



## English Language Education in the Philippines: Policy Landscape and Future Directions

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### Abstract:

This study examines English Language Education (ELE) in the Philippines, focusing on policies, challenges, and prospects. Through a systematic review of literature, it identifies key issues shaping ELE. Policy fragmentation has hindered effective implementation, with initiatives like the Bilingual Education Policy facing criticism and disparities. Teacher capacity and training pose significant challenges due to shortages of qualified English teachers and inadequate training programs. Language competency decline persists, attributed to literature-focused curricula and resource shortages. Despite challenges, prospects for multilingual education and global competence are recognized, with initiatives like Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education showing promise. The study emphasizes the need for coherent policies, improved teacher training, and balanced language approaches to enhance language proficiency. Embracing multilingual education can prepare Filipino students for success in the globalized world. Addressing these challenges and leveraging linguistic diversity can lead to more effective English language education in the Philippines.

*Keywords:* English Language Education, Philippines, Policies, Bilingual Education, Teacher Training

### Introduction:

English language education in the Philippines is a topic of significant interest, particularly in light of the country's integration into the ASEAN community and its aspirations to become a regional education hub. As English serves as the official language of ASEAN, the demand for proficient English speakers has intensified (Minh, 2013). The Philippines, along with other ASEAN member countries, has been striving to enhance English proficiency among its workforce and students to meet the demands of globalization (ICEF Monitor, 2012).

In recent years, there has been a growing sense of urgency to improve English language education due to economic factors as well. The Philippines has positioned itself as a major Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) hub, generating significant revenue and employment opportunities due to its English-proficient workforce (Espina, 2015). Moreover, English proficiency has become crucial for overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) whose remittances contribute significantly to the Philippine economy (Magtulis, 2013).



Despite these opportunities, English language education in the Philippines faces various challenges. The results of the National Achievement Test (NAT) administered by the Department of Education (DepEd) reveal a continuous decline in learning outcomes, especially in basic education (Department of Education, 2012). Issues such as inadequate resources, teacher competency, and curriculum problems hinder the effective teaching and learning of English.

This study aims to delve into the policies, problems, and prospects of English language education in the Philippines. By examining historical trends, current policies, and emerging challenges, this research seeks to provide insights into the evolving landscape of English language education in the country and explore potential avenues for improvement.

### **Literature Review:**

English language education in the Philippines has undergone significant changes over time, influenced by historical, political, and socio-economic factors. This literature review examines key studies, policies, and issues related to English language education (ELE) in the Philippines, focusing on policies, problems, and prospects.

English language education in the Philippines has its roots in the country's colonial history. With the arrival of American colonizers in 1898, English became the medium of instruction in schools (Martin, 2008). The American colonial project aimed to "civilize" Filipinos by promoting English literacy (University of Illinois, 1908). This historical influence shaped the trajectory of English education in the country.

Language-in-education policies have undergone changes over the years. The Bilingual Education Policy (BEP) of 1974 aimed to balance English and Filipino (formerly Pilipino) as mediums of instruction (Gonzalez, 1990). However, debates and contradictions in language policies persist. Policies like Executive Order No. 210 in 2003 emphasized strengthening English as a second language (Quezon III, 2007), while issues of language marginalization and nationalism continue (Gallego & Zubiri, 2011).

The Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, also known as the K to 12 program, introduced reforms to extend basic education to 12 years, including enhancements in English language instruction (Plata, 2013). However, implementation challenges remain, particularly in resource-constrained public schools.

Teacher capacity and training have been identified as major challenges. Many teachers lack adequate training in English language teaching (Plata, 2007), and there's a shortage of qualified English teachers, exacerbated by the exodus of competent teachers seeking better opportunities abroad (Plata, 2013).

Resource constraints in public schools, such as overcrowded classrooms and lack of materials, hinder effective English language instruction (Gonzalez, 2003). Limited access to textbooks and other learning materials affects the quality of education. Curriculum alignment and assessment practices pose challenges. There's a need for coherence between curriculum goals, assessment practices, and instructional methods (Plata, 2010). Assessment frameworks often focus on knowledge-based assessments rather than skills development (Plata, 2007).

The decline in learning outcomes, as evidenced by standardized test scores like the National Achievement Test (NAT), indicates ongoing challenges in English language education (Department of Education, 2012). Issues such as low proficiency levels and inadequate language skills persist. Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTBMLE) has emerged as a prospect for improving English language education by integrating local languages into the curriculum (Bautista et al., 2009). MTBMLE has shown positive effects on learning outcomes in early grades.

Investments in teacher training and professional development are crucial for improving English language instruction (Plata, 2013). Continuous training programs can enhance teacher competencies and classroom practices. Curriculum reforms focusing on modern teaching methodologies, technology integration, and learner-centered approaches can enhance English language education (Plata, 2010). Technology can provide access to resources and support interactive learning environments. English proficiency is vital for economic opportunities, particularly in BPO industries and global employment (Espina, 2015). Strengthening English language skills can enhance the country's competitiveness in the global market.

English language education in the Philippines faces various challenges, including teacher competency issues, resource constraints, curriculum alignment problems, and declining learning outcomes. However, prospects for improvement exist through multilingual education approaches, teacher training, curriculum reform, and leveraging economic opportunities. Addressing these issues is crucial for the country's educational advancement and global competitiveness.

### **Methodology:**



A systematic review approach was employed to investigate English language education (ELE) policies, problems, and prospects in the Philippines. The systematic review followed established guidelines to ensure a comprehensive and rigorous synthesis of existing literature. A systematic search was conducted across electronic databases including Google Scholar, ERIC, JSTOR, and Scopus. The search terms used included combinations of keywords such as "English language education," "Philippines," "language policies," "challenges," "teacher training," and "language proficiency." Boolean operators "AND" and "OR" were used to refine the search.

Initially, titles and abstracts were screened based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Selected studies underwent full-text assessment for final inclusion. Any discrepancies during study selection were resolved through discussion.

Data were extracted from the included studies using a predetermined form. Key information extracted included author(s), publication year, study aim, methodology, key findings related to ELE policies, problems, and prospects.

The quality of included studies was assessed using predefined criteria adapted from relevant guidelines for systematic reviews. The criteria included study design, methodology, sample size, data collection methods, and analysis techniques.

Data synthesis involved organizing and summarizing findings from included studies thematically. Key themes related to ELE policies, problems, and prospects were identified and synthesized to provide a comprehensive overview.

## **Findings and Discussion:**

### **Policy Fragmentation and Implementation Challenges:**

English language education (ELE) in the Philippines has been shaped by various policies aimed at improving language proficiency and educational outcomes. However, the implementation of these policies has often been fragmented, posing significant challenges to their effectiveness and coherence.

The Bilingual Education Policy (BEP), introduced to balance English and Filipino as mediums of instruction, exemplifies the challenges of policy implementation. Despite its intentions to promote bilingualism, the BEP has faced criticism and encountered difficulties in execution, leading to disparities in academic achievement across different regions of the Philippines (Gonzalez, 1990).

Gonzalez (1990) discusses the impact of the BEP on academic achievement, highlighting how the policy favored Tagalog-speaking regions and students, widening the gap between Manila and non-Manila areas. This uneven implementation raised concerns about equitable access to quality education and the marginalization of non-Tagalog languages.

Similarly, Plata (2010) points out the lack of coherence in ELE policies, noting that despite efforts to implement bilingual education, there was a disconnect between policy intent and practice. The study reveals challenges in aligning curriculum, assessment, and instructional practices with policy directives, leading to inconsistencies in educational outcomes.

Furthermore, the introduction of various policies without proper coordination has led to confusion among educators and stakeholders. Licuanan (2007) criticizes the lack of unity and coherence in language education policies, particularly regarding the use of English as the medium of instruction. This fragmentation has hindered efforts to introduce systemic reforms in ELE.

Addressing policy fragmentation requires a concerted effort to ensure alignment, consistency, and effective implementation across all levels of education. Policies should consider the diverse linguistic landscape of the Philippines and aim for inclusivity and equity in language education.

### **Teacher Capacity and Training Issues:**

Teacher capacity and training play crucial roles in the effectiveness of English language education (ELE) in the Philippines. Several challenges related to teacher competence and training have been identified, impacting the quality of English instruction across the country.

One significant challenge is the exodus of competent teachers seeking better employment opportunities abroad. Bautista (1996) highlights this issue, indicating that many qualified teachers leave the country in pursuit of higher-paying jobs overseas. This brain drain further exacerbates the shortage of skilled English teachers within the Philippine education system.

Inadequate training for teaching English in diverse contexts is another pressing issue. Licuanan (2007) discusses how many teachers lack the necessary training to effectively teach English, especially in multilingual settings.



Teaching English to students with varying linguistic backgrounds requires specialized skills that many teachers may not possess.

Shortages of qualified English teachers contribute to the challenges in ELE. With the demand for English instruction increasing, there is a persistent shortage of teachers who are proficient in English and adequately trained to teach the language (Bautista, 1996). This shortage affects the quality of instruction, particularly in public schools where resources are limited.

The quality of teacher education programs is also under scrutiny. Licuanan (2007) points out concerns regarding the alignment of teacher training programs with the demands of ELE. Many education programs may not adequately prepare teachers to address the complexities of language teaching, leading to gaps in teacher competence.

Furthermore, there is a need to ensure that teacher training programs are aligned with evolving pedagogical approaches and language teaching methodologies. Continuous professional development is essential to equip teachers with the skills needed to adapt to changing educational landscapes (Licuanan, 2007).

Addressing teacher capacity and training issues requires comprehensive strategies. Improving teacher education programs, providing ongoing professional development opportunities, and incentivizing teachers to stay within the country are vital steps toward enhancing the quality of English instruction.

### **Language Competency and Proficiency Decline**

English language competency and proficiency among students in the Philippines have been a subject of concern despite the widespread use of English in the country. Several factors contribute to the observed decline in language skills among Filipino learners.

One contributing factor is the emphasis on literature-based English Language Education (ELE) curricula. Plata (2007) notes that the focus on literature may not effectively develop language skills among students. Literature-based approaches often prioritize literary analysis over language acquisition, which may not address the practical language needs of learners.

Moreover, the lack of focus on language skills development is a significant issue. While literature has its place in language education, the neglect of language skills such as speaking, listening, and writing could hinder students' overall language proficiency (Plata, 2007).

Large class sizes pose another challenge to language instruction. The Department of Education (2012) acknowledges that some public schools in the Philippines face overcrowded classrooms, with class sizes reaching as high as 75 students or more. In such environments, individualized attention and effective language practice become difficult to achieve.

Inadequate learning materials also contribute to the decline in language proficiency. Plata (2007) discusses how shortages of textbooks and other resources result in a lack of practice opportunities for students. The ratio of students to available learning materials can be as high as 1:10, which means many students do not have access to sufficient materials for language learning.

Furthermore, the results of the National Achievement Test (NAT) administered by the Department of Education reflect the continuing deterioration of learning outcomes in basic education in the country (Department of Education, 2012). Scores have consistently fallen below the desired passing rate of 75%, indicating a widespread challenge in language competency.

The decline in language competency and proficiency has implications beyond the classroom. English proficiency is crucial for various sectors, including business process outsourcing (BPO) and overseas employment. Without adequate language skills, Filipino workers may face challenges in accessing job opportunities and contributing effectively to the workforce (Kilag, et al., 2023).

Addressing the decline in language competency requires comprehensive reforms in ELE. There is a need to rebalance curricula to include more focus on language skills development alongside literature-based approaches. Additionally, efforts to reduce class sizes, improve learning materials, and enhance teaching methods are essential.

### **Prospects for Multilingual Education and Global Competence**

In recent years, there has been an increasing recognition of the importance of multilingual education and global competence in the Philippines. Efforts such as the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTBMLE) and initiatives to strengthen English proficiency have been initiated to address these needs. However, challenges persist in reconciling the diverse linguistic landscape of the Philippines with global language demands, highlighting the need for balanced language policies and effective implementation strategies.



The Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTBMLE) program has gained traction as a promising approach to improve education outcomes by utilizing students' native languages as a medium of instruction in the early years of schooling. Bernardo et al. (2009) conducted studies showing that using the mother tongue in the classroom helps students learn better and improves their overall academic performance. MTBMLE not only facilitates learning but also preserves and values indigenous languages, contributing to cultural diversity and identity (Kilag, et al., 2023).

Moreover, initiatives to strengthen English proficiency continue to be crucial in preparing Filipino students for global engagement. English remains a vital language for international communication, trade, and employment opportunities. Gallego and Zubiri (2011) emphasizes the importance of English proficiency in enhancing competitiveness and facilitating connections with the global community.

However, implementing effective multilingual education and strengthening English proficiency face several challenges. One challenge is the linguistic diversity within the Philippines. With over 170 languages spoken across the archipelago, crafting language policies that accommodate this diversity while meeting global language demands is complex (Bernardo et al., 2009).

Another challenge is the need for balanced language policies. While promoting the use of mother tongues in education is important for learning outcomes and cultural preservation, it must be balanced with the need for English proficiency to meet global communication needs and economic demands (Gallego & Zubiri, 2011).

Effective implementation strategies are crucial for the success of multilingual education initiatives. Bernardo et al. (2009) stress the importance of providing adequate training and support for teachers in implementing MTBMLE effectively. Teachers need resources, professional development, and pedagogical support to teach effectively in multilingual settings.

Furthermore, ensuring equitable access to quality education in both urban and rural areas is essential. Gallego and Zubiri (2011) highlights the need for infrastructure development, teacher training programs, and access to learning materials to be prioritized, especially in underserved regions.

Despite these challenges, there are opportunities for multilingual education to foster global competence among Filipino learners (Kilag, et al., 2023). By valuing and incorporating diverse languages and cultures into education, students can develop not only language skills but also intercultural understanding and empathy, essential for global citizenship.

The prospects for multilingual education and global competence in the Philippines are promising but face challenges in implementation. Balancing the promotion of mother tongue languages with the need for English proficiency, providing adequate support for teachers, and ensuring equitable access to education are crucial steps towards addressing these challenges and preparing Filipino learners for success in a globalized world.

### **Conclusion:**

The study examined the landscape of English Language Education (ELE) in the Philippines, focusing on policies, challenges, and prospects. Through a systematic review of literature, key issues have been identified, shedding light on the complexities surrounding ELE in the country.

Policy fragmentation has been a significant challenge in ELE implementation. Despite the introduction of various policies aimed at addressing language education, such as the Bilingual Education Policy (BEP), inconsistencies and disparities in implementation have hindered their effectiveness (Gonzalez, 1990; Plata, 2010).

Teacher capacity and training have also emerged as critical concerns. The exodus of competent teachers, inadequate training programs, and shortages of qualified English teachers have posed obstacles to delivering quality language education (Bautista, 1996; Licuanan, 2007).

Language competency and proficiency among students have been declining, attributed to literature-based curricula and insufficient focus on language skills development (Department of Education, 2012; Plata, 2007). Factors like large class sizes and inadequate learning materials further compound this issue.

Despite these challenges, there are promising prospects for multilingual education and global competence. Initiatives such as Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTBMLE) and efforts to strengthen English proficiency aim to address these needs (Bernardo et al., 2009; Guinigundo, 2013). However, challenges remain in reconciling linguistic diversity with global language demands and ensuring effective policy implementation.



Addressing the challenges in English language education requires coordinated efforts from policymakers, educators, and stakeholders. There is a need for coherent policies, improved teacher training, and curriculum reforms to enhance language proficiency among Filipino learners. Embracing multilingual education can not only improve learning outcomes but also foster global competence essential for success in the 21st-century world.

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