Teachers' Attitudes on the Efficacy of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education Curriculum

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Abstract

Despite appearing to be a well-established topic of research, language of instruction policy has continued to be the locus of attention for language teachers and linguists. In the Philippines, Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) Curriculum was recently adopted by their educational system. Thus, this paper examines the teachers' attitudes on the efficacy of the implementation of MTB-MLE and their implications to local and national community. This study follows a qualitative research design and is carried out using a phenomenological approach. The participants were 15 teachers from two different locales – Apalit-Pulilan and Apalit-Baliwag borders. Data were gathered through interviews and observations and were analyzed using a thematic content analysis. The researchers found out 4 main attitudes of teachers (extent of involvement, consistent use of mother tongue/degree of application of mother tongue, actions taken in improving one's mother tongue, and teachers' role) and 4 main difficulties in the implementation (mother tongue differences of learners, difficulty in translation, inadequacy of instructional materials, and similar treatment for Mother Tongue subject and Filipino subject). These findings imply that they were just forms of adjustments made by the teachers which mainly root from what the language policy is giving. With this, recommendations were discussed in the end.

Key Words: Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE), Attitudes of Teachers, Efficacy, Difficulties in Implementation, Language Policy

Introduction

The language of instruction policy has been a never-ending issue of debate in the field of education. The Philippines, a country which is not only rich in resources but also in languages – having 187 languages in total as specified by Ethnologue, is one of the big partakers of this issue. Having shifted from the separate use of English and Filipino as the mediaum of instruction in specific subject areas in the Department Order No. 25 of 1974 and in the revised Bilingual Education Policy of 1987 or the Department Order No. 52 of 1987 to whichever first language of the learners as the medium of instruction in Grades 1, 2, and 3 under the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) Curriculum of 2009 or the Department Order No. 74 series of 2009, it can be drawn out that there is a struggle on which language will either facilitate or impede learning. Many studies have been conducted on both aforementioned education policies, but since MTB-MLE Curriculum is in its early and formative years in the country, it

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will be the focus of this paper. In particular, this paper will examine teachers' attitudes on the efficacy of MTB-MLE Curriculum.

As many studies point out the effects or outcomes of MTB-MLE on learners, based on the perceptions of teachers-- i.e. it provides a better learning experience among learners (Singh, 2017; Wa-Mbaleka, 2014); it promotes active involvement of learners in classroom lesson (Bachore, 2014; Cabansag 2016; Richardson, 2001; Singh, 2017; Villalba, 2013); it helps learners build more self-confidence (Cabansag & Medilo, 2016); and it also helps to promote cultural heritage (Singh, 2017), it is still considerable for this study to succeed by generating new knowledge.

While most of the studies only highlight the beliefs or the mere perceptions of teachers on the effectiveness of MTB-MLE curriculum through learners' learning and behavioral outcomes, this study will focus on teachers' attitudes which are more of a way of doing and are a great factor in student learning. With that, this research intends to contribute important findings to narrow the gap in the problematic scenario of Philippine educational system in terms of national language policy.

Research Questions

This study attempts to examine teachers' attitudes on the efficacy of MTB-MLE curriculum by analyzing the responses of the participants to the following research questions:

1. What are the teachers' attitudes on the implementation of MTB-MLE curriculum?
2. What difficulties arise during the implementation of the MTB-MLE curriculum?
3. What are the implications of teachers' attitudes on the on-going implementation of MTB-MLE curriculum?

Methodology

Research Design

Qualitative research design was utilized in this study because it focuses on the experiences or way of doings which are related to professional practices of teachers under the Mother Tongue Based-Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) curriculum. According to Qualitative Research Consultants Association, this design is used to gain a deep understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations. It is a method designed to reveal a target audiences' range of behavior and perceptions that drive it with reference to specific topics or issues. It lets the meaning emerge from the participants.

The current research also used a phenomenological approach because it focuses on the examination of an event, activity, or a phenomenon in a particular place (Sauro, 2015). A combination of methods was used such as conducting of interviews (written and oral), visitations, and observations. It is also a descriptive research, since it aims to collect descriptive data and provide insights based on participants' experiences and perspectives.

Participants

This study is limited to 15 teacher-participants under MTB-MLE curriculum who came from two different locales – Apalit-Pulilan and Apalit-Baliwag borders. Specifically, the participants came from 4 different

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schools – Balucuc Elementary School and Sta. Peregrina Elementary School from the first locale and Galang Elementary Memorial School and Calantipay Elementary School from the second locale. These schools fall under a prevalent phenomenon. Due to their geographical location, teachers enter classes faced with students whose mother tongues are different (i.e., Kapampangan and Tagalog).

Instruments

In gathering data, an oral and a written interview were conducted. The oral interview took place after the participants answered the written interview or the questionnaire. It was done in order to seek additional information and for further clarification or verification of their claims. The questions asked aimed to assess the existing attitudes of the teachers in the MTB-MLE program and their implications to local and national community to formulate insights in describing the efficacy of the MTB-MLE curriculum. Also, observation notes gathered from the visitations were used.

Data Collection

For the data collection, the researchers visited the schools for 2 days in order to conduct interviews and observe classroom instructions. Through these, the Researchers have a double-edge basis which can support stronger arguments and evidence. The Researchers can validate if the participants' claims are in consonance with what really takes place in the MTB-MLE classroom.

Data Analysis

Analysis took place after the data collection period. The collected information was reviewed, synthesized, and documented in order to keep careful notes. Since the research instruments suit to provide thematic information, transcripts were coded using *thematic content analysis* as the main technique. Responses were analyzed following an incident-to-incident coding strategy, instead of a word-for-word or line-by-line coding strategy, in order to generate main themes, sub-themes, and categories, which is necessary to extract meaning and make sense of the participants' utterances.

Results and Discussions

After analysis of the collected information, 4 significant themes emerged on the attitudes of teachers on the implementation of MTB-MLE and 4 significant themes on the difficulties that arise during the implementation of MTB-MLE.

Teachers' Attitudes on the Implementation of MTB-MLE

Table 1 Distribution of Faculty Profile

Particulars	Number	Percentage
1. Extent of Involvement [a]		
1.1 0-2 years	5	33.33%
1.2 3-5 years	5	33.33%
1.3 6-9 years	5	33.33%

(*Continued*)

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Table 1 Distribution of Faculty Profile—cont'd		
Particulars	**Number**	**Percentage**
2. Consistent Use of Mother Tongue/Degree of Application of Mother Tongue		
2.1 Yes, because it is easier for learners to understand.	8	53.33%
2.2 Yes, because it is required.	5	33.33%
2.3 No, because English is more appropriate and applicable to use in a subject and learners learn it well.	2	13.33%
3. Actions Taken in Improving One's Proficiency in Mother Tongue [b]		
3.1 Attending seminars	8	53.33%
3.2 Adopting different methodologies and strategies	5	33.33%
3.3 Reading books	5	33.33%
3.4 Daily use of mother tongue	4	26.67%
3.5 Asking guidance or advice from superiors	1	6.67%
4. Role of the Teacher		
4.1 Controller	7	46.67%
4.2 Facilitator	8	53.33%

Note:
[a] The number of years are rounded off to the nearest figure.
[b] Some of the respondents participated in more than one action.

Extent of Involvement

At first glance, extent of involvement does not actually appear to be an attitude. The Researchers opted to include this due to the reason that they believe that teachers' actions, practices, and attitudes will be greatly biased and influenced by the number of years they are involved in the program. In order to create a more detailed analysis and to see if there are significant differences of experiences and perspectives among teachers with varying extent of involvement in the MTB-MLE, the Researchers opted to categorize them into three.

Category 1: (0-2 years)

Participants from this category stated that they deliver the lessons effectively. They believe that their short extent of involvement in the MTB-MLE curriculum does not automatically constitute to them being not fully effective teachers. They believe that no matter how new or not they are in the MTB-MLE curriculum, as long as they use the mother tongue that the learners use as well, they will be effective in achieving the goals and objectives of the MTB-MLE.

Category 2: (3-5 years)

In this category, participants pointed out that they deliver the lesson better and help learners be more motivated and engaged in the teaching-learning process. They believe that they have the ability to enrich the vocabulary of the learners more by making them easily acquire the competencies being taught.

Category 3: (6-9 years)

Participants from this category mentioned that since they have been long exposed with the curriculum, they have acquired more experiences in delivering lessons. They learned different methods, strategies, and techniques which in turn lead to learners' easy understanding of concepts and mastery of required

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competencies. But despite this strength, one weakness was commonly raised by them as well. There is a dominant existence of difficulty in translation especially in language classes such as English and Filipino.

Consistent Use of Mother Tongue/Degree of Application of Mother Tongue

MTB-MLE, like any other national policy, clearly demands attention, support, and compliance. Cabansag (2016) pointed out that compliance to this program in the educational sector means attainment of its goals and objectives. Reflecting, from the participants' responses, it can be concluded that they support this claim. When the teacher-participants were asked if they consistently use mother tongue as the medium of instruction (MOI), most of them answered affirmatively.

Although most of the participants answered *yes*, as shown in Table- 1, their reasons still vary. Eight participants or 53.33% of them use mother tongue as the MOI *because learners understand it easier*. To support, Cabansag (2016) stresses that MTB-MLE instruction benefits the learners by having better retention of the lessons. Another one is that 5 participants or 33.33% of them use mother tongue as the MOI *because it is required*. With this, it is understandable that participants adhere to the program in order to achieve its goals and objectives. On the other hand, even if it is lesser than the first one, it is alarming. This creates an implication that stakeholders in the grassroots sectors, most especially the teachers, act as "soldiers of the system" who carry out the orders given to them (Shohamy, 2006, as cited by Burton, 2013). When it comes to the remaining 2 participants or the 33.33% who answered *no,* they do not actually mean to not support the national policy totally despite its little consideration to the perspectives at the ground level (Burton, 2013). It is just that they are only acting toward the problems they encounter in the MTB-MLE – that they only shift to English which is more appropriate and applicable if the mother tongue cannot accommodate the presented concepts or ideas in a subject.

Actions Taken in Improving One's Proficiency in Mother Tongue

Matic (2012) cited in her study that teachers' ability in mother tongue is one of the most important factors for making teaching and learning mother tongue effective. Also, Nolasco (2008) stated that in Multilingual Education, there is a need for a pool of adequately trained teachers in the required languages. In this sense, it is not only the duty of the top-level management to ensure the qualifications of teachers but it is also the responsibility of the teachers to improve and develop their skills in teaching and most importantly their proficiency in using the mother tongue.

As shown in the Table- 1, 53.33% or more than half of the participants engage themselves in attending seminars. They believe that seminars, workshops, and trainings offered by the government and schools are necessarily helpful to them. This supports what Boudersa (2016) pointed out in her study, that professional development programs like seminars and workshops help teachers improve their teaching skills and deepen their knowledge of the subject matter they teach.

When it comes to adopting different methodologies and strategies in teaching, 33.33% of them believe that it gives them the opportunity to be flexible, creative, and innovative in executing lessons. This gives strength to what Thamarana (2015) noted in his study, "With an adept use of suitable strategies in language instruction, a teacher can accomplish his goal in content presentation through using traditional as well as modern technological strategies for best teaching objectives" (p. 5).

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33.33%, participants engage themselves in reading books because they believe that it allows them to gain more knowledge and skills that they can apply to lessons. According to Society of Chief Librarians (Wales) (2011), reading overwhelmingly impacts on literacy levels of a person and that literacy profoundly impacts on skills of a person.

Moreover, though the most effective way to learn a language or to become more fluent in using it, is to treat it as a way of living, only 26.67% or 4 of the participants responded that they use mother tongue in daily life in order to teach more effectively in the MTB-MLE. As what Morehouse (2017) concluded in his article *5 Key Benefits of Daily Language Learning*, everyday language learning allows people to maintain and grow their language skills indefinitely.

Lastly, only 6.67% of the participants responded that seeking for guidance or pieces of advice from superiors who are far more experienced, is one way of improving one's proficiency in mother tongue. Brooks, Gino, & Schweitzer (2015) in their study remarked that seeking advice can bring substantial benefits – it boosts perceptions of competence of the advice seeker and it makes the advisor feel affirmed.

Teachers' Role

In every classroom, the role of a teacher that must be employed, largely depends on different factors – lesson, activity, type of students, classroom environment, school philosophy/policy, and even teachers' freedom. In line with these, since MTB-MLE is faced with pressing issues as regards with its implementation, arguments about teachers' roles have also been part of it. Paulson (2010) pointed out that incorporating mother tongue changes the way of teaching and learning takes place and creates major role shift from authoritative figure to facilitator of learning. As with the results of the teachers' responses about their role in MTB-MLE classroom, it supports Paulson's claim, though with a marginal advantage.

The 7 authoritative figures or the controllers believe that in a MTB-MLE classroom, they are the fountain of knowledge. They believe that they are more competent in using the language and that they have a wider range of knowledge, so learners will be able to learn more from them. On the other hand, there are 8 participants who believe they are facilitators of learning in MTB-MLE classroom. With their role, they believe that learners actively engage themselves in learning since they easily understand and freely express themselves and it provides a friendly environment within the classroom (Bachore, 2014; Cabansag 2016; Richardson, 2001; Singh, 2017; Villalba, 2013; Wa-Mbaleka, 2014).

Difficulties in the Implementation of MTB-MLE

Table 2 Distribution of Faculty Profile

Particulars	Number	Percentage
1. Mother Tongue Differences of Learners	6	40.00%
2. Difficulty in Translation	6	40.00%
3. Inadequacy of Instructional Materials	3	20.00%
4. Similar Treatment for Mother Tongue Subject and Filipino Subject	2	13.33%

Note: Some of the participants responded to have experienced more than one difficulty.

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Mother Tongue Differences of Learners

Due to the schools' geographical location, one of the most serious problems that the participants face is the variety of mother tongues spoken by learners in one classroom. This puts great burden on their part. As shown in Table- 2, 40% of them reported that they experience this phenomenon. They need to deliver the lesson or at least part of the lessons in Kapampangan and Tagalog to address the needs of their learners. Also, delivering lessons using two languages means that they need to be proficient enough of the two languages to effectively execute the lesson and make sure to be understood by the learners. Even if let's say that the teachers can master the use of two different mother tongues and can deliver the lessons using the two different languages, still issues arise. Difficulty of pupils in learning will still prevail. Confusion may arise due to the simultaneous shift of the teacher from one language to another. Another one is that there will be lesser time for the learners to learn since language shifting of the teacher in discussing the lessons takes time.

Difficulty in Translation

Translating lesson content in the local languages to another language is a big challenge to teachers. Also, it is one of the biggest issues concerning MTB-MLE instruction. Here, 40% of the participants pointed out that there are really words which learners hardly understand so they stick or switch to its English equivalent, sometimes in order for the learners to understand. Aside from that, difficulty in translation does not only apply for teachers delivering the lesson, it applies to learners in using the language. Many studies have claimed the benefits of using mother tongue as LOI in the early years of children (Burton 2013; Gacheche, 2010; Llaneta, 2010; Supnad, 2014, and Wa-Mbaleka, 2015), but further exposure on mother tongue can cause reliance to it making the learners have difficulty in understanding and learning English, which is a lingua franca in the country and a core subject in the Philippine curriculum, thus, leading to difficulty in translation as well.

Inadequacy of Instructional Materials

Another issue raised by the participants is the inadequacy of instructional materials. Three or 20% of them have pointed out that it affected the delivery of instruction and the learning of the pupils. Matic (2012) stated that these results were alarming. In multilingual education, the materials that are of interests to the children are very important in facilitating and understanding of the lesson and it is by the help of teaching materials the children learn by doing. But despite this negative issue, the participants tend to build a positive attitude over it. Instead to stick with what the government has provided, they opted to do their own research, ask a more knowledgeable other, and look for different strategies and techniques.

Similar Treatment for Mother Tongue Subject and Filipino Subject

One feature of MTB-MLE curriculum is the occurrence of the separate Mother Tongue and Filipino subjects at the same time. Though it looks like the same, there is actually a dividing line between the two, in which the former focuses on reading while the latter focuses on language. Here, participants pointed out that repetition and redundancy of objectives arises – that most features of Mother Tongue can be also found in the Filipino

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subject. This implies that since objectives appear to be similar, teachers tend to prepare one lesson for the two different subjects or two semi-identical lessons or activities. They do not bother much since the language used in the two subjects are very much the same. As an effect, learners will also tend to not see the difference between the two subjects.

Implications

The attitudes of teachers in the implementation of MTB-MLE curriculum, in all of its form and sense, clearly manifest a recurrent pattern. The teachers' attitudes root from what the MTB-MLE policy gives. The efforts done by the teachers, in one way or another, are only forms of adjustments aimed to satisfy this national language policy. This implies that there are existing problems or lacking aspects in its implementation. If these phenomena keep on happening, the Researchers believe that it will be hard for our education system to improve. It is for this reason that our government or the top-level implementers will continue these kinds of doings – *treating the teachers, ultimately, and other grassroots sectors as only devoted followers of the directives above.* This situation proves the real nature of a top-down implementation. If not critically addressed, this *cycle*, as it has begun, will continue to prevail in local communities and will have a further and greater national impact in the long run.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The purpose of this research is to contribute important findings to narrow the gap in the problematic scenario of the Philippine education system in terms of national language policy.

Although the participants justified their acceptance and provided honest statements in support for the national language policy, they also expressed uncertainty on the total efficacy of the program for the learners. Their deviating actions in the classrooms prove that the policy does not promise consistent and compact benefits and advantages on the part of stakeholders, especially teachers and learners. This, points again to the very apparent nature of the policy – that just because it was issued through the directives above, does not mean there would be an assurance for its successful implementation. In this sense, it then creates a challenge among the top players here to grasp the actual scenario at the ground level from where the implementation is being executed – that since insufficiencies and imprecisions were notably evident, it may be time to end the accustomed image of compliance of teachers through consultations or by fully involving them in the planning process and by recognizing their concrete experiences in the field.

By adopting this bottom-up approach in implementation, it can create avenues for positive outcomes, like :

(1) Teachers will no longer need to abandon their belief systems since the huge part of the perspectives of the implementation will be anchored to them,

(2) Unaddressed special issues like the prevalent phenomena in schools near provincial or regional borders would likely to be given more attention; and

(3) Iinstead of being viewed as a highly imposing entity, it can contribute to a better image of the government in education welfare by trusting the grassroot agents (that is, teachers) of education in curriculum planning and language policy implementation.

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