

Coping With Mtb-Mle Challenges: Perspectives of Primary Grade Teachers in a Central School

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Abstract:

A couple of years after the full-swing implementation of the Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education (MTBMLE) in the Philippines, the program status continues to be confronted with many challenges in various provinces. It is in this context that this study endeavored to explore the status of the program, the challenges confronting the program implementers and as well as the strategies employed by the implementers to address these challenges. Using qualitative and qualitative research design, the study evaluated the status and challenges in the implementation of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education in Tagbina Central Elementary School, Tagbina, Surigao del Sur. Issues found include the inadequate representation of the cultural heritage the children in their first language, insufficient and inadequate instructional materials and equipment, and the lack of teachers training for appropriate MTB-MLE teaching techniques and learning styles. In order to address these problems, teachers employ various coping strategies including self-training and study, asking help from a more knowledgeable faculty and shouldering the expenses of instructional material reproduction. These imply that the program implementation of MTBMLE needs looking into considering the serious problems confronting it. Concerned people should be informed and these people need to work collectively in formulating and designing appropriate intervention and sustainability plans for the program to thrive and subsequently attain its ultimate purpose of providing quality MTBMLE among primary graders.

Keywords: central school, mother tongue, Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTBMLE), primary grade

1.0 Introduction

Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) is one of the salient parts of the K-12 Basic Education program of the Philippine government which was implemented through the enactment of Republic Act 10533 otherwise known as Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013. MTB-MLE underscores the use of the learners' mother tongue and other additional languages in the instructional setting in the primary grades. This is pegged on the idea that the use of mother tongue in teaching the learners will help develop stronger literacy abilities among them, and these knowledge and skills will eventually transfer across languages. On the account of the MTB-MLE implementation, the present study explored the status of the program, the challenges confronting the program implementers and as well as the strategies employed by the implementers to address these challenges.

Several researchers both foreign and local like that of Walter and Dekker (2008), Xinia (2012), among others have affirmed the successful implementation and the efficiency of mother tongue-based education in many countries including the Philippines. However, contrary to the pronounced success stories of the program are some problems and issues that challenged the implementers. Unachieved instructional objectives (Cruz, 2015), lack of resources (Wa-Mbaleka, 2014), and teachers'

lack of ability to teach the mother tongue (Gacheche, 2010) are just some of the identified problems of the MTB-MLE implementation.

Apparently, the aforementioned problems in the implementation of the program have to be addressed by the concerned individuals; otherwise, its ultimate goal will be defeated. Hence, the present study tried to gather first hand data as to the emerging challenges that the teachers, who are considered as frontline implementers of the program experienced. Moreover, based on these problems seen, the study also investigated on specific steps and strategies the teachers have taken to address the prevailing challenges they faced and their suggestions on how higher offices of education, government and non-government entities could be of help in solving the problems.

By knowing the issues and problems concerning this program implementation, implementers, and policy makers could gain insights as to how the program went through years after its implementation. On the account thereof, a basis for policy revisiting could be laid out and thus arrive at sound decisions in improving the status quo of the MTB-MLE implementation towards the bigger picture of providing quality education among Filipino learners.

2.0 Statement of the Problem

The study generally aimed to evaluate the status and challenges in the implementation of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education in Tagbina Central Elementary School, Tagbina, Surigao del Sur.

Specifically, it sought answers to the following questions:

1. What is the status of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) implementation as perceived by the teachers in terms of the following:
 - a. curricular content;

- b. instruction and strategies used; and
 - c. physical facilities?
 2. What are the problems the teachers encountered in the MTB-MLE implementation in terms of the following:
 - a. curricular content;
 - b. instruction and strategies used; and
 - c. physical facilities?
 3. What strategies/steps do teachers take to address the problems they encountered in the implementation of MTB-MLE?
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3.0 Research Methodology

This study is descriptive in nature which put premium on the perceptions of the teachers regarding the MTB-MLE implementation. It made use of both quantitative and qualitative approaches of research. The quantitative aspect was on the assessment of the status of implementation of the program where the teachers' perceptions were quantified. Likert scale was used with five (5) being the highest and one (1) being the lowest in describing the status and problems of the program implementation as perceived by the teachers. On the other hand, the qualitative part lay in the teachers live experiences as to their attempts in addressing the prevailing problems, issues and concerns pertaining to MTB-MLE which they have personally encountered. Along with these strategies they employed are their suggested ways and steps in which the administrators, higher offices, government and non-government entities could help in solving the problems.

The study was conducted Tagbina Central Elementary School which is the largest school in the municipality of Tagbina in terms of population of pupils and teachers and thus, the researcher believes that this central school is enough to represent and give us a general picture of the MTB-MLE implementation in the municipality of Tagbina, Surigao del Sur.

To amass the needed data in this study, the researcher adopted the tool used by Antigua (2012) in investigating the MTB-MLE implementation in Agusan del Norte. This tool was validated by experts from the Philippine Normal University. The questionnaire is composed of four (4) parts. The first part asks for the profile of the respondents. Part II and III focus on the level of perceptions of the teachers on the status and problems they encountered in the MTB-MLE implementation. The areas evaluated were on curriculum content, instruction and strategies used, and physical facilities. Finally, Part IV, which was personally added by the researcher, asks for the respondents' personal experiences in addressing the problems they encountered in the implementation of the MTB-MLE, and whether or not their strategies were effective; and how they think other entities could help them. In the context of this study, only the teachers' perceptions were gathered considering that they are the frontline implementers of the program. Included as respondents in the study are the 13 teachers teaching mother tongue subject and other subjects using mother tongue as medium of instruction in grades 1 – 3.

After the data were gathered, the weighted mean of each indicator in the three areas of implementation were computed to determine the perceived status of implementation and the most prevailing problem of MTB-MLE. Finally, the responses in Part IV were analyzed and were grouped in themes for systematic discussion.

4.0 Results and Discussion

Status of MTB-MLE Implementation

Table 1. Status of the Implementation of MTB MLE

A. Curriculum Content	Mean	Verbal Description
1. Topics contribute to the attainment of conceptual, process skill, and affective objectives based on PELC.	4.31	Much Observed
2. Topics are significant to human experiences, problems and issues needed to develop the mother tongue and the languages used in school such as English/Filipino.	4.69	Very much Observed
3. Lessons are adaptable in terms of learners' abilities and home /cultural background.	4.38	Much Observed

Table 1 shows that in terms of curriculum content, item 2 is 'very much observed' in the implementation of MTB-MLE as perceived by the teachers with a mean of 4.69. It is interesting to note also that this item got the highest mean which goes to show that teachers greatly observed that 'topics in the curriculum are significant to human experiences, problems, and issues needed to develop the mother tongue and the languages used in school such as English and Filipino.' This proves that there is no doubt as to the relevance of the topics in the language development of the pupils who receive the MTB-MLE curriculum. Moreover, the teachers rated the other items in curriculum aspect as 'much observed'.

Similarly, items in instruction/Teaching Strategies aspect were mostly rated 'much observed' which means that the instructional aspect of the program is in place. Item 5 however got the lowest rating in this aspect with only 3.38 mean. This shows that the heritage background is not proportionally represented in the teachers' use of children's literature and text. In a casual interview with the teachers, they said that this is due to the material used which is not localized.

Finally, in terms of physical facilities and equipment, this seems to be the aspect of MTB-MLE which needs looking into as the items were poorly rated from among the aspects of the program implementation. Most notable is the 'adequacy of instructional equipments/tools such as blocks, counters, audio player, etc' which according to the teachers is 'fairly observed' as implied in its 2.31 mean – the lowest mean among all items rated. Items 1 and 2 only got a mean of 3.46 and 3.08 respectively.

4. Topics are useful in planning and organizing instruction	3.85	Much Observed
5. Topics develop competence in clarifying values, attitudes and cultural identity of the learners	4.46	Much Observed
B. Instruction/ Teaching Strategies		
1. Use of mother tongue/first language in teaching the subject areas	4.38	Much Observed
2. Utilization of communicative-based instructions	3.85	Much Observed
3. Use of integrative modes of teaching to appreciate cultural diversity	4.00	Much Observed
4. Application of life-skills in the learning activities	3.85	Much Observed
5. Use of children's literature and text in the first language proportionally represent the heritage background of the community	3.38	Observed
C. Physical Facilities and Equipment		
1. Availability of reading materials in the first language for children	3.46	Observed
2. Availability of basic textbooks and primers on MTB MLE for teachers	3.08	Observed
3. Adequacy of instructional equipments/tools such as blocks, counters, audio player, etc	2.31	Fairly Observed

Problems Encountered in MTB-MLE Implementation

Table 2 manifests the problems the teachers encountered in the MTB-MLE implementation. In terms of curriculum content, teachers deem this as 'not so much of a problem.' A focus group discussion with the teachers affirms that they see the content of the curriculum as well-planned and structured. The contents are really relevant and adequate.

'Much a problem' to them is on the instructional aspect and physical facilities. 'Lack of sufficient training on the mastery of MTB-MLE learning techniques' and 'failure to address the

principles of learning styles in the approaches' are two of the significant problems in the instructional aspect. On the other hand, 'inadequate supply of textbooks' is the most prevailing problem in the MTB-MLE implementation. Along with this, 'inadequate supply of supplementary ad reading materials' adds up to the problems in physical facilities and equipment. These results affirm the findings Wa-Mbaleka (2014) about the lack of resources relative to MTB-MLE, and Gacheche (2010) on the teachers' lack of ability to teach the mother tongue and insufficient training of teachers

Table 2. Problems Encountered in the Implementation of MTB-MLE

A. Curriculum Content	Mean	Verbal Description
1. Inadequate knowledge on the use of MTB MLE	3.00	Not So Much of a Problem
2. Incompetence to prepare lesson plans in conformity with MTB MLE program	3.23	Not So Much of a Problem
3. Inadequate knowledge in the first language of the learners	3.00	Not So Much of a Problem

4. Difficulty in teaching the subject areas using the first language	2.62	Not So Much of a Problem
5. Difficulty in providing activities that will elicit cultural awareness and identity	2.62	Not So Much of a Problem
B. Instruction/ Teaching Strategies		
1. Lack of sufficient training on the mastery of MTB-MLE learning techniques	3.77	Much a Problem
2. Failure to address the principles of learning styles in the approaches	3.54	Much a Problem
3. Failure to identify learners' strength and weaknesses	3.15	Not So Much of a Problem
4. Lack of knowledge in handling remedial instruction	2.54	Not So Much of a Problem
5. Failure to motivate pupils to learn	2.69	Not So Much of a Problem
C. Physical Facilities and Equipments		
1. Inadequate supply of textbooks	4.15	Much a Problem
2. Inadequate supply of supplementary and reading materials	3.54	Much a Problem
3. Insufficient classrooms and tables/ chairs for pupils' use	2.46	Not Much a Problem
4. Insufficient library facilities and tools	3.15	Not So Much of a Problem

Teachers' Coping Strategies in Addressing the MTB-MLE Problems

A. Problems on Instruction and Teaching Strategies

In an interview with the teachers, one prevailing problem common to them is the insufficient knowledge on the techniques in teaching mother-tongue owing to the lack of trainings they have.

T1: Bag-o pa ko sa DepEd ug gipatudlo ko sa mother tongue. Naglisud ko kay wala koy seminar ani. [Being a newly-appointed teacher in the Department of Education, I found it really difficult to teach mother tongue because I was not exposed to trainings relevant to teaching the subject.]

To cope with this problem, the teacher said that she did some research on the internet as to teaching and learning strategies in mother-tongue and ask senior faculty members for mentoring and through LAC sessions. It was not fully enough according to her but she did not have a choice.

Meanwhile, even the teachers who were sent to training and conferences were also problematic as they revealed the reality of the trainings they attended.

T2: Yes we we're sent to trainings pero 3 days? 5 days? It's not enough kay bag-o kaayo ug lisud siya itudlo. [Yes, we were sent to trainings but it was only for 3 days or the most, 5 days and this is not enough given the novelty and complexity of the subject.]

Many of the teachers suggested that trainings for teachers especially on the mother-tongue should be conducted for a longer period of time and not just for a few days. They emphasized that the training must be really intensive and extensive to ensure maximum learning among teacher-participants. Others also suggested that it should not only be a selected few who would be sent to trainings. Every teacher teaching mother-tongue should be sent to trainings because the mode on merely 'echoing' the training to those who were not able to participate would be less effective.

B. Problems on Physical Facilities and Equipment

Aside from problems on trainings, teachers also raised their concerns on the resources and equipment provided in teaching the mother-tongue. According to them, the number of materials in teaching mother tongue is insufficient and these materials used *Sinugbuanong Binisaya* which is actually not the exact mother tongue of the pupils.

T3: Dakong problema gyud namu ning mga libro ug materials kay aside from the fact na kuwang siya, dili pa gyud tawn mao. Lawm kayo ang mga binisaya which is not the real first language of our pupils. [Book and materials are our biggest problems because aside from its insufficient number, the language used is similar to the first language of our pupils but it is not the exact language our pupils use.]

As to how they cope with this, they responded that they can do nothing but use the books but during the delivery, they made some corrections and teach the items in the actual context of the pupils' first language which somehow created confusion to some of their pupils. They recommended that the Department of Education craft materials that are really in context of the children's first language. However, they air out

concerns on having the teachers make the materials themselves as this has been the trend. They object to this practice because they are already bombarded with a number of tasks as teachers and call ups from higher offices for localization of mother tongue materials would just be an additional burden to them and this would just reduce their contact-time with their pupils. The teachers suggested that DepEd should ask external experts to craft and produce the materials and such materials should undergo intensive validation to ensure quality before it will be distributed for teacher's use in the field.

5.0. Conclusion

It can be gleaned from the findings of this study that while it is true that the implementation of the MTB-MLE is satisfactory, zooming in to the actual classroom scenario, the program implementation is surrounded with some issues and concerns especially on the part of the frontline implementers – the teachers. The primary grade teachers were doing their best to address the problems in their little ways; however, this is not enough to totally eradicate the problems. The teachers need the help of the administration, higher offices, to counter these problems. Trainings for teachers and instructional materials should be the top priority to be addressed so as not to endanger the provision of quality education among primary graders.

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