers, students and evaluators" (Paulson, 2010b). They teach in the same ways they were taught when they went through the system, which is generally rote memorization and drills, the only model they have ever been exposed to.

Incorporating the mother tongue can be seen as threatening for teachers because they would have to "change what they're doing in the classroom...it's a totally different classroom environment, the kids start asking questions, the kids talk back...all kinds of stuff happens" which changes the way that teaching and learning take place and creates a major role shift from an authoritative figure to facilitator of learning (Bender, as cited in Paulson, 2010b) Bender also notes that teachers don't have much incentive to change the way they are currently teaching. As a teacher, you "receive your salary whether you work or not, or you don't receive your salary whether you work or not. It has nothing to do with performance...so that basic link of accountability doesn't exist" (Bender, as cited in Paulson, 2010b).

Teachers act as one of the principal barriers to enhancing learning and literacy through MTB-MLE. The challenges that these teachers will face in an MTB-MLE classroom require a marked shift in ingrained beliefs and practices, which is why teachers need intense training and support. According to Bender, support for teachers is a piece that “has been very neglected” (as cited in Paulson, 2010b). Malone also emphasizes that “good pre service and in-service training and supportive supervision” are a must for any system attempting to implement mother tongue instruction and Hartwell insists that “there has to be a training and support system for the teachers that is on-going” and not just one or two short-term trainings (as cited in Paulson, 2010b, p.28). Based on the findings of my initial study, I concluded that three major barriers exist to MTBMLE: 1) education policies, 2) the structure of the education system, and 3) teachers (Paulson, 2010b). Since I am unable to have much effect on education policies or systems in the Philippines, I chose to focus this research on number three: teachers.

Management Insights of Teachers in the Use of Mother Tongue

The literature highlights that adequate knowledge of the MT is an essential foundation for learning second languages. August, Calderon, and Carlo (2002) asserted that once the cognitive capabilities underlying skills in reading and writing in the first languages have been fully developed, they can be applied to the learning of another language. Other research, such as that conducted by Durgunoglu, Nagy, and Hancin-Bhatt (1993) discovered that “first-language learning and experience can aid children in the beginning stages of reading.” Durgunoglu, et. al (1993) studied Spanish non-fluent readers to determine whether L2 word recognition skills were influenced by the pupils’ phonemic awareness in their native tongue. Through a variety of tasks—letter naming task, a Spanish phonological awareness test, a Spanish and English word recognition task, an English word reading task, an English-derived pseudo word task, and a Spanish and English oral proficiency test, researchers determined that phonological awareness training in one’s MT (in this study, Spanish) could facilitate children’s ability to read in English.

In their own work, August, Calderon, and Carlo (2002) examined transfer of skills from Spanish to English as well as effects of level of Spanish literacy and oral English proficiency on English literacy acquisition. By constituting 4 cohorts of pupils (N=189) into (1) English monolingual pupils instructed in English; (2) Spanish-speaking pupils instructed in English; (3) Spanish-speaking pupils instructed in Spanish through second grade; and (4) Spanish-speaking pupils instructed in Spanish through third grade, the study tracked pupils’ progress over a three-year period (end of second grade to end of fourth grade) in schools in Boston, El Paso, and Chicago in the United States.

The study’s concrete findings endorsed the theory of Linguistic Threshold Hypothesis: that Spanish phonemic awareness, letter identification, and word reading were reliable predictors of performance on parallel tasks in English at the end of third and fourth grades, and most especially that Spanish phonemic awareness among the 4 cohorts translated to English phonemic awareness. Similar studies on the positive cross-linguistic transfer of phonological awareness from Spanish to English have been studied by Bialystok, Luk, & Kwan (2005); from Arabic to English, in works of Abu-Rabia et al, (2013); Farran, Bingham, & Matthews (2012); from Hebrew to English (Kahn-Horwitz, Shimron, & Sparks, 2005; Russak & Kahn-Horwitz, 2013); and from Korean to English (Kim, 2009; Kang, 2012).

Similar cognitive results were traced in a positive relationship between Spanish passage comprehension at the end of second grade and English passage comprehension at the end of fourth grade. These few preliminary findings support the practice of providing literacy instruction in Spanish to Spanish-speaking English-language learners.

In the Philippines, results of Barrios and Bernardo (2012) research showed that speakers of Cebuano learned Filipino much more easily than did speakers of Chavacano learning Filipino, since Cebuano and Filipino are structurally similar languages, whereas Chavacano is different from either of those two languages.

Thus, learning one’s Mother Tongue first will help facilitate the learning of L2, especially in cases where the two languages share similarities. Studies conducted by Arzadon, et al (2016), Ocampo (2006), Quijano (n.d.), Reyes (2010), and Tapang (2012) also yielded encouraging results among pupils learning academic content in the MT.

Nolasco (2008) had strongly proposed the adoption of the mother-based multilingual education, eschewing the teaching of either English or Filipino, languages that are essentially “foreign” to millions of school-age children in the Philippines, and claimed that if used as MOI either languages will do more harm to an already “ailing system of education” (Nolasco 2008). Reyes (2010), in a paper presented at the First Philippine Conference-Workshop on Mother Tongue-based Multilingual Education held at the Capitol University, discovered that pupils learned Science better when the children’s MT is used.

This study anchors on a proposition and a theory. The proposition rests on UNESCO (2007) facts on Mother Tongue successful implementation, and the theory is on Bronfenbrenner’s theory of ecology.

The present study is fastened on UNESCOs (2007) factors in the success of mother tongue-based multilingual education program implementation and the strategies to be used. Bensons (2004), Danbolts (2011) and Malones (2012) inventory of challenges in mother tongue-based multilingual education were also used.

UNESCO (2007) emphasized that the effectiveness of mother tongue-based multilingual education necessitates thorough planning and commitment. The planners need to take into consideration measures to ensure that the program is effective and understood the factors by teachers who are at the forefront of implementing it. These factors are language model, teacher recruitment and preparation, materials development and production, parental support, and education sector alignment. These factors guided the researcher in framing the questions for the study. They were considered and were modified by the researcher to fit the present study.

The researcher came up with teachers Mother Tongue experiences, challenges or concerns in using the MT, and management insights of the teachers, as the three main aspects to be considered in investigating the challenges that stakeholders faced in the implementation of the mother tongue-based multilingual education in Matanao, Davao del Sur.

This study viewed the concepts on the nature of transition and how it can affect learners' performance. Transitions are defined as "phases of life changes connected with the developmental demand" that are determined by communal, financial and ethnic variables in existence in the framework in which they are obtainable (Niesel & Griebel, 2005). The learner can be affected by his or her surroundings which could make it impossible for him or her to perform effectively in class. Bronfenbrenner observed human growth as a "product of interaction between the growing human organism and its environment" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Bronfenbrenner's theory of ecology is based on the evidence that an individual's growth occurs within a multifaceted system of relationships which are also affected by different stages of their social and cultural setting. He also argued that an individual is not influenced by the direct setting only but that an individual's growth is "profoundly affected by events occurring in settings in which the person is not even present" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The learners' languages from both schools can be affected by their environmental surroundings. Central to Bronfenbrenner's ecological approach, there are four interacting aspects that need to be considered to fully understand child development in context: The aspects are the person, process, contexts and time factors. The procedure is known as the proximal procedure and includes forms of communications that occur between the individual and the setting or context. The interactions must invite the individual's attention, exploration, manipulation, elaboration and imagination (Mampane, 2010; Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The Grade 3 learners' transition into Grade 4 and higher grades is a new environment for learning new skills. Learners' characteristics differ. They are different individuals with different behaviors and attitudes. Bronfenbrenner (1979) states that a person's characteristics relate to a developmental outcome and impacts the form, influence, context and direction of proximal procedures throughout the growth. He further says that, to assure development, the person is required to interact regularly over a prolonged period with the setting (Mampane 2010).

The environment influences development, and a person's behavior at times represents a measure and outcome of how a person interacts with and responds to a context. Bronfenbrenner (1979) explains that the context relates to the environment in which the growth happens. He refers to "many levels of influence in a person's environment where the individual is in the center of all the interactive systems" (Mampane, 2010). He suggests that the environmental ecology consists of concentric layers which build outwards liable on the effect they have on the growing person.

These surroundings vary from the direct relations the child enters with the family and the schools. The growing person is in the personal (innermost) layer which is the microsystem. The microsystem represents patterns of activities, roles and interpersonal relationships in a given face-to-face setting, for example home, school, peer group and work place. The influence of relationships at this level runs in two directions – away from the child and towards the child. For an example, the parents may affect or influence the child's beliefs and behavior, and the child also affects the behavior and beliefs of the parent (Mampane, 2010; Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The language transition of the Grade 4 learners thus indicates that transition is an ongoing process. As all the levels of Bronfenbrenner's theory depend on each other, the learners' language transition as well depends on how the teachers handle and manage Mother Tongue.

2. METHODS

The qualitative research methods used for this study are described further and included purposive sampling, open-ended interviewing, and systematic and concurrent data collection and data analysis procedures. Specifically, the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used to analyze the data and discover the meaning of teachers' experiences with Mother Tongue.

Twelve (12) teachers from Marcelo H. del Pilar Elementary School in Towak, Matanao, Davao del Sur from Grades 1 to 6 from the identified school were chosen by the researchers as participants based on the inclusion criteria set for the study (teachers who are teaching in the identified school, teaching Grade 1 to 6, of either sex, rich experiences in employing and implementing the Mother Tongue policy in the identified school, and have tried different strategies in

teaching the early grades in a multilingual classroom). This school was chosen because it implemented the Mother Tongue for the municipality considering the nature of the learners in the school. Davao del Sur, where Matanao is, is known to be a melting pot of different language and culture in Mindanao, Southern Philippines, so the pupils have diverse background in terms of language and culture. Having 12 interview subjects for the study was arrived at based on phenomenological inquiry and data saturation criterions. According to Creswell (1998), phenomenology requires in-depth interviews from 3 to 13 subjects.

A semi-structured interview (Patton, 1990) was used as data gathering tool. An aide memoire which probed the dynamics of the teachers' experiences in employing MTB-MLE in teaching Grades 1 to 6 in the school was developed by the researcher. The sharing of the participants revolved around the questions, "What are the strategies that you used in using MTB-MLE? What were the problems that you have encountered in using MTB-MLE? What management insights can be derived from the study?"

The interview was conducted in English language since the respondents are proficient in English but they were given the freedom to answer the questions in other languages like Cebuano, the national language or in their native language that they are comfortable with to ensure the richness of data. The interview sessions for teachers have closed and open-ended questions to allow the researchers to follow up points which needed elaboration and to clarify questions that were misunderstood by the respondents (Mouly, 1978 as cited by Ndamba, 2008). The interview focused /centered on the best strategies employed by the teachers and the problems they encountered in using Mother Tongue. Best and Kahn (1993) stated that interviews are particularly appropriate in getting responses from respondents. The video and tape recorded interviews and classroom observations were transcribed into field texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) where both anchors and phenomenal themes were extracted. The text was subjected to phenomenological reduction by means of repertory grid. The grid presented the significant statements made by the respondents which were classified using themes and were interpreted carefully.

3. RESULTS

Strategies employed by teachers in using Mother Tongue in the multilingual classrooms

Based on the answers given by the participants and the observation conducted on the strategies employed by teachers in the implementation of mother tongue-based instruction in a multilingual setting, several strategies emerged. These strategies are (a) translation from target language to mother tongue, (b) utilization of multilingual teaching, (c) utilization of lingua-franca, (d) improvisation of instructional materials written in mother tongue, (e) remediation of instruction, and (f) utilization of literary piece written in mother tongue as motivation.

Problems encountered by teachers in employing the Mother Tongue

The problems teachers met in teaching and using mother tongue are given in this section. Among these problems, limited English vocabulary of pupils is mostly encountered. It is pointed out by the participants that this problem also resulted to poor reading comprehension and pupils not understanding instructions/word problems in English. Other situations identified by the participants as much a problem which can be attributed to the limited English vocabulary of the pupils are identified spelling, reading comprehension and solving word problems in mathematics as areas of concerns.

Management insights by teachers derived from study

Participants experienced that it takes time to cover the topics and noted that pupils have limited English vocabulary. They further identified spelling, reading comprehension and solving word problems in mathematics as problematic areas. Translating concepts from L2 to L1 is also recognized as a problem for teachers who do not have the same MT as that of their learners. It can be inferred that teachers hold certain expectations from the pupils with MTB-MLE exposure in relation to the assumptions of its implementations. However, the MTB-MLE cited that "errors" are a normal part of second-language learning and thus, learners should be afforded with opportunities to receive feedback in a respectful and encouraging way. Accordingly, second-language (L2) acquisition indicates that it takes a minimum of two years to learn basic communicative skills in a second language when society supports that learning (K to 12 Mother Tongue Curriculum Guide, 2016).

Participants rely heavily on translation as a strategy to help pupils' transition. This requires familiarity of the teacher on the MT of pupils. They also employ certain strategies that develop the vocabulary, reading, and comprehension skills of the pupils. A new language is learned best when the learning process is non-threatening and meaningful. This is generally evident in the practices of the teachers. Teachers take "small steps" that help learners gain confidence in their ability to use the language meaningfully.

The idea of the MTB-MLE is that there should be a gradual transition to using the L2 as medium of instruction (K to 12 Mother Tongue Curriculum Guide, 2016). Researches say that most successful outcomes in English achievement occurred among students who received instructional support in MT over a longer period of time. This implies that the longer the English language learners had participated in bilingual education instruction, the more positive were the results in English when compared to groups who were in English mainstream programs.

The problems and challenges encountered by the participants may be attributed to their limited understanding of the program and the transition. To help them better transition pupils, participants suggest that they be trained in MTB-MLE and be equipped with transition strategies. As grade 4 teachers, they mentioned that they do not have a clear idea of how MTB-MLE is implemented in the lower grades. They also need to be knowledgeable of the MT of the pupils especially that translation from English to the pupils' MT is the most common strategy that teachers employ. Adequate knowledge on how things are done in the MTB-MLE will provide them insights on how to receive and manage the transitioning of pupils with MTB-MLE exposure. Teachers in Grade 4 should have understood the bridging stages and processes of an MLE program. Villaneza (2012) states that the success of starting from the Mother Tongue to Multilingualism (MTB-MLE) is greatly dependent on the quality of the transition process or the bridging program. Nolasco (2013) further suggested that the DepEd shall formulate a mother language transition program from Grade 4 to Grade 6 so that Filipino and English shall be gradually introduced as languages of instruction until such time when these two (2) languages can become the primary languages of instruction at the secondary level. The Department of Education can consider the conduct of training of grade 4 teachers to prepare them in handling transitioned learners.

Teachers perceive the teaching with the use of the mother tongue as challenging. To address these challenges, teachers employed strategies they believe can help pupils' transition. Teachers rely heavily on translation to facilitate the discussion. They initially present things in English and based on the pupils' response, verbal or non-verbal, they code-switch and/or translate the concepts presented in English to mother tongue, which requires familiarity of the teacher on the mother tongue language of pupils. Some teachers suggested that the lower grade teachers introduce important concepts in English. This will ensure better understanding of concepts as terms are already familiar. Other teachers integrate in the teaching of reading the concepts and terms to enhance the vocabulary of pupils and develop their reading and comprehension skill. The participants are using translation in their lesson. The first statement shows that the teacher is using Ilocano as a medium of instruction but if there are pupils who do not understand Cebuano, she translates the discussion into another language that the said pupils understand. The second statement signifies that the teacher translates in one native language to another native language used by the pupils. It implies that pupils learn more if the lesson is translated to their mother tongue.

Milambiling (2011) further states that those who speak more than one language are also generally more aware of sociolinguistic variables and functions than those who speak one language, and they are adept at switching between different regional varieties, registers, and formal and informal language styles. This same author stated that the advantage of being a multilingual is that it creates different kinds of connections in the brain, which gives multilingual individuals an advantage in some respects compared with monolingual individuals. The participants use Cebuano as a medium of instruction because majority of the class understand Cebuano. If the teacher uses Cebuano in delivering the lesson then majority would understand and take part, and with those who do not understand Cebuano, it is where translation is used. The statements revealed that the first choice of the teachers when it comes to using mother tongue is Cebuano due to the fact that Cebuano is the most dominant language in class. With the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction, instructional materials should also be written in mother tongue to achieve consistency. These instructional materials are prepared based on the interests and needs of learners. The poems, songs, and stories were translated by the teacher because there are no books written in the mother tongue. Thus, the use of instructional materials written in mother tongue enhances learners' awareness of their own language which can lead to their proficiencies of the said language. This is also a way of appreciating their own language, using it in the class and making materials with it.

4. DISCUSSION

The study acknowledges that teachers are the most important factor for a successful implementation of an educational program. They also are in a good position to say whether such program needs revisiting. The success of starting from mother tongue to multilingualism is greatly dependent on the quality of the transition process or the bridging program. Certain measures be implemented by the authorities of the education system (in-service and pre-service) such as training and/or retraining of teachers on mother tongue implementation with emphasis on how to transition pupils from mother tongue to English with an understanding of how children learn language and content literacies.

The study focused on the perception of teachers and did not include that of the parents'. Parents' perceptions and experiences on their children being exposed to mother tongue can provide a much clearer picture of the phenomenon under study. Hence, it is good that a study should be conducted with the inclusion of parents.

Similarly, since the study selected the school within the convenient reach of the researcher, it is encouraged to conduct similar studies on small and rural schools. The findings of the study are essential sources of information that can be utilized by the curriculum developers in enhancing the curriculum. A copy of the research report shall be forwarded to respective offices since it will be a vehicle to open the eyes of the teachers in the use of the mother tongue.

The study advances the current literature by illuminating areas on the strategies and problems of mother tongue instruction previously not cited as well as concurring with the previous investigations. Clearly, findings generated in this study affirm the vital role of teachers in supporting pupil's learning relative to the implementation of the mother tongue through their innovative strategies and overcoming the barriers. Hence, the Department of Education are challenged to initiate a mechanism by which the teachers' innovative strategies and problems are assessed, monitored and evaluated at the same time design an effective program or model of mother tongue that is geared towards supporting these teachers' role in its effective implementation. The findings may not reflect the experiences of all teachers locally and internationally. Nonetheless, this study surfaced trends worthy of further investigation. We end this study with a view to increasing administrators and teachers' awareness and improving mother tongue policy in a multicultural and multilingual setting. Because of migration and globalization it is not rare to find classrooms where three or more different languages or dialects are spoken by the students. In these situations, it would be practically difficult (although not impossible) to provide a full blown bilingual education program for each student. But rather than ignoring all the languages and opt for one language only, teachers can still create a welcoming environment where all languages are valued. Students can be provided opportunities to use their home languages in the classrooms, for example by allowing them to make homework assignments in their mother tongue (and providing translation) or by collaborating with peer students who speak the same language.

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