

Level of Teachers' Competency in Addressing Challenges in Teaching Using Mother Tongue-Based-Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE)

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Abstract:

This study aims to identify the challenges faced by public school teachers in teaching using Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE). The participants of this study include all public school teachers currently teaching Grades 1 to 3 during the academic year 2015-2016 in the entire district of Bacong. The primary tool used by the researcher was a survey questionnaire, supplemented by the Likert scale, Pearson r Product-Moment Coefficient of Correlation, and percentage analysis for data collection. The study employed a descriptive method, which allowed the researcher to describe the level of teachers' competency in addressing challenges in teaching using MTB-MLE. Findings revealed that the level of challenges experienced by teachers in teaching using MTB-MLE was categorized as a "moderate problem" with a 2.88% rating. This was mainly due to the difficulty of teaching deeper words in the mother tongue, which made it harder for students to understand. It was also found that the level of teachers' competency in addressing these challenges was "extensive," with a 4.38% rating attributed to the teachers' practice of training students to read materials written in the mother tongue. Overall, the teachers' competency in addressing the challenges of teaching using MTB-MLE was assessed as extensive. Furthermore, there was a very low correlation between teachers' profiles—such as age, grade level taught, and years of teaching experience—and their competency in addressing challenges in teaching using MTB-MLE.

Keywords: *Level; Mother Tongue-Based-Multilingual Education; Challenges; Competency*

Introduction

The choice of language for instruction remains a prevailing challenge in the development of education. According to UNESCO (2010), language has historically given insufficient attention within educational systems. Over the years and decades, educators have gradually focused on this issue. As Malone (2007) posited, the rationale for implementing Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) in schools across South Asia is to facilitate broader learning among elementary students. He emphasized that it should be a policy of the Department of Education to use students' native languages for teaching and learning, particularly at the primary level. Furthermore, he noted that numerous studies have proven that students understand concepts better when instruction is delivered in their familiar language.

The findings of the United Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), cited by Malone in his publication, served as one of the reasons the Department of Education (DepEd) prioritized the MTB-MLE approach. With the current implementation of the K to 12 curriculum, the use of MTB-MLE has been fully integrated, especially in public schools. Its goal is to capture the students' attention during classes and enable them to understand the concepts and skills they need to learn in each subject effectively.

Research shows that using the mother tongue in early education helps students acquire and develop foundational skills (such as literacy) and enhances their comprehension and participation in class discussions. Students are more likely to engage actively when they understand the topics being discussed, both inside and outside the classroom. Their confidence in expressing their thoughts and feelings in specific situations, issues, and topics increases as they are proficient in articulating their ideas in their native language.

According to Dutcher and Tucker (2009), children who learn effectively in their first language can more easily acquire a second or third language compared to those immediately immersed in a second or third language.

Nolasco (2008) further stated that children need at least six years of intensive study of a second or third language before using these as mediums of instruction.

Despite the clear advantages of using MTB-MLE, as emphasized by UNESCO (2010), it remains challenging for bilingual and multilingual states to adopt this approach due to political, linguistic, educational, socio-cultural, and practical circumstances. The experiment conducted in Iloilo by Jose Aguilar (UNESCO, 2010), titled *The Uses of Vernacular Languages in Education*, demonstrated the positive effects of using the mother tongue in teaching. However, the government did not immediately recognize the importance of implementing MTB-MLE.

Every change in the education system significantly impacts both teachers and students. Thus, this study aims to determine the competency level of teachers in addressing challenges in teaching using MTB-MLE. Specifically, it seeks to identify the problems public school teachers face in teaching with the use of the mother tongue.

Literature Review and Related Studies

Instruction Based on the Mother Tongue

The Mother Tongue-Based (MTB) approach is one of the most effective interventions implemented by the Department of Education (DepEd) to improve the quality of education in the Philippines. Through DepEd Order No. 74, Series of 2010, the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) program was introduced. This program utilizes more than two languages for literacy and formal education, starting from preschool. It is grounded in studies from various local initiatives and international research on basic education, which demonstrate the significant benefits of using the learners' mother tongue in improving learning outcomes and advancing inclusive education.

Under this framework, the learners' first language is used as the primary medium of instruction from preschool to the third grade. Teachers, as the key facilitators of learning, must be proficient in all subjects, including Filipino and English. Additionally, the mother tongue is introduced as a subject and as a language of instruction in the first grade to enhance conceptual understanding. Other languages, such as Filipino, English, and additional local and foreign languages, are introduced as separate subjects starting in the second grade.

The mother tongue, typically the child's first language, is the language they first recognize and commonly use. It is also the medium for primary socialization and is further developed during the early stages of childhood. Education in the mother tongue assumes a linguistically homogenous community, where teachers speak the language, and instructional materials are developed in the learners' native language.

Several pilot projects related to MTB-MLE have shown remarkable outcomes. Teachers observed that students demonstrated extraordinary engagement and participation in lessons as they could relate the content to their prior experiences, existing knowledge, and socio-cultural backgrounds.

This alignment of lessons with students' real-life contexts fosters better comprehension and active involvement in classroom discussions, highlighting the effectiveness of the MTB-MLE framework in creating meaningful and impactful learning experiences.

Why do children learn better using the "Mother Tongue"?

From the results of the 2003 study on the "Functional Literacy Education and Mass Media Survey" (FLEMMS), it was revealed that out of 57.59 million Filipinos aged 10 to 64 years old, 5.24 million were unable to read and write. Additionally, 7.83 million could not read, write, or tell stories, and 18.37 million could not read, write, tell stories, or understand. This revelation raises awareness about the significant number of illiterate Filipinos. FLEMMS further noted that this situation occurs due to the language and medium of instruction used in schools.

Why should the first language be used in schools? The "Mother Tongue" is the child's language at home. It is also the language of primary socialization, and it is further developed through experiences with the aid of formal education. According to Silva (2014), it is easier for children to read fluently or effectively and understand what they are reading when the first language is used.

While learners build a strong foundation in their first language (lingua franca - L1), the second language (Filipino and English) is gradually introduced, starting with speaking, followed by writing. Students with sufficient knowledge of the second language (L2) can transfer cognitive skills and lessons learned in the first language (L1) to the second language (L2).

Apart from the structured program of using various languages, MTB-MLE (Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education) encompasses the following: a) the development of cognitively demanding curricula, b) the training of competent teachers in the required language for subject content and teaching approaches, c) the production of error-free and culturally relevant materials, and d) the empowerment of the community (e.g., school-based management).

Students' understanding of the language they use and hear helps them quickly form and express their worldview without fear of making mistakes. This strengthens their ability to voice their opinions and incorporate new concepts into what they already know. On the other hand, it becomes easier for teachers to immediately determine whether students have learned or not and identify which parts of the lesson need additional support (Nolasco, 2001).

MTB-MLE also provides children the opportunity to exercise their right to learn in their language. It promotes literacy while expediting the learning process. Students can do the following: a) understand what the teacher is saying, b) think critically, c) reason effectively, and d) ask relevant questions on sensitive issues (Silva, 2014).

In both developed and developing countries, a significant portion of the school-aged population enters school without speaking the classroom language. In some cases, the use of a colonial language for educational purposes means that

all children begin school in a foreign language. Such children succeed in the classroom once they become proficient in the second language.

The Department of Education's K-12 program is in its initial stages of implementation, and other changes in the educational system have been introduced, including the use of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education as the medium of instruction, aside from the additional years of schooling (Kho, 2012).

According to Walter (2010), "language is an integral part of educational activities in the classroom. Teachers communicate content instruction through language. Students listen and interact using the classroom language, which they may already know or are still learning, to meet specific educational outcomes."

Based on data from the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), for every 100 children who start in Grade 1, only 65 reach Grade 6, 58 make it to high school, but only 43 graduates. Of those, only 23 enroll in college, and from there, only 14 earn a degree (UNESCO, 2009). The results of the study highlight the country's longstanding problem in the education system, the high dropout rate among students. Quijano, in an interview with Kho, stated that students' lack of preparation in Grade 1 affects their learning, forcing them to drop out. The Universal Kindergarten under the K-12 program, overseen by MTB-MLE advocate Thereby, prepares students to learn effectively in school to prevent them from leaving school prematurely.

Most developing countries, including the Philippines, are multilingual, but there is typically only one foreign language used in education, and that is English. English is employed in what is known as "submersion teaching." Here, the focus is on teaching the language and grammar used in instruction rather than on skill development or the students' understanding. This shift in focus places emphasis not on the learners but on the language itself (Benson, 2014).

The Philippine education system is undergoing changes and innovations to improve its structure. Using the "Mother Tongue" as the medium of instruction will be implemented from Kindergarten to Grade 3.

The experience of using English as the official medium of instruction has shown mixed results. If using the Mother Tongue yields positive outcomes, why not try it? Some say that the only constant is "change." Thus, why not strive for change that leads to improvement? If MTB-MLE proves beneficial for education and the learning process of students, it should be adopted and further enhanced.

The use of the Mother Tongue is not yet widely embraced, even though studies have shown its significant impact on shaping young individuals. Research by Nazary (2010) revealed that students are hesitant to use their Mother Tongue in contexts related to English and often refuse it to prioritize proficiency in the second language. This finding indicates that many students still doubt the effectiveness and importance of using the Mother Tongue.

Numerous educational studies worldwide have proven the benefits of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education from an early age (Kavaliauskiene 2009, Kangas 2010; Walter and Dekker, 2010).

Recognizing the importance of MTB-MLE, the Philippine Department of Education issued DepEd Order No. 16, S. 2012, which initiated guidelines for implementing MTB-MLE as part of the K-12 Basic Education Program starting in the 2012-2013 school year. This was released on February 7, 2012, affirming the government's belief in the program's effectiveness. It also aims to realize the goal of "Every child – a reader and a writer" in Grade 1, drawing inspiration from the successful "Lingua Franca Project" (1999-2001) and the ongoing Lubuagan project since 1999.

Gone are the days when children were forbidden from speaking their Mother Tongue in school, based on the belief that it had no value in learning English. Previously, it was thought that speaking English in class helped students master the language and develop learning skills in various subjects. While students may still speak English in the classroom, they are no longer forced to use it exclusively in class discussions. This practice has been abandoned, as it has long been discovered to be ineffective. It was one of the primary reasons many primary students dropped out of school (Monsod, 2009).

Now in its third year of implementation, MTB-MLE has garnered significant attention from the academic community. As part of the academe, administrators play a crucial role in implementing this program for the benefit of the majority of learners.

Methodology:

This part covers the method, research design, respondents, research environment, and research instruments, as well as the ethical considerations in the study.

Study Design

The study employed a descriptive research design. This method was chosen by the researcher as it aimed to describe the level of teachers' skills in addressing the challenges of teaching using the MTB-MLE. It is an appropriate method as the current study focuses on portraying the existing problems encountered by teachers in teaching with MTB-MLE.

The data collected were presented through tables and supplemented with interpretations and validations derived from related studies and literature.

Research Environment

This research was conducted in the public elementary schools of the Bacong District, including Bacong Central, San Miguel, Sac-sac, Isugan, Buntod, Calangag, Tubod, Nazario Tale Memorial, Timabao, and Timbanga. Each school in the area is managed by principals and assistant principals. Most of the teachers covered in the study reside within the barangays of Bacong. The primary livelihoods of the parents of students in these schools include vending, farming, and livestock raising. The Bacong District is located in the southern part of the province of Negros Oriental.

Respondents

This study focuses on the challenges encountered by teachers in teaching using Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE). The respondents of the research are primary teachers from Grades 1 to 3 in Bacong District. The scope of this study is limited to 48 teachers from public schools in the Bacong District, selected through purposive sampling. Purposive sampling will be employed to identify the respondents covered in this study.

Schools	Number of Respondents
Bacong Central School	7
San Miguel Elementary School	12
Sac-sac Elementary School	6
Isugan Elementary School	3
Buntod Elementary School	4
Calangag Elementary School	3
Tubod Elementary School	2
Nazario Tale Memorial Elementary School	7
Timabao Elementary School	2
Timbanga Elementary School	2
Total	48

Research Instrument

The primary tool used by the researcher for data collection was a survey questionnaire. In designing the questionnaire, the researcher reviewed various books and publications related to teachers' proficiency in using the mother tongue under the MTB-MLE program. The selected items were translated into Filipino by the researcher. Additional feedback was sought from other teachers to ensure the appropriateness and accuracy of the questionnaire items, which were then reviewed again.

The researcher consulted with an adviser to refine the questionnaire. The items underwent thorough review and revisions to ensure their relevance and suitability for the study. A pilot survey was conducted among teachers who were not part of the current study to validate the instrument.

To ensure the validity of each item, a pilot test was performed. Using Cronbach's Alpha, the reliability score of all included items was calculated to be 0.931%. This result indicates that the items included in the questionnaire are valid, allowing the researchers to proceed with the survey.

Ethical Considerations

When people are involved as participants in a study, their rights must be safeguarded to ensure that their dignity and privacy are protected while minimizing potential risks (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

The researcher sought permission from the superintendent to distribute the survey questionnaires to the respondents. Furthermore, the questionnaires were designed to ensure anonymity and confidentiality by excluding identifying information. Consultations were conducted to ensure that the research topic was justified, significant, and ethically appropriate to pursue. Throughout the data collection process, the researcher maintained an impartial attitude to avoid any form of bias or judgment.

Results

This chapter presents the data gathered through records and provides their interpretation. Relevant studies and literature were also utilized as supporting evidence.

Table 1: Teacher Profile Based on Age

Age	Frequency	Percent
26-35	17	35.42
36-45	17	35.42
	13	27.08
46-55	1	2.08
56 above		
Total	48	100.00

Table 1 shows the profile of teachers based on age. It can

be observed that most of the teachers are within the age ranges of 26-35 and 36-45 years old. Both age groups account for the same percentage of 35.42% of the total population. This indicates that a significant number of teachers handling Grades 1 to 3 are aged between 26-35 and 36-45 years. Following this are teachers aged 46-55 years, comprising 27.98% of the population, which suggests that many of the respondents are still relatively young.

Table 2 Profile of Teachers Based on Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	0	0.00
Female	48	100.00
Total	48	100.00

Table 2 shows the profile of teachers based on gender. It can be observed that all

participants are female teachers. This implies that female teachers are primarily assigned to teach young children who are still in the foundational stage of learning.

Table 3 Grade Level Taught by the Respondents

Grade Level Taught	Frequency	Percent
1	19	39.58
2	13	27.08
3	16	33.34
Total	48	100.00

Table 3 describes the profile of teachers based on the grade level they

teach. It shows that the majority of the respondent teachers teach Grade 1, accounting for 39.58%. This is followed by those teaching Grade 3, with 33.34%, and lastly, teachers handling Grade 2, with 27.08%. This indicates that a greater number of respondent teachers are assigned to teach Grade 1.

Table 4 Years of Teaching Experience

Years of Teaching Experience	Frequency	Percent
1-5	12	25.00
6-10	15	31.25
11-15	10	20.83
16-20	4	8.33

21 up	7	14.59
Total	48	100.00

Table 4 shows the number of years teachers have spent teaching. Notably, 15 teachers, or 31.25%, are relatively new to teaching. Meanwhile, only 7 teachers, or 14.59%, have been teaching for 21 years or more. Based on the results, a small percentage of teachers have extensive experience in teaching MTB-MLE.

Table 5 Level of Challenges Experienced by Teachers in Teaching Using MTB-MLE in Terms of Teacher's Skills in Using the First Language

Statement	Weighted Mean μ	Verbal Description	Extent of Barrier
1. The words in the first language are too deep, making it even more difficult to teach to the students.	2.88	Not much of a Problem	<i>Moderate</i>
2. There is an insufficient amount of training, seminars, and workshops related to effective teaching of the first language (mother tongue).	2.58	A moderate Problem	<i>Low</i>
3. The teachers' skills in using teaching strategies for the first language (mother tongue) are not very extensive.	2.44	Not much of a Problem	<i>Low</i>
4. The teachers' experience in teaching the first language (Mother Tongue) is not very extensive.	2.29	Not much of a Problem	<i>Low</i>
5. Not very accustomed to using the first language, making it more difficult to translate the lessons into the first language.	2.27	Not much of a Problem	<i>Low</i>
Composite	2.49	Not much a Problem	<i>Low</i>

Table 5 presents the level of challenges experienced by teachers in teaching using MTB-MLE based on their skills in using the language. It can be observed that a "moderate problem" among teachers is "The words in the first language (mother tongue) are too deep, making it even more difficult to teach to the students." Overall, the challenges related to teachers' skills in using the first language are considered "not much of a problem" by the respondent teachers.

Table 6 Level of Challenges Experienced by Teachers in Teaching Using MTB-MLE Based on Students' Skills in Using the First Language

Statement	Weighted Mean μ	Verbal Description	Extent of Barrier
1. Students find it more difficult to understand words in native languages because most of them are very deep or complex (Cebuano).	3.29	Not much a Problem	<i>Moderate</i>
2. Lack of vocabulary in the first language (mother tongue)	3.25	Not much a Problem	<i>Moderate</i>
3. Students find it difficult to count using their first language (mother tongue).	3.10	Not much a Problem	<i>Moderate</i>
4. Struggle to understand the full content of a sentence written in the first language (mother tongue).	2.17	Not much a Problem	<i>Moderate</i>
5. Most students often struggle to speak fluently using their first language (mother tongue).	1.96	Not much a Problem	<i>Moderate</i>
Composite	2.75		<i>Moderate</i>

Not much a
Problem

Table 6 describes the level of teachers' perceived barriers to teaching using MTB-MLE on students' first language skills. It can be seen that statements 1-3, are "moderate problems" for teachers while statements 4 and 5 are "less problems" for teachers.

Table 7

Teachers' Level of Experience Barriers to Teaching Using the MTB-MLE Baseline Tool

Statements	Weighted Mean μ	Verbal Description	Extent of Barrier
1. There is not enough dictionary base available for deep words in the first language (mother tongue)	23.65	Serious problem	High
2. Lack of basic books written in the first language (mother tongue)	3.23	Not much a Problem	Moderate
3. There are not enough instructional materials (instructional materials) written in the first language (mother tongue)	2.85	Not much a Problem	Moderate
4. Students do not have enough guide (learners guide)	2.81	Not much a Problem	Moderate
5. MTB-MLE teachers do not have enough teaching guide (teacher's guide).	2.65	Not much a Problem	Moderate
Composite	3.04	Not much a problem	Moderate

Table 7 describes the degree to which teachers experience barriers to teaching with the MTB-MLE based on the equipment. It can be seen that statement 1 or not having enough base dictionary available for deep words in the first language (mother tongue) has the highest Weighted μ . It has a score of 3.65 which means "It's a serious problem" for teachers. Meanwhile, 2-5 related to the lack of basic books written in the first language (mother tongue), There are not enough instructional materials (instructional material) written in the first language (mother tongue), the students do not have enough guidance (learners guide) and the inadequate teaching guide (teacher's guide) teachers in teaching MTB-MLE are "moderate problems" of teachers.

Overall, the degree to which teachers experience barriers to teaching using the equipment-based MTB-MLE is a moderate problem for teachers.

Table 8 Level of Teachers' Skills in Addressing the Challenges Mentioned in Teaching Using MTB-MLE

Statement	Weighted Mean μ	Verbal Description	Scope of skills
1. I trained my students to read books written in the first language	4.38	Always done	Very extensive
2. I create teaching materials written in the Cebuano language	4.02	Regularly done	Extensive
3. I participate in all MTB-MLE-related seminars and workshops	3.83	Regularly done	Extensive
4. I participated in trainings related to the correct use of MTB-MLE teaching strategies	3.60	Regularly done	Extensive
5. I read books and various reading materials written in the first language (Cebuano) to enhance my knowledge in using the first language.	3.54	Regularly done	Extensive
6. I photocopied basic books written in the first language (Cebuano) so that my students would have something to use.	3.44	Regularly done	Extensive
7. I encourage all of my students to listen to radio programs where the first language (Cebuano) is used, such as the "educational program" DYWC 801 AM, a DepEd program about MTB-MLE.	3.19	Sometimes done	Moderate
	2.98	Regularly done	Moderate
	3.62	Regularly done	Extensive

8. I participate in workshops related to creating "story books" where the medium of communication used is the first language (mother tongue).
Composite

Table 8 shows the levels of teachers' skills in addressing the challenges mentioned in teaching using MTB-MLE. It can be observed that the level of skill in addressing the challenges in teaching using MTB-MLE 1 is very extensive. This has the highest Weighted μ of 4.38, with the statement "I train my students to read materials written in the first language" being highlighted. For teachers, the level of skill in addressing challenges in MTB-MLE is considered very extensive. Overall, the levels of teachers' skills in addressing the challenges in teaching using MTB-MLE, as shown in Table 8, indicate that they have a broad skill set in responding to the challenges of the MTB-MLE program.

Table 9

Relationship Between Teachers' Profile and Their Level of Skills in Addressing Teaching Barriers Using the MTB-MLE

Variables Related to the Level of Their Skills in Addressing the Challenges in Teaching Using MTB-MLE	Computed r	Extent of Relevance
Age	0.0720	Very low
Grade Level Taught	0.0728	Very low
Years In teaching	0.0822	Very low

The data in Table 9 show a "very low" relationship between teachers' profile and their level of skill in addressing teaching barriers using the MTB-MLE. It is shown that there is a very low level of correlation between teachers' profiles such as age, grade taught number of years spent teaching, and their level of skill in addressing teaching barriers using MTB.

This means that the teacher's age and length of time in teaching are not related to their response to the barriers they encounter in MTB. Whether they are young or old, whether they are new to teaching or have been teaching for a long time, their response level is the same.

Discussion:

From the results, it means that more of the respondent teachers are younger and have not been teaching for a long time. It will also be seen that the female teachers teach the children who are still in the foundation of learning. From grade 1-3 grade one more teacher will teach grade 1. It has been proven that the number of people entering the teaching field is getting younger and younger and it will increase even more due to the newly implemented curriculum. Overall, the obstacles related to the teacher's skills in using the first language were "not much of a problem" for the teacher respondents. The degree to which teachers experience obstacles in teaching using MTB-MLE in students' first language skills is in the medium range. Overall, the degree to which teachers experience barriers to teaching using the equipment-based MTB-MLE is a moderate problem for teachers. Overall, teachers' skill levels in addressing barriers to instruction using MTB-MLE ranged widely in their skill in addressing barriers to the MTB-MLE program. This means that the teacher's age and length of time in teaching are not related to their response to the obstacles they encounter in MTB. Whether they are young or old, whether they are new to teaching or have been teaching for a long time, their response level is the same.

Conclusion:

Based on the results, most of the teacher respondents are between the ages of 26-45 years old. All of the respondents are female. The majority of them teach in the first grade, and most have spent 6-10 years teaching. The lack of a dictionary to aid in translating Sinugbuanong Binisaya is considered a "serious problem" by the teachers. The deep words in Sinugbuanong Binisaya pose a "moderate problem" for the respondents, and students struggle to understand these deep words. Overall, all categories of challenges in using the first language (MTB) in teaching from grades one to three are considered "moderate problems" by the teachers. The level of teachers' skills in addressing the challenges in teaching using MTB-MLE is "extensive." Overall, the extent of the challenges experienced by the teachers in teaching using MTB-MLE is "moderate," while the teachers' level of skill in responding to these challenges is "extensive." Moreover, the correlation between the teachers' profile and their level of skills in addressing the challenges in teaching using MTB-MLE is considered "very low."

Recommendations:

Based on the findings of these studies, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Teachers who are assigned to teach MTB-MLE should be experts in the mother tongue and must attend all seminars and workshops related to effective teaching and the use of MTB-MLE.
2. It would be beneficial for the Bacong district to allocate funds for purchasing teaching materials for teachers teaching from grades one to three, as outlined/written in Sinugbuanong Binisaya, such as 2.1 Dictionary 2.2 Big Books 2.3 Learner's Guide 2.4 Teacher's Guide
3. It would be best to conduct intensive training and workshops throughout the Bacong district related to the following: a. Adapting basic books for MTB-MLE; b. Designing basic books for grades one to three across all subjects, by the Cebuano customs of Negros Oriental.

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