Implementing Mother Tongue Based-Multilingual Education in an Area of Armed Conflict in Southern Philippines: A Case Study

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Abstract
With Philippine schools adopting the use of mother tongue as the medium of instruction from Kindergarten to Grade 3, this case study looked into how the Mother Tongue Based- Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) programme was implemented in an area of armed conflict.

The current study answered the following questions: 1) How is MTB-MLE implemented in an area of armed conflict in terms of the use of mother tongue as subject, medium of instruction, and auxiliary language; 2) How is the mother tongue integrated in peace education in an area of armed conflict particularly in the curriculum, instructional materials, and strategies.

A public elementary school located in Maguindanao, Southern Philippines was the study locale. As a qualitative research, it used the instrumental case study design involving two Grade 1 classes, and one class each in Grades 2 and 3.

Classroom observations, Focus Group Discussions, Key Informant Interviews, analysis of instructional and learning materials, and surveys were conducted.

Results of the study reveal that Maguindanaon as a Mother Tongue subject was taught in Grade 1 with the teacher using both Maguindanaon and Filipino as media of instruction; however, Maguindanaon as an auxiliary language has not been established in the study.

For the second question, results show that the school indirectly and informally integrates peace education using Maguindanaon through the teaching of values education and in the Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education (ALIVE). However, there is no direct mention of peace, unity and harmony in the lessons observed. Teaching strategies were also very limited.

Keywords: mother tongue, armed conflict, peace education, MTB-MLE, Bangsamoro, multilingual education

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Introduction

Results of several local studies in the Philippines and abroad have presented the perception and beliefs of various sectors in society that English and anything related to the West such as music, entertainment, fashion, and anything shown in the mass media are more important than one's own language and culture.

However, this attitude and perception toward the use of the mother tongue and the role it plays in the learning process and lives of Filipino learners are expected to take an interesting turn with the implementation of Mother Tongue Based-Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) program in Kindergarten to Grade 3 classes.

Based on the MTB-MLE Framework, the mother tongue (MT) or First Language (L1) will be used as the primary medium of instruction (MOI) from pre-school until at least Grade 3. The mother tongue will be used as "the main vehicle to teach understanding and mastery of all subject areas like Math, Science, Makabayan (Social Studies), and language subjects like Filipino and English" (DepEd No. 74 Enclosure 1, 2009:1).

For this case study, the study locale is part of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), wherein students learn using their mother tongue, Maguindanaon aside from the national language Filipino and two foreign languages specifically English and Arabic. Other than that, the school is also located in an area of armed conflict.

Thus, this specific case study attempts to offer a snapshot of how the current language policy is being implemented in an area regularly besieged with armed conflict due to its peoples' "aspiration to chart their political future through a democratic process that will secure their identity and posterity and allow for meaningful self-governance (Draft Basic Bangsamoro Law, BBL 2014, Art. 1, Sec. 3).

Literature Review

Educators and researchers have long studied the issue of what language should be used in formal and informal education in order to provide the best method of learning.

In the 1990 U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child, it mandates that children must be educated in a language that they use to interact with their family at home.

However, the use of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction was not instituted for several decades in the Philippines as various language policies had been passed prioritizing the use of English and Filipino.

One was the Philippine Bilingual Education Policy (BEP) defined operationally as the separate use of Filipino and English as media of instruction in specific subject areas.

Another was former President Arroyo's Executive Order 210, "Establishing the Policy to Strengthen the Use of the English Language as a Medium of Instruction in the Educational System" in 2003. The declaration was designed to increase the

employment of fresh graduates in the Call Center industry or Business Process Outsourcing (BPOs) industry.

Despite the language policies prioritizing English, there were several attempts to use the mother tongue in the Philippine Education System. One was Republic Act 8980, otherwise known as the Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Act of 2000. The Act provides a clear policy on children's development from conception to age six regardless of their individual needs and socio-cultural background. It mandates that the child's first language is the medium of instruction (ECCD Act, 2000).

Another one was Department of Education (DepEd) Order No. 74, s. 2009, known as, "Institutionalizing Mother Tongue-based Multilingual Education (MLE)." This was the second significant milestone recorded in favor of the mother tongue. The first one was in 1957 when the Revised Philippine Education Program, based on a UNESCO research, implemented the use of the local languages for Grades 1 and 2 while English was taught as a subject.

By 2013, Republic Act No. 10533 or "An Act Enhancing the Philippine Basic Education System by strengthening its Curriculum and Increasing the Number of Years for Basic Education, Appropriating Funds Therefor and for Other Purposes," was passed. It specifically mandates the use of the mother tongue (MT) as the medium of instruction (MOI) from Kindergarten to Grade 3, aside from being taught as a subject from Grades 1 to 3. After Grade 3, only English and Filipino are to be used, which are already part of the learning areas from Grade 1 to Grade 10.

With these developments on the implementation of the MTB-MLE policy nationwide, research studies and other forms of feedback coming from various areas and sectors are expected to improve the country's language policy in schools. Consequently, it is also expected to improve the learning experience of the students and their academic performance.

The Education For All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report 2005 states that mother tongue-based bilingual education not only increases access to skills but also raises the quality of basic education through classroom interaction and integration of students' background knowledge and experiences to what they are currently learning.

Language and Armed Conflict

In a UNESCO analytical review on mother tongue-based bilingual or multilingual education in the early years, Ball (2010) recommends that the linguistic rights of the minority groups in learning be recognized.

The said review underscores the fact that language is a fundamental attribute of cultural identity and empowerment aside from helping ensure peaceful cohabitation among the peoples. At the same time, linguistic rights must be recognized in situations of political change and evolution.

Boyden and Ryder (1996) note that in areas of armed conflict, the learners' first language should be used and learning takes place through active participation in

discussions and debates, group work, individual project work and experiential work. With this approach, children are allowed to practice and learn on their own terms, using their own language, concepts and understandings, thereby building their confidence. Creativity through role-play and drama are encouraged. By drawing on the pupil's personal experience and applying the acquired knowledge and skills to practical situations, full reinforcement is given to the learning process as a tool useful and relevant in all aspects of life.

Smith (2010) in his background paper for EFA 2011 Global Report identifies education as either "a driver of conflict or a contributor towards conflict transformation and peace building." In his paper, he notes that there must be appropriate curriculum content, pedagogy and learning resources to build peace. This means that the type of curriculum must be responsive to the needs of society instead of using it to promote particular political ideologies, religious practices or cultural values and traditions.

In the case of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) where the current school for the case study is located, no less than the former President Benigno Aquino III identified in his Ten-Point Education Agenda the importance of *madaris* education in order to "make the full basic EFA available to all Muslim Filipino children anywhere in the country" (EFA 2015 National Review Report: Philippine, 2015). The *madaris* recognize the linguistic and cultural heritage of the Muslims and give them full access to education that is contextualized to their beliefs, language and culture.

Based on the qualitative and comparative study of Fabris (2011) in two Mindanao schools, it points out that when schools neglect the minorities' histories and languages, it has the two-fold outcome of either frustrating minority identities or promulgating social biases and intolerance on the other. Using social constructivism, Fabris concludes that as societal tensions increase due to lack of recognition of one's history and language, conflict would develop and allow groups to de-legitimize or dehumanize one another.

Thus, in the implementation of MTB-MLE and integration of peace education using the mother tongue, there must be an interaction between the national level and the local level. Otherwise, the language policy will not be successfully implemented as shown in a study by Burton (2013).

The said study points out that despite the implementation of the language policy and the teachers' compliance in using the mother tongue, both teachers and parents still believe that English is more important than the Bicol language due to its global status and economic value. The study concludes that a singular top-down approach to MTB-MLE is ineffective unless local knowledge and stakeholders such as parents and teachers in the area are included in the decision-making and implementation of the language policy.

Conceptual Framework

For this study, a modified version of Hornberger and Ricento's a layered "onion" in language planning and policy is utilized.

Like an onion, language planning and policy have several layers with the outermost part represented by broad language policy objectives enacted by legislative or executive bodies at the national level. The next layer is represented by institutions, agencies, business or government offices that interpret the policy for dissemination to the next level, which is the core of the onion. It is expected that as the policy goes down to the core, "it could be interpreted and modified as individuals from diverse backgrounds, experiences and communities interact with each other." (Hornberger & Ricento, 1996).

What makes the "onion model" applicable to this current study is that there is an assumption that the different "layers of the onion" would affect each other. Thus, from outside to inside of the onion, the actors representing each layer would interact with each other. This aptly describes the "top-down" and "bottom-up" approach in implementing a successful MTB-MLE policy.

The "bottom-up" approach is intended to gather feedback from the main implementers and in some cases help "revitalize threatened and non-dominant languages in language planning and policy" (Hornberger and Ricento, 1996). On the other hand, the "top-down" approach allows the national level to operationalize the policy through executive orders, legislations, guidelines, and regulations.
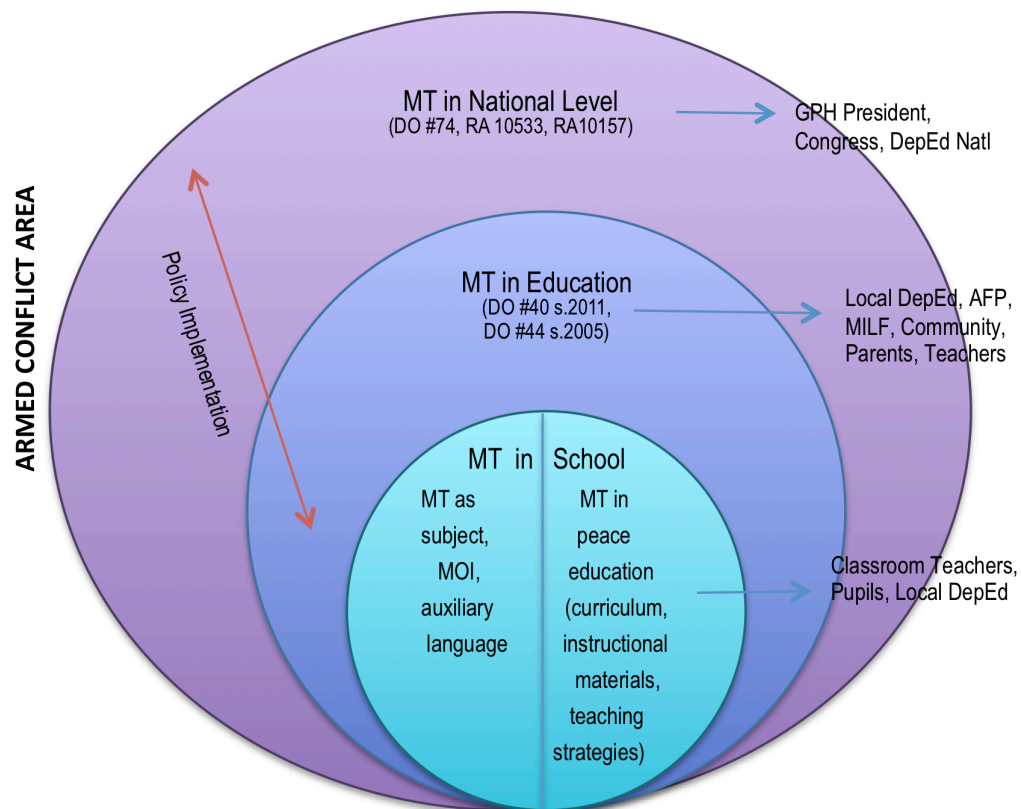

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework on MTB-MLE policy implementation using the "top-down" and "bottom-up" approaches

Methodology

The present study utilized the qualitative approach as it is flexible and the research design comes out based on the real world as the research moves on (Robson, 2011).

Moreover, the study made use of social constructionism in the analysis and interpretation of data considering the topic and respondents. According to Schwandt (2003), in social constructionism, concepts, models, and schemes are created to make sense of experience, and to test it continuously then later modify these constructions based on new experience where there are shared understandings, practices, and languages.

As a qualitative research, the Instrumental Case Study Design was used "... to accomplish something other than understanding a particular situation. It provides insight into an issue or helps refine a theory" (Stake in Baxter & Jack, 2008: 149). This design was deemed appropriate because the case is "often looked in depth, its contexts scrutinized, its ordinary activities detailed, and it helps the researcher pursue the external interest," (Stake in Baxter & Jack, 2008: 149). The case study design also allowed the integration of the quantitative survey data generated from a survey questionnaire given to teachers to improve data credibility.

The location of the case study was chosen based on the following criteria. First, the area must be considered by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) to have armed conflict. In this case, the presence of Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) in the area and existence of violence involving local politicians, rebels, and government troops has reached a minimum level of intensity, thus, the locale met the first criterion. Second, the school included in the case study should have been implementing the MTB-MLE program since its inception, and third is that the major composition of the student population should be Muslims.

The participants in the case study were the students, teachers, parents, school officials, local education officials, and a local high-ranking AFP officer in charge of the Maguindanao area.

In conducting the research, classroom observations, archival research, analysis of instructional aterials, tools and interview schedules for Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were used. Due to the absence of a similar study, tools were designed based on previous studies on MTB-MLE implementation. A survey questionnaire that was validated in another school located in an area of armed conflict was also used.

Discussion

The intent of this case study was to examine the implementation of the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education in an area of armed conflict. It specifically answered the following questions: 1) How is MTB-MLE implemented in an area of armed conflict in terms of the use of mother tongue as subject, medium of instruction,

and auxiliary language; 2) How is the mother tongue integrated in peace education in an area of armed conflict particularly in the curriculum, instructional materials, and teaching strategies.

The result for the first question reveals that the teachers observed during the Mother Tongue subject use Maguindanaon in discussing the lesson. However, their familiarity and ease in implementing the bilingual policy for over a long period of time made them resort to the Filipino language even during the Mother Tongue subject. The lack of curriculum guides, instructional materials and trainings are among the challenges encountered by the lower primary teachers.

On the use of Maguindanaon as medium of instruction in Math, Araling Panlipunan and Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education (ALIVE) classes, results of the class observations, interviews and FGDs reveal that teachers would still regularly switch to Filipino when explaining the lessons. English is also used in some instances for convenience and spontaneity of discussion in the classroom. The teachers have identified familiarity and ease in code switching between Maguindanao, Filipino and English as a reason for the continued use of the other languages in their classes. Unlike the apparent willingness of the teachers and students in using Maguindanaon as medium of instruction despite the challenges they have encountered, parents have strongly expressed their resistance to the new language policy. Their apprehensions toward the MTB-MLE outweigh their feeling of pride that Maguindanaon is used as medium of instruction. For them, the old bilingual policy would make their children at par with graduates from other schools.

Meanwhile, Maguindanaon as an auxiliary language has not been established in the study as teachers, students and school officials consider Filipino as the auxiliary language. In the presence of Muslim and non-Muslims, speakers would automatically use Filipino language in order to communicate.

For the second question, the study has explored how Maguindanaon integrates peace education in their school curriculum and ALIVE curriculum. Results of class observations, interviews and FGDs show that the school indirectly and informally integrates peace education using Maguindanaon through the teaching of values education in various learning areas inside and outside the classroom. Although there was no direct and formal mention of peace, unity and harmony in the lessons observed, emphasis was given on how students should behave in the school, at home and in their community.

In answering the question on the use of Maguindanaon in peace education particularly in the instructional materials, the other textbooks and references analyzed do not directly contain any integration of peace education, but were focused on values formation and the Arabic Language. These instructional materials were in Arabic and English and the *ustadz* translated the terms and concepts to Maguindanaon language.

The last question explored how Maguindanaon is integrated in peace education through the teaching strategies. Results of the class observation and interview reveal that the teaching strategies are very limited. In one of the classes observed during the math class, the teacher used story telling to inculcate values education, while the ALIVE teacher depended a lot on the translation method and experiential learning. It

is possible though that as very limited classes have been observed, there could be more teaching strategies in informally integrating peace education in the lessons with the use of Maguindanaon language in other classes.

Conclusions

Results from this study suggest that the implementation of a national policy requires a "top-down and "bottom-up" approach. As illustrated by the problems encountered by the teachers such as lack of curriculum guides and lack of training, there should have been local consultations and trainings conducted by the national and regional levels. After all, the process of conceptualization, planning, and preparation are activities that have to be shared at all levels prior to the implementation of a policy.

As posited by Ricento and Hornberger (1996) in the onion model, there are interactions and negotiations within and between levels in order for a policy to be successfully implemented.

The succeeding conclusions are based on the results of this study.
First, the teachers identified lack of training, curriculum guides and instructional materials as factors that hinder the successful implementation of the MTB-MLE program. Class observations, interviews, focus group discussions, and analysis of instructional materials support the claims of the school officials and teachers. The lack of preparation in terms of conducting training, development of curriculum guides and instructional materials prior to the implementation of MTB-MLE nationwide placed the local schools and teachers in a daily struggle. Even the use of the local language, which is Maguindanaon, is not an assurance of immediate success in implementing MTB-MLE.

Due to the use of bilingual policy for several decades, both native speakers of Maguindanaon and non-native speakers such as the Christian teachers, face a challenging task of teaching Maguindanaon as a subject and using it as medium of instruction and auxiliary language. With regular training and development of curriculum guides and instructional materials, teachers could slowly adjust to the MTB-MLE program.

As pointed out by Burton (2013) in a case study on the implementation of MTB-MLE in the Philippines, there is a possibility of a misalignment on policy intentions between the local level and national level when teachers resort to mere translation due to lack of knowledge on pedagogical approaches and understanding of the rationale of MTB-MLE.

Second, teachers need additional support from the regional and national DepEd office in order to fully implement the MTB-MLE program. At the same time, the regional and national education offices should gather feedback from the local level in order for them to identify specifically what is needed to improve the program.

Third, although the school for this study is faced with the challenge of being located in an area of armed conflict, the ideals and plans in integrating peace education using Maguindanaon by the school officials, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders are yet to be implemented.

Laws and policies like the Muslim Mindanao Act. 303 s. 2012, which enhances the Basic Education Act in ARMM and the 2006 Road Map for Upgrading Muslim Basic Education are clear indications of the national and regional governments' intention to infuse peace education in the curriculum.

Thus, the national and regional education offices should actively and faithfully implement these laws and policies on peace education. Local school officials, teachers and other stakeholders should also take the initiative to integrate peace education in the curriculum and take advantage of using the mother tongue in integrating peace education in the different class subjects.

In the process of implementation, feedback on training and financial support for the integration of peace education vis-à-vis MTB-MLE implementation could be brought up to the national level that comprised of the GPH President, Congress and national DepEd Office. This would give legislators a clear and realistic picture of the current situation of peace education and MTB-MLE in a school located in an area of armed conflict.

Fourth, the harmonious co-existence in Maguindanao of Muslims, Christians and indigenous people despite their different beliefs and culture could be fully achieved through the use of a common language that all parties could understand.

Teachers, school officials and an AFP official pointed out during the Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) that while Maguindanaon language could help in peace education, a language common to all is needed to avoid misunderstanding and conflict. In the case of Maguindanao, the Filipino language could serve this purpose because of the existence of different languages such as Maguindanaon, Ilocano, Ilonggo, and Bisaya.

Tupas (2011) noted that Filipino as the national language has become the country's "inter-national lingua franca." This means that among the peoples from different tribes and ethnicity residing in Maguindanao, Filipino has become a common language for all.

Fifth, Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) need to improve their pre-teacher training to fully prepare future teachers who will be deployed in areas of armed conflict. Topics on MTB-MLE and peace education should be included comprehensively in the pre-teacher training.

Sixth, the curriculum and teaching resources provided by curriculum developers and instructional material writers were not contextualized to the local setting. It would also be beneficial if a Maguindanaon dictionary is developed and provided to the teachers. In the light of the implementation of the rationalization plan, there should be a more conscious effort on the part of the regional education office to implement the integration of peace education at the primary level where the mother tongue is taught as a subject and used as medium of instruction. A Peace Education Teaching Exemplar using the mother tongue should also be provided considering that the school is located in an area of armed conflict.

Finally, studying the implementation of MTB-MLE in one of the areas of conflict is not enough, as this only presents a single snapshot of how a national policy is carried

out down to the school level by teachers, who have inadequate training, curriculum guides, textbooks, and teaching resources. Thus, it is recommended that a similar study be conducted in other ARMM areas besieged with conflict over a longer period of time. This will give readers a broader and a comprehensive discussion on the implementation of the mother tongue policy.

Furthermore, as local education officials, teachers and parents are currently adjusting to the new language policy, it will be interesting and significant to repeat the same case study on how MTB-MLE is implemented after three years. This will offer readers a new level of understanding how the implementation of MTB-MLE has evolved through the years. The study will focus on how MTB-MLE is implemented in an area of armed conflict in terms of the use of mother tongue as medium of instruction/ language of instruction; subject; and auxiliary language. It should further delve into the use of mother tongue in peace education in an area of armed conflict particularly in the curriculum; instructional materials; and strategies.

By studying the implementation of MTB-MLE in different areas of the country especially those outside the city, the national government will have a bigger picture of the benefits of MTB-MLE and strengthen whatever weaknesses will be gathered from the main implementers – the teachers.

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