

## **Implementation of the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) Program: Reactions, Attitudes and Perceptions of Teachers**

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### **Abstract**

In June 2012, the K to 12 Curriculum was implemented in the Philippines. Basic education is now thirteen years instead of the usual ten years. In the K to 12 Curriculum, the elementary grades will focus on the core learning areas namely: languages, mathematics, science and social studies. One of the highlights of the K to 12 Curriculum is the use of the eight major Philippine languages to teach Kindergarten to Grade 3 students. The Department of Education adopted the “Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE)” after pilot tests showed that students learn better when the language used at home is also used in the classroom. This study aimed to determine the reactions and attitudes of the teachers and the problems they encountered on the implementation of the Multilingual Education and the Teaching of Mother Tongue in the Philippines. The study utilized quantitative and qualitative research methods through document analysis, survey and interview. This paper focused in selected public elementary schools in four municipalities in Northern Isabela in the Cagayan Valley Region namely Cabagan, San Pablo, Santa Maria and Santo Tomas. Survey questionnaire, interview guide and observation checklist were used to document the problems, attitudes and perceptions of K to 3 teachers in the implementation of MTB-MLE for the K to 12 program. Results showed that the reactions, attitudes and perceptions of the teachers on the implementation of the MTB-MLE are generally favorable. However, the teachers encountered problems on availability of instructional materials and facilities.

Keywords: K to 12 Curriculum; Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) Program; Reactions, attitudes and perceptions

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## **Introduction**

Basic education in the Philippines underwent a radical change in June 2012 when the K to 12 Curriculum was implemented. Basic education is now thirteen years instead of the usual ten years, that is, kindergarten, elementary level which is still six years and high school which is now six years - four years junior high school and two years senior high school, rather than the usual four. This two-year addition in High School is supposed to bring our students at par with global standards and synchronize our educational system to world standards. It will also stream students into the more rational vocational college bound tracks that fill employment demands (Hall, 2012). With the curricular changes for these two additional years, higher educational institutions (HEIs) worry about the impact these changes will have.

In the K to 12 Curriculum, the elementary grades will focus on the core learning areas namely: languages, mathematics, science and social studies. One of the features of the K to 12 Curriculum is the use of the eight major Philippine languages to teach Kindergarten to Grade 3 (K to 3) students. The Department of Education (DepEd) of the Philippines adopted the “Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE)” program when results of pilot tests showed that students learn better when the language used at home is also used in the classroom. The establishment of Multilingual Education (MLE) support system is necessary to ensure the effectiveness of the use of mother tongue as medium of instruction.

The Mother Tongue Based-Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) is the government’s banner program for education as a salient part of the implementation of the K to 12 Basic Education Program. It was embodied in the Department Order Number 74, series of 2009, an order “Institutionalizing Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE). Its significance is articulated in Republic Act 10532, otherwise known as the “Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013.”

MTB-MLE is a formal or non-formal medium of communication, in which the learner’s mother tongue and additional languages are used in the classroom. The MTB-MLE is a program where the medium of instruction is the mother tongue or the first language (L1) of the learners. In the teaching-learning process, both the teacher and the learners use the mother tongue in explaining the lesson. Other languages are also used during the discussion, provided these languages will help the teacher and the learners understand each other in the discussion.

Learners begin their education in the language they understand best, their mother tongue, and develop a strong foundation in this language before other languages. Mother Tongue instruction allows teachers and students to interact naturally and negotiate meanings together, creating participatory learning environments that are conducive to cognitive as well as linguistic development. Children with a solid foundation in their mother tongue develop stronger literacy abilities in the school. Their knowledge and skills will be developed through languages. The implementation of MTB-MLE enables the learners to use different languages for success in school and for lifelong learning.

In rural areas, most of the Filipinos use the native language in their respective localities as their mother tongue. This is especially true before the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Later

when children go to school, they learn and adopt the Filipino language, the national language of the Philippines, which is very similar to Tagalog. They also learn the English language along with the Filipino language in the school. Learning Filipino and English languages became mandatory because of the bilingual policy. However, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century many parents trained their children to speak in Tagalog, no longer the native language in their localities because of its advantage in the school. Hence, the mother tongue of many children is not the native language in their localities. Many students find it difficult to relate with their teacher when the local language is used as the mother tongue in the delivery of the lesson.

The Ibanag speaking communities have variety and variation of Ibanag as their language. This is a reality in various places in Region 02 which include some communities in the province of Isabela, although, there are commonalities in the Ibanag language of the different Ibanag speaking communities. In the implementation of K to 12 Basic Education Program, the mother tongue is taught as a subject in the K to 3 levels and is used to emphasize the lessons in Grade 4 to Grade 12. Thus, mother tongue is very significant in the implementation of K to 12 Basic Education Program.

Some of the implications of the K to 12 Program include the following: graduates will be better prepared for higher education; graduates will have a better mastery of basics, and remedial courses will no longer be necessary, graduates of the K to 12 Program will be better prepared for work, thus they can go directly to work. In view of the implementation of the K to 12 Program, a development of a National Qualifications Framework is deemed necessary (Licuanan, 2012).

This study is primarily aimed at determining the perceptions, reactions and attitudes of the teachers on the implementation of the MTB-MLE program. Secondly, this research determined the problems and difficulties encountered by the teachers in the implementation of the MTB-MLE Program in terms of the following: Preparation and delivery of learning tasks, course content, textbooks, school's MTB-MLE facilities, students' mother tongue and school location.

## **Methodology**

The study utilized quantitative and qualitative research methods through survey and interview. This paper focused in selected elementary schools in four municipalities in Northern Isabela in the Cagayan Valley Region (Region 2) namely: Cabagan, Santa Maria, San Pablo and Santo Tomas. Stratified random sampling of schools was done. The respondents were teachers of the Department of Education teaching in the elementary level. There were 65 respondents from Cabagan, 51 respondents from Santa Maria and 18 respondents from San Pablo and 36 respondents from Santo Tomas, a total of 170 teachers.

In this study, a survey questionnaire was developed where the teacher respondents were asked to respond to statements describing their reactions, attitudes and perceptions, of the teachers on the implementation of the MTB-MLE program and the problems and difficulties encountered by the teachers in the implementation of the MTB-MLE Program in terms of the following: preparation and delivery of learning tasks, course content, textbooks, school's MTB-MLE facilities, students' mother

tongue and school location. An interview guide was also developed to supplement the survey.

## **Results and Discussion**

Teachers under the Department of Education are currently required to implement the MTB-MLB Program. In this study, the teacher respondents were asked to respond to statements describing their perceptions, reactions and attitudes on the implementation of the MTB-MLE program. In addition, the teachers responded to statements describing their problems and difficulties they encountered in the implementation of the MTB-MLE Program in terms of the following: preparation and delivery of learning tasks, course content, textbooks, school's MTB-MLE facilities, students' mother tongue and school location.

The summary of the results is shown in Table 1.

### **1. Teachers Reactions, Attitudes and Perceptions on the Implementation of the MTB-MLE**

There were fifteen (15) statements and the respondents indicated their reactions, attitudes and perceptions, using a Rating Scale: 4 for very favorable, 3 for favorable, 2 for unfavorable and 1 for very unfavorable.

Based on the results of the survey, the teacher respondents' feelings, reactions and attitude on the implementation of the MTB-MLE are very favorable in terms of the following statements: the pupils will learn better their lessons; the teachers very much appreciate the effort of school administrators in implementing the program; the vitality of the mother tongue will be preserved; and the teachers would rather recommend pupils to learn their native language before a foreign language.

**Table 1. Reactions, Attitudes and Perceptions of Teachers on the Implementation of the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) Program in the Philippines**

Areas	Weighted Mean	Description
1. Teachers' Feelings, Reactions and Attitudes on the Implementation of the MTB-MLE	2.88	Favorable
2. Difficulties/Problems Encountered by the Teachers in the Implementation of the MTB-MLE Program		
2.1 On Preparation and Delivery of Learning Tasks	2.50	Moderately Difficult
2.2 On Curriculum Guide	2.39	Moderately Difficult
2.3 School's MTB-MLE facilities		
3.3.1 On MTB-MLE Textbooks and Other Printed Materials	2.65	Moderately Difficult
3.3.2 On Availability of MTB-MLE Facilities	2.78	Moderately Difficult
3.3.3 On Adaptation of Available MTB Facilities	2.57	Moderately Difficult
3.3.4 On School's Location	2.12	Not Difficult

The teachers have favorable feelings, reactions and attitude on the implementation of the MTB-MLE in terms of the following statements: the pupils will be fully prepared for college; the pupils with learning gaps could cope with their lessons even if other languages are used; pupils' poor learning will be corrected; they recommended for the sustainability because it enhances pupils' learning; and they believe that the quality of education for the past years could have not been deteriorated.

On the other hand, the teacher respondents have unfavorable feelings, reactions and attitude on the implementation of the MTB-MLE in terms of the following statements: the pupils are not interested to learn because of too many languages used in teaching; the MTB-MLE is an additional expense to the government; the program is a waste of time; and pupils cannot cope with difficulties in learning even if the lessons were using this program. In other words, the teachers feel that the pupils are still interested to learn the mother tongue even if there are many languages used in teaching such as English, Filipino and/or Tagalog, and Ilocano. Also, the teacher respondents do not agree that the MTB-MLE is an additional expense to the government. The teachers do not think that the program is a waste of time. In addition, the teacher respondents do not agree that pupils cannot cope with difficulties in learning even if the lessons were using this program, meaning, pupils can cope with their difficulties in learning even if the lessons were taught using the mother tongue.

Go (2012) said that the native language or mother tongue is a starting point for beginning reading in the grades while speaking knowledge of English has yet to be acquired by grade school pupils.

In fact, Caguioa (2013) reported that she observed an improved participation among her pupils where they could readily relate the lesson to their own experiences, prior knowledge and other socio-cultural background. Children learned faster and better since they are adept in their mother tongue. The students learned to read faster and fluently because of the songs, poems and rhymes were taught in Ibanag, the mother tongue of most of her pupils. In addition, they were able to think and understand their lessons well and were able to ask questions critically. The children enjoyed playing, singing with indigenous instruments such as coconut shells and improvised tambourines, dancing, dramatizing, writing paragraphs and simple essays. Mother Tongue is very much helpful and effective in the lower grade pupils for instruction.

Based on Table 1, the weighted mean is 2.88 which is described as favorable. This implies that the teacher respondents have a favorable reactions, attitudes and perceptions on the implementation of the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) Program.

The shift to the native language as medium of instruction started with the *Lingua Franca* Education Project through DECS (Department of Education, Culture and Sports now Department of Education) Memo 144, s. 1999. The current Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) policy is the continuation of this project. This MTB-MLE approach is based on the premise that to be academically competent, a student must have a strong grasp of his native tongue/first language (L1). This means that education should start from “where the learners are and what they already know” (Nolasco, 2009). Building a strong L1 foundation, the student is then bridged to his/her second language/s (L2) by providing a strong training in his/her L2 listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills.

Lastly, the teacher respondents have very unfavorable feelings, reactions and attitude on the implementation of the MTB-MLE in terms of the statement, “this program might not prosper because the mother-tongue among pupils are different”. This result implies that the teachers think that the MTB-MLE program may prosper even if the pupils have different mother tongue.

The culture of students in central areas and in remote barangays are different. It is assumed that the local language spoken by the people is regarded as the mother tongue in a certain municipality or community. However, with the introduction of bilingual policy, many parents trained their children in speaking using English or Filipino language particularly in the central area of a town or barangay (village). The Ibanag speaking communities have variety and variation of Ibanag as their language. Thus, teachers are cautious in the teaching of mother tongue.

## **2. Common Problems and Difficulties Encountered by Teachers in the Implementation of the MTB-MLE Program**

### **2.1 On Preparation of Learning Tasks**

The teachers had difficulty or encountered serious problems in the following: choosing appropriate activities for motivating the class; availability of resources for pupils' activities; sufficiency of training acquired for the implementation of MTB-

MLE; sufficiency of MTB-MLE materials; coping with the different mother tongue of pupils.

Based on the interview conducted by the authors, there are pupils who are not originally from the town and have different mother tongue. There is a need to guide these pupils and help them adjust to the mother tongue used in the locality.

The teachers had moderate difficulty or moderately encountered serious problems in the following: choosing appropriate teaching strategy; identifying the appropriate language to be used; planning how the learner can cope with the MTB-MLE for those pupils whose mother tongue is not the native language of the locality; adapting the available instructional materials due to the variety (version) of language used which is different from the locality; pupils' engagement in classroom activities due to unfamiliarity of one of the languages used; coping with the different mother tongue of pupils; orientation of the available materials is not patterned from the mother tongue of the locality; due to unfamiliarity of the mother tongue of pupils/locality; fluency/proficiency in the different mother tongue of pupils; and pupils' refusal to learn other languages specially the common mother tongue of the class.

Overall, the teachers have moderate difficulty or encountered moderately serious problems in the preparation and delivery of learning tasks in the implementation of MTB-MLE. The weighted mean is 2.5.

## **2.2 On Curriculum Guide**

The teachers had moderate difficulty or moderately encountered serious problem in the following: vagueness of topics and lessons to be covered; achievement of the objectives of the lesson; proper sequence of topics; familiarity of terms used due to variety and variation of language used which is different from one locality to another; coverage of the lesson is too many or congested.

Overall, the teachers had moderate difficulty and/or encountered moderately serious problems in the preparation and delivery of learning tasks in the implementation of MTB-MLE. As seen in Table 1, the weighted mean is 2.39.

## **2.3 School's MTB-MLE Facilities**

### **2.3.1 On MTB-MLE Textbooks and Other Printed Materials**

The teachers encountered serious problem in attracting pupils' interests due to lack of appeal of textbooks in terms of figures and pictures; attracting pupils' interests due to lack of appeal of textbooks in terms of color; limitation of examples; limitation of questions and exercises making pupils just to understand the lesson rather than to develop the thinking process and reasoning ability of pupils; complicated terms used in writing the book; proper sequencing of the topics

The teachers had moderate difficulty or encountered moderately serious problems in vagueness of instruction; appropriateness to the ability of pupils.

Based on Table 1, the weighted mean is 2.65 which means that the teachers encountered moderate difficulty or moderately serious problems in the MTB-MLE textbooks and other printed materials in teaching.

Based on the interview made by the authors, there is a lack of instructional materials written in the Ibanag language. There are more Ilocano materials, however, most of the students do not speak Ilocano as most of the people in the community speak Ibanag. Ilocano is the language spoken by majority of the people in Isabela, however, in Northern Isabela, Ibanag is widely spoken.

### **2.3.2 On Availability of MTB-MLE Facilities**

The teachers encountered serious problem in the availability of mother curriculum guide; audio-visual materials to support the hearing and sighting skills of pupils in mother tongue; modules, manuals and textbooks for further discussion of mother tongue; latest version of Ibanag dictionary; latest version of Ilocano dictionary; latest version of Ibanag Orthography; latest version of Ilocano Orthography; dictionary of mathematical/science/arts & humanities terms and concepts in mother tongue; supplies and materials for reproduction; equipment such as computer, photocopier, printer, and other facilities used for reproduction.

Overall, the teachers encountered serious problems in the availability of MTB-MLE facilities. The weighted mean is 2.78.

### **2.3.3 On Adaptation of Available MTB-MLE Facilities**

The teachers encountered difficulty or serious problem in adapting (1) mother tongue curriculum guide because it is not patterned in the mother tongue of the locality; (2) modules, manuals and textbooks because it is not patterned in the mother tongue of the locality; (3) Ibanag dictionary since it is very rare and different from the variety and variation of the Ibanag language in the locality; (4) Ibanag Orthography since it is different from the variety and variation of the Ibanag language in the locality.

The teachers encountered moderate difficulty or moderately serious problem in adapting available MTB-MLE facilities due to varied mother tongue of pupils. Based on the weighted mean of 2.57, the teachers encountered difficulty or serious problems in adapting the available MTB-MLE facilities.

### **2.3.4 On School's Location**

The teachers encountered no difficulty or no serious problem on the following: native language of the locality is dominated by the pupil's mother tongue; some parent's mother tongue is not the native language; too many migrants; some teachers assigned in the locality are not native speakers; unavailability of an expert in the mother tongue to provide further knowledge and information in the locality; promptness to information on MTB-MLE.

The weighted mean is 2.12 which implies that there is no difficulty in terms of the school's location.



The materials used by the teachers to teach and materials that students use to learn are designed to reflect the goals of the curriculum of the Department of Education (DepEd) (Talisayon, et. al, 2000). They also believe that methods that teachers use to teach students and methods that teacher use to train teachers are means of implementing the curriculum. The success of the curriculum depends on the teaching and learning materials and the teaching and training methods. Changes in curriculum do not only focus on content but also on the mode of delivery. Thus, designing, developing and adaptation of appropriate instructional materials needed are important in the implementation of K to 12 Basic Education Program most especially the MTB-MLE program.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The current K to 12 curriculum implements the MTB-MLE program. One of the key features of the K to 12 Curriculum is the use of Mother Tongue as primary medium of instruction from K to 3. The formation of MLE support system is necessary to make sure the efficiency of the use of mother tongue in teaching K to 3 pupils.

In this study, the teacher respondents generally have favorable feelings, reactions and attitudes on the implementation of the MTB-MLE. The teacher respondents encountered moderate difficulty on preparation of learning tasks, curriculum guide and school's MTB-MLE facilities such as textbooks and other printed materials, availability of MTB-MLE facilities and adaptation of available MTB facilities. However, the teacher respondents did not encounter any difficulty on the schools' location.

The implementation of MTB-MLE in teaching K to 3 pupils helps the teacher in explaining the lessons well. This is also true for the pupils where they can understand and express their thoughts in the language where they are most comfortable with. One of the main concerns of the teacher respondents is the lack of textbooks, curriculum guides and other instructional materials written in Ibanag, the mother tongue of the communities involved in the study.

MTB-MLE is very important in the implementation of K to 12 Basic Education Program. While it is true that the teacher respondents generally have favorable feelings, reactions and attitudes on the implementation of the MTB-MLE, there is a need of more trainings specifically on the preparation of appropriate activities for the pupils.

In addition, more seminars and workshops regarding the implementation of MTB-MLE should be conducted. In-service trainings regarding MTB-MLE be conducted in DepEd Schools in Northern Isabela. Materials written in Ibanag currently available must be revised. The teachers' guide and the learners' material must be written using the mother tongue of the pupils.

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