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## CHALLENGES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MOTHER TONGUE-BASED MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION PROGRAM: A CASE STUDY

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### ABSTRACT

The Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTBMLE) Program has found a solid basis to claim that it is the most viable and fastest route towards the acquisition of basic concepts in the primary years. However, its manner of implementation has created challenges that affect the way children are learning skills and content. This single, holistic case study found difficulty in understanding concepts, pronouncing and using archaic terms, code switching, performing low in competitions carried out in English, and widening gap between parents and children in scaffolding process as the major challenges encountered by primary students, teachers and parents in MTBMLE. We uncovered the key factors to be the use of archaic words as substitutes for scientific terms, mix-up of terms from three languages, teaching mother tongue as a separate subject, mismatch between trainings and expected outcomes, divergence of mother tongue at home from school, and lack of relevant materials. Finally, parents and children still prefer English to mother tongue while teachers reluctantly choose mother tongue with a compromise- that it will only be used to facilitate learning and not considered as a new language to be taught and learned.

Keywords: Challenges, Implementation, Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education, Case study

### 1. Introduction

Despite the continuous prevalence of monolingualism as a global norm in official or dominant languages (Wolff & Ekkehard, 2000; Arnold, Bartlett, Gowani, & Merali, 2006), UNESCO (1953) has remained firm in its advocacy to promote the use of the mother tongue-based instruction in the primary years which led to the birth of the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education Policy (MTB MLE) (Rumenapp, 2014). This movement

stemmed from a growing body of empirical research and theory on language acquisition and multilingualism attesting to the powerful effect of using the mother tongue ( $L_1$ ) in bringing out the potentials of children in the learning process (UNESCO, 2007).

Studies reveal that the use of mother tongue enables children to enroll and succeed in school (Kosonen, 2005), attain a higher level of comprehension (McEachern, 2010; Decker and

Dumatog, 2003) and acquire basic literacy skills and concepts rapidly (Espada, 2012, UNESCO, 2008); thus, establishing a solid foundation for learning the higher concepts (Decker and Young, 2005). It empowers parents and teachers to forge a strong link in planning for children's learning experiences (Benson, 2002) and provides opportunities for the disadvantaged groups like the developmentally challenged and children coming from the rural and indigenous communities (Hovens, 2002). It is likewise helpful to girls who are less exposed to an official language but who have been found to be more resilient, achieving higher and enjoying promotion to the next grade level (UNESCO, Bangkok, 2005). Furthermore, it allows learners to interact with teachers, peers and family members in their most familiar language (Abdullah, 2015). The mother tongue, which is often dubbed as a 'neglected resource' in the classroom by Atkinson (1987) actually places learners in a nonlinear environment where they can determine their own learning path (Robberecht, 2007). In other words, this natural usage of the language can develop creativity and innovativeness due to the uninterrupted, free flow of ideas generated by the power of self-expression (Nunan and Bailey, 2009).

### *1.1 Challenges in MTB MLE*

In contrast with the foregoing premise, global findings of contemporary research (Gacheche, 2010; Burton, 2013; Walter, 2011 ;Dea, Basha, and Abera, 2014) are demonstrating that despite over 50 years of initiatives from UNESCO (e.g., UNESCO 1953), mother tongue-based bi/ multilingual and indigenous language education programs remain challenged by a number of variables. Studies report a lack of educational resources (Burton, 2013; Ball, 2010; Seyoum, 2009) and competent teachers, translation of academic language (Burton, 2013); a multilingual environment, lack of incentives for teachers (Burton, 2013; Ball, 2010), lack of lexical capacity to express authenticities of science and technology, inadequacy of vocabulary and writing system (Gacheche, 2010; Dea, Basha and Abra , 2014), new terminology for modern discourse and few speakers of the language, low status of the minority language which points to the unwritten L<sub>1</sub> (Ball, 2010) or what Gacheche (2010) would

describe as the local languages' limited geographical significance and the last being the participants' self-denial or a feeling of shame when using the mother tongue and lack of political commitment (Seyoum, 2009).

Without disregard for the previous indicators, Ball (2010) believes that the greatest factor that could weaken the MTB MLE policy is the pressure from parents who want their children taught in international languages for economic gains. With the increased status of English as a ticket for global prosperity in trade, many parents would want their children to study English early (Burton, 2013; Gallego&Zubiri, 2011). Conversely, there is little evidence to show that early foreign language learning promises a long-term advantage as reflected in the large-scale studies of Burstall (1975) in Britain.

For decades, many scholars have debated how language policies should be implemented and which language should be used for instruction. For instance, Stern (1983:9) suggests that when considering the language of instruction, it is essential to examine the objective and subjective characteristics of the language. He defines objectivity as being standardized, written, codified, elaborated and organized into a system or code to eradicate variations and apply more functions. Subjectivity of the language is associated with being teachable and rich in resources and taught in a natural, informal, non-threatening language environment. Stern (1983) then proposes that L<sub>1</sub>s can be developed following those standards. However, Tollefson (1991) contradicts Stern's argument saying it would be best to "leave the languages alone," and just 'allow them to play their part in a diversified, multilingual environment' (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2013).

The analogy used in explaining this context is the state of global biodiversity which diminishes as a result of eliminating the other species in order to preserve the 'chosen ones' (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2013). This suggests that focusing on one language would exterminate the rest of the languages (Phillipson, 2008, 2009a, 2009b). From a different angle, Wa-Mbaleka (2014) proposes that, without removing the mother tongues from the classroom,

the Filipinos can use English as the official language of instruction due to its collective global implications added to the fact that currently it is the only intellectualized language in the Philippines (Wa-Mbaleka, 2014). Nonetheless, Davis (2008) disagrees by echoing India's most renowned environmentalist, Vandana Shiva who uttered, "In any crisis, uniformity is the worst way to respond; diversity is resilience," which means we should allow our languages to flourish in the classroom regardless of their identities.

### *1.2 How MTB MLE is viewed and implemented*

In assessing the outcome of a language policy it is important to examine 1) how it is viewed by the stakeholders and 2) how it is delivered by layers of implementers. To illustrate, Ruiz (1988) presents three lenses of language orientations. First, if language is viewed 'as a problem' societal-multilingualism can be taken as an obstacle, such as how Filipinos favor English over the mother tongue (Sibayan, 1999). Second, if language is viewed 'as a right,' learning one's language, whether it is minority or standard, is regarded as a human right. (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000; 2002). In this context, indigenous language teaching becomes a 'crime against humanity' because focusing on one language would lead to the extinction of the other cultural, indigenous languages (Krauss, 1992, 1998; UNESCO, 2008e; Nunan, 2003; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000; Crystal, 2000; Dixon, 1997). Third, when language is taken 'as a resource,' language proficiency in any language (bilingual /multilingual) regardless of number is highly valued.

In the course of implementing the policy, it is highly observable that Stern's (1983) proposition to repair a language to make it look 'suitable' illustrates Tollefson's (1991) claim that languages do not develop naturally but are 'formed and manipulated within specific parameters to suit the interests of different classes of people (Seyoum, 2009). This context is often viewed from the lenses of the ruling class (Alexander, 2005; Spolsky, 2004; Wa-Mbaleka, 2014). Since a language policy (LP) points to language practices, beliefs and management decisions of a community or a political entity (Spolsky, 2004) it therefore defines which languages obtain status and priority by being

labelled as 'standard', official', 'local', 'indigenous' or 'national'(Gacheche, 2010). This bestows LP the power to 'legitimize marginalized languages' and subsequently manipulate or impose language content and behavior (Shohamy, 2006; Tupas, 2015; Dawe, 2014). However, we cannot deny existing violations of three criteria used when negotiating which languages can be adopted for mother tongue education. Some mother tongues studied by children 1) have very small ratio of users, 2) very low intelligibility and 3) have no written systems (Greenwood, 2017). Greenwood adds that the mismatch between the expected and actual LP outcomes bring about conflicts and chaos.

Borrowing the analogy of an onion (Ricento&Hornberger, 1996), the MTB MLE policy moves down to its layers of implementers usually going through explicit and implicit or interpretative modifications resulting in a manner of implementing which was far from the intended process (Ball & Pence, 2006). Since the policy implementation is highly dependent on the core layer or local context, there is necessity for local implementers to have a full grasp of the language issue (Walter, 2011).

## **2. Framework of the Study**

Based on Crotty's (1998) Model this paper includes 4 elements in a social research: (1) epistemology, (2) theoretical perspective, (3) methodology, and (4) methods (Malik, 2015). Anchored on constructivism, this study also uses interpretivism in exploring students', parents' and teachers' challenges and experiences in the implementation of MTBMLE as well as their beliefs on the factors that caused those challenges.

### *2.1 Theories*

This study is anchored on Tomasello's (2000) Social Pragmatic Theory of Word Learning; Vygotsky's (:1978, 1981, 1987) Socio-Cultural Theory, Bruner's (1960) Constructivist Theory and various language acquisition theories.

The Social Pragmatic Theory of Word Learning proposes that the process of word learning is fundamentally social (Bruner 1983; Tomasello 1992a, 2000). It argues that learning words does not necessitate strict adherence to grammatical rules and functions because language acquisition and word learning thrive best in a culturally-relevant

context. Tomasello (2000) promotes flexible and potent social-cognitive skills where children can understand the communicative purposes of others in a wide variety of authentic, interactive contexts. As applied in the study, the concept of dedicated word learning is akin to the teaching of mother tongue as a subject where children are forced to adopt archaic words in the mother tongue which is far and beyond their linguistic environment. It suggests further that the mother tongue need not be taught as a subject whereby learners will be pressured to adhere to its rules of grammar and usage and get a failing grade if they fail to meet its linguistic demands (Shohamy, 2006; Casquite, 2010).

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1987) asserts that developmental processes take place through active involvement in cultural, linguistic, and historically-oriented settings, such as classroom instruction and peer group interactions. Effective communication may require a common language among interlocutors. The absence of a mediatory language between the learner and the lesson as well as with the teacher would hinder the levelling of comprehension which can lead to confusion.

Bruner's (1960) Constructivist Theory proposes that learners construct new ideas and concepts upon existing knowledge. People effectively construct the meaning of the reality around them through interacting with others and the objects in the environment (Malik, 2015). As an active process, learning would involve perception, selection and transformation of information, generation of hypotheses, decision making and formulation of meaning or categorization.

## *2.2 How mother tongue is acquired*

Butzcam (2003) argues that we acquire the mother tongue only once. All the other languages are but additions to the first language. In one study, Plato discovered that we possess certain aspects of knowledge and understanding that are inherently and biologically endowed, genetically determined and in consonance with the natural tendency (Goldberg, 2016). For instance, we can grow arms and legs instead of wings (Chomsky, 1957; 1988).

The Sanskrit grammarians argue that a person's ability for word recognition could be innate (Allan, 2007) while empiricists believe that language and knowledge of the world are acquired not through the genes, but through sensory experiences or sense perceptions (Morick, 1980). Meanwhile, the behaviorists view language as learnt through a form of operant conditioning (Kennison, 2013). Skinner (1957) asserts that the successful use of a language is determined by a provocation that strengthens its momentary probability. For instance, when a child who wants to be picked up says 'up' and gets the desired response from another person, it reinforces the word's meaning and the child will most likely use the word again (Skinner, 1957).

According to Bates (2003), humans are the only species with a full-blown, fully grammaticized language that emerges over time from humbler beginnings. Constructing that language requires various tools, and it could be that no cognitive, perceptual and social mechanisms evolved for language alone. Built by Nature using old parts, it is compared to an innate "mental organ" which is 'domain-specific' emerging through certain adaptations in order to solve problems that require its usage (Prodromou, 2002; Harbord, 1992). Language is therefore, not a concept we can inject into the human brain to be fed with chunks of data in order to sustain its growth; but it is an element in the tapestry of the whole human structure that manifests and evolves through time alongside the multiple aspects of human development.

Kuhl & Miller (1975) observed that language acquisition begins at late conception. The newly-borns display a universal ability to hear all the speech sounds and every phonetic contrast used by any human language. However, Plato's finding of infants' innate ability for word-meaning mapping may not be specific to speech (nor specific to humans). Learning speech signal starts when the auditory system is ready and continues steadily across the first year of life until children can weed out irrelevant sounds and tune into the specific phonological boundaries of their native language (Eimas, Siqueland, Jusczyk and Vigorito, 1971). Then speech turns into real language, i.e., the ability to turn sound into meaning (Bates, Bretherton, &

Snyder, 1988). So, children's acquisition of grammar in their mother tongue does not look like or behave like any other existing cognitive structure (Goldberg, 2016).

Krashen (1977) observed that when children are acquiring a language, instead of fixing on the use of extensive grammatical rules, they focus on the attainment of some purpose such as gaining friends or buying (Chen, Lin, & Jiang, 2016). They pick up the essential parts of their first language in its natural order and are not force-fed with grammar too early before their language acquisition devices are ready (Morick, 1980; Prodromou, 2002). They acquire the language first and consider the structure later (Schütz, 2007).

Acquisition necessitates meaningful interaction in the target language supported by comprehensible input—natural communication in which the speakers are concerned more with the message and understanding rather than the form of utterances (Krashen, 1987;1988). The theory implies that the teaching of mother tongue as a subject contradicts the natural process by which it is acquired. At the lower levels it will increase demands for children to perform communication functions such as speaking, reading or writing beyond their capacity, resulting to high levels of anxiety. It suggests further that the MTB MLE policy may be 'prescribing cures that turn out to be worse than the sickness itself' (Alexander, 2005).

### **2.3 Problem Statement**

Although previous empirical studies have pointed out significant findings that support the MTBMLE policy, we cannot deny the current issues surrounding the policy which directly influence primary students' mode of learning. There were no case studies that especially dealt with the challenges that students, parents and teachers are experiencing with the MTB MLE implementation in a laboratory school. We regard this as important because the laboratory school exposes pre-service teachers to authentic teaching. Whatever knowledge and experiences they acquire will be reflected in their formal teaching experience. We therefore felt the need to probe into the experiences of interlocutors who are directly affected by a language policy that

originally intends to maximize learning but may actually create a potential hazard.

### **2.4 Purpose Statement**

This study, therefore aims to describe the students', teachers' and parents' experiences and challenges in using the mother tongue. Specifically, we will identify factors which participants believe contribute to the challenges in using the mother tongue. Unearthing the vulnerabilities of the MTBMLE will benefit stakeholders in the process of initiating practical steps to improve children's learning conditions.

### **Research Questions**

#### **Central Question:**

How did the pupils, parents and teachers describe their experiences in the implementation of MTBMLE?

#### **Sub-questions:**

- What challenges were encountered by the pupils, parents and teachers in the implementation of MTBMLE?
- Which factors do pupils, parents and teachers believe contribute to the challenges in implementing MTBMLE?
- Do pupils, parents and teachers believe that MTBMLE should continue its implementation?

## **3. Methods**

### **3.1 Design**

The study employed a descriptive-explanatory case study research design whose aim is to describe a phenomenon and explain the presumed causal links in the real-life intervention which would be too complex if done through surveys and experiments (Yin, 2003). In this study, we described the challenges experienced by the participants in the implementation of the MTBMLE as well as to explain the reasons why those challenges were being felt. However, the aim of the study is not just to make statements about the case but to study it because "it is a typical instructive example for a general mother tongue issue" (Yin, 2003) The study therefore attempts to capture the process in a very detailed manner, devoid of restrictions so that more could be drawn from analyzing it (Flick, 2010).



Aside from determining the case and the specific type, we also considered using a single, holistic case study with embedded units because we were looking at the challenges of students from various grade levels (i.e., the kindergarten, grades 1, 2 and 3 students) in one environment- a laboratory school which possesses a unique context (Yin, 2003), particularly, a primary and secondary student teaching laboratory.

### *3.2 Positioning*

In this case study, we, the investigators collaboratively coded, compared, reconciled and consolidated the data as a team (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The other members gathered literature, analyzed data and sought parents' and teachers' consent to be interviewed and observed.

Since we stood as the main instruments in the data collection we therefore claimed our subjectivity (Boss, Dahl & Kaplan, 1996; Creswell, 1998). In order to prevent our opinions from influencing our view of the case under investigation, we took into account our assumptions and biases on the case prior to the investigation. For instance, we assumed that children would find it useful and more convenient to use their home language when interacting with the teacher in the classroom because it is the natural way they communicate with family members at home. We doubted the effectiveness of the mother tongue when taught to native speakers because babies are generally observed to acquire the mother tongue naturally without using textbooks and instructional materials. We believed that children acquire their first language via natural interaction in a free environment devoid of pressure and threat. Thus, there could be a difference when mother tongue is taught in a structured classroom setting, taking the form of a second language taught in sequence by chapters and lessons. In this context, learning becomes linear or slow.

### *3.3 Setting*

Interviews and observations were held at the location of each participant's choice, specifically, at a laboratory school within a Philippine university which will be encrypted in this study as Lab School. This setting provides pre-service teaching experience for all primary and secondary students

during their practicum year. The Lab School is headed by a Director from whom we sought permit to conduct the study. The Director supervises a group of faculty called Supervising Teacher Educators (STEs) who handle both the primary and secondary students and the practicum students who are called 'student teachers'. In this study we only interviewed the STEs and selected primary students and some parents. We saw to it that all interviews, regardless of setting, were recorded by video and/or audiotape, for the purpose of accurately transcribing the data into written form. The observations were held in and out of the classroom in order to obtain a clearer grasp of their language interactions. Lastly, the mother tongue being pointed to in the study is the regional language Waray with variations in the north, east and west regions in Eastern Visayas in the Philippines.

### *3.4 Participants*

The participants were selected using purposive sampling, particularly maximal variation sampling which aims to integrate only a few cases who are as different as possible, to disclose the range of variation and differentiation in the field, if there are any (Patton, 2002). The thirteen (13) participants in the study, assumed to have had a direct involvement in the implementation of the MTBE, were composed of three (3) Supervising Teacher Educators handling Kindergarten, Grades 1, 2, 3 and 4 classes and 5 parents whose children were involved in the study. The teachers were aged 30-35 years with two (2) to five (5) years of teaching experience before joining the Lab School. The children participants were 6-9 years old representing the Grades 1, 2 and 3 classes. In choosing the participants, we ensured that 1) they possessed knowledge and experiences on the issues surrounding MTBMLE which enabled them to answer the question during the interview; 2) they could reflect and articulate and had time to be asked and observed; and lastly, 3) they were willing to participate in the study. Under these conditions, we were able to integrate the cases into the study.

### *3.5 Participant Recruitment*

Initially, we sought approval from the director of the Lab School. The director announced the study opportunity to the children, teachers and

parents who qualified Morse's (1998) conditions for inclusion/exclusion from the study. Since the children belong to the category of vulnerable population, we gave the consent to a substitute- in this case, their parents. After participant-initiated contact and approval were established, consent forms were administered to the parents and teachers which included consent for the child. Cain, Harkness, Smith, and Markowski, (2003) remind that when gathering information that involves the family, all the other members are considered secondary subjects. However, in this study, we focused only on the parents, not the siblings, because the parents are the ones who would normally provide scaffolding to the child-participants.

### *3.6. Data Collection Procedures*

As soon as we obtained informed consent, the participants were oriented on the purpose of the study assuring them of the confidentiality of their information (Jesani, Barai, 2004). We gathered data through audio-recorded interviews with selected Kindergarten, Grades 1, 2 and 3 and 4 pupils, 5 parents and 3 teachers handling Grades 1, 2 and 3, respectively, as well as through classroom observations. Prior to the interview, participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire that elicited their demographic information such as their pseudonym, grade level, gender, age and the language spoken at home. The teachers were asked the number of years they have been teaching before they entered the laboratory school.

*3.6.1 Interviews:* Using three (3) major open-ended questions followed by probing questions we conducted audio-recorded, semi-structured, face to face interviews. This was done so we could discuss some topics in more detail and elicit meaningful answers. Recognizing the social and conversational dimensions of interview interactions, we tried to reduce the social distance from study participants by encouraging them to express their ideas and thoughts freely using their own words (Grinstead, 2005; Houtkoop-Steenstra, 2000). Establishing rapport allowed us to take part in the creation of meaning during interviews as it allowed us to verify the conceptual views we generated from their responses. The initial questions were broader and provided context for the more specific subsequent

questions. The interviews lasted from thirty-five (35) to ninety (90) minutes. After conducting the interview, data were transcribed verbatim. We then informed the participants that we would visit them again to confirm whether the findings reflect their MTBMLE experiences.

*3.6.2 Observations.* After obtaining the consent forms, the assigned observers were oriented and trained in order to standardize the focus of the observations. We then conducted video-recorded observations with the Grades 1, 2 and 3 teachers handling their respective classes in the primary grades varying a duration period of 45-50 minutes. We took the role of the complete observer. We designed an observational procedure to record descriptive and reflective notes. Guided by the aim and objectives of the observation, we took note of the pupils' and teachers' portraits, physical setting of classrooms and some events that took place during the observed period including our reactions. We tried to follow the flow of events avoiding interruptions and intrusions as much as possible so that the participants were oblivious that they were being observed (Adler and Adler, 1998:81). The observations focused on the children's and teachers' patterns of interactions while using the mother tongue as medium of instruction and as language of mediation.

### *3.7 Ethical Considerations*

For this study, covert observations would have been the most appropriate method to use for observing wherein participants will not be aware that they are being observed (Flick, 2010). However, this kind of observation is practiced in open, public and unstructured spaces or fields where researchers can take a role that is 'not conspicuous and does not influence the field' and where consent may not be possible (Allmark, 2002, p. 224; Murphy and Dingwall, 2001). This appears to be a clear violation of the participants' right for privacy because information pertaining to them is being taken without their knowledge. Hence, we decided to modify the context. We sought the consent of the participants regarding our intention to observe their classes assuring them of guarding their data with utmost confidentiality. The consent forms specified the aim, nature and procedures of the study and

clarified the time needed for collecting data from the pupils, parents and teachers. Throughout the study we ensured respect for the participants by regularly thanking them for allowing us to conduct the interviews and observations. We designed an interview guide that was age and developmentally appropriate and which considered their background, culture and interests. We also designed it in a way that their identities will be kept confidential. Interviews and observations were held at the time and place convenient for all the participants. We assigned pseudonyms to the participants in the process of reporting the data.

### *3.8 Challenges*

One of the challenges we faced was the delay of the permit to conduct interviews and observations. Since we had a timeline to follow, this caused a lull in the process. A number of intervening school and personal tasks and activities began accumulating in our personal list which caused this paper to lag behind our scheduled completion. However, our persistence paid off when we finally got our permit and started collecting data.

### *3.9 Data Analysis Procedures*

We conducted a global analysis of the data generated from the interviews and observation field notes. Legewie (1994) describes global analysis as a pragmatically-oriented supplement to analytic procedures that aims to obtain an overview of the thematic range of the text which is to be analyzed. The unit of analysis was focused on the statements of the participants describing their challenges and experiences in the implementation of the MTBMLE. In preparing our data for analysis, we recorded observations and transcribed interviews, the responses of which were segregated and transcribed into a word processing file and subsequently into units of meaning or codes. We reviewed our research questions to guide us in structuring the large passages of the texts. Significant statements--key words or phrases, related to every participant's experiences in the implementation of mother tongue were extracted. We then refined the structure by marking central concepts or statements and information about the communicative situation in the generation of each text identified (Flick, 2010:329). To determine if there were any

inconsistencies in the statements/key words/phrases extracted we went line by line in each transcript; thus phrases that were off-tangent were removed.

Our initial codes emerged from the perspectives of primary pupils, teacher' and parents' challenges in connection with the implementation of the MTBMLE Program. They were our first impression phrases derived from the passages. Being aware of our individual filters influencing our perceptions of the meanings of the passages, we saw to it that our judgments and coding decisions converged as a team (Creswell, 2007; Mason, 2002; Merriam, 1998). After comparing these units with each other, these chunks of data were grouped into emerging categories. Following our agreed rule for inclusion and exclusion for each category we described the essence of the units in that category.

A manual review was done to verify the coding. We checked for complementary data and compared cohorts (different primary pupils). Alternative explanations, conclusions, or interpretations were tested against the current data and findings were compared with literature or alternative theories. We also checked the accuracy of the descriptive information. To build rigor into the work, peer debriefers were consulted. We forged inter-coder agreements or interpretive convergence- the percentage at which different coders agree and remain consistent with their assignment of particular codes to particular data (Hruschka, Schwartz, St. John., Picone-Decaro, Jenkins and Carey, 2004; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The passages were formatted in prescribed ways containing the exact word or phrase. We checked back the source participants for remaining uncertainties as well as to verify the codes. They were allowed to comment on, provide additional information about what they regarded as errors of judgment. Reismann (2008) reminds that 'participants' stories might be fractured and lacking in coherence"; thus, it is important to return to their experience which can help make sense analytically of the thematic convergence and divergence across the stories; we obtained feedback on interpretive analysis to generate further data; used respondent quotation or other data where surprise exposure or



inadequate context could cause embarrassment from an ethical view; lastly, we confirmed our work with the participants by presenting the results to them. Then, divergent views were checked out against further data from original or additional participants.

We also conducted a cross-case analysis and examined themes across cases for purposes of looking into similarities and differences among the cases. For instance, it was worth noting that the three groups of participants were one in saying that "there is a mismatch between expectations and outcomes in using mother tongue," which for them meant that while children were being taught in mother tongue, standardized tests and competitions were held in English. This mismatch is creating more confusion than helping in getting across areas of knowledge. Cross-case analysis also revealed some differences on the issue of comprehension. For instance, while teachers and parents understand mother tongue easily, the children have to request translation of mother tongue into English so they can understand.

Lastly, we established naturalistic generalizations in interpreting and gaining understanding of the participants' experiences. Naturalistic generalizations are statements that point to conclusions derived from 'second-hand experience so well-constructed that people feel as if it happened to themselves' (Stake, 1995, p.85). In other words, we provided our own personal interpretations of their own experiences.

### 3.10 Validity Procedures

In the context of qualitative research, validity is needed to ensure that the information is accurate and credible (Creswell, 2007; Mathison, 1988). As a strategy for validation, we applied triangulation wherein we tried to independently obtain and scrutinize two important sources of data (i.e., interview and observation) in order to see whether the inferences we drew from the data had any convergence, inconsistency or contradictions (Bazely, 2013; Glesne&Peshkin, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Aware that multiple minds bring multiple ways of analyzing and interpreting the data, the entire process was done collaboratively. We

conducted member-checking to receive accuracy and consistency of interview transcripts. We reflected on the passages of the data ensuring a shared interpretation and understanding of their core meanings and determining their appropriate codes and labelling (Erickson & Stull, 1998; Guest & MacQueen, 2008). We allowed the participants to review and obtain approval of the interview transcripts regarding content. We kept all records of correspondence to and from the participants in a research log. We discussed and sought from each other an external feedback of the research process (Creswell, 2007)

## 4. Results

We describe the challenges in MTBMLE, the factors that caused them and the participants' suggestions for improving the policy.

### 4.1 Challenges in MTB MLE

The children have *difficulty understanding concepts across subjects*. They cannot understand, memorize and use terminologies in newly-translated subjects like Values Education, Science and Mathematics because they don't possess the new vocabulary. Although they like being talked to in the conversational mother tongue they prefer lessons to be taught in English because 'The mother tongue seems more difficult. English is easier,' says Child #1. The teachers reported that 'the children replied in English whenever they were talked to in the mother tongue' (Teacher # 1). They often asked for the English translation of unfamiliar words. Parents (#1& 2) shared that, "Our child can't understand the Waray dialect (mother tongue) because his first language is English. He can barely read words in Waray.' Parents also added that their children 'frequently use and do better in English than in the mother tongue' (Parent # 5). Among the child participants though, Albert (pseudo) was proud to say, '*Masayun kay naiintindihanko, Nagwawaray kami ha balaypirmi.*' (It's easy because I can understand. We speak Waray at home). Nonetheless, when in school, he also asks for the translation of words to English due to the deviance of mother tongue at home from that in school.

*They struggle in pronouncing and using archaic terms.* In an effort to indigenize materials, the content of the subject is translated into the

'chosen' mother tongue using extremely unfamiliar words that substitute technical terms. Examples of these are "*balor hit kinahimumutangan*" (place value), "*undukay*" (triangle) or "*napolokagsiyam*" (nineteen). Accordingly, much time is consumed in pronouncing and using the words than engaging in meaningful interactions. This child's statement, '*kay it ibanawords dire aknakakainchindi..*' (..because I don't understand some words..). is very common especially in the lower years.

*Code switching* is done very often such as observed in the following phrases from Teacher No. 3 '*..kay diriguditohiramaka-answer..*' (..because they cannot answer..), Teacher No. 1, '*nako-confuseditohira..*' (They are confused.) and child No. 3 ('*kay it ibanawords dire aknakakainchindi..*' (..because I don't understand some words..). They explained that the mother tongue words are highly new, so they often switch to English and vice-versa when they run out of words (Teacher # 3). The participants prefer to use English terms for practical reasons. For instance, instead of using '*balor hit kinahimumutangan*' students would rather say, '*place value*' which is easier to say and understand. The teachers recall that the first time they used the Waray counterpart of place value, they got a collective blank stare from the students which they described as '*nganga*' or which millennials would call in English '*loading*' or '*nose bleeding*' which means 'difficult to understand'.

They perform low in competitions delivered in English. One parent recalled, 'In Math competitions, the pupils who were under MTB MLE approach found it difficult to answer because the questions were all written in English.' (Parent No. 4) The teachers confirmed this and related their experiences of translating the reviewers in English into and conducting the review in mother tongue to facilitate understanding of the scientific terms. Unfortunately, when they joined the competitions, the children felt completely disoriented due to language confusion.

There is a widening gap in the scaffolding process. At home, the gap is due to the difficulty of bridging two genres of the mother tongue-contemporary, conversational language spoken by parents at home and the policy-based mother

tongue used and taught to children by teachers. This divergence of the mother tongue at home from school causes a drift in the scaffolding process because it hinders parents from catching up with what children are studying. The parents related, 'We encountered communication gap whenever our children were confused with meanings because of the difficulty in interpreting the archaic terms' (Parent # 2). Another parent admitted, 'We find it difficult to tutor our child because we, too, have to translate the terms from Waray to English.- (Parent # 5) This became an issue because parents were often worried whether the information they provided were accurate or not.

This *widening gap* is not only felt by parents but also by teachers. '*It problema ha DepEd kay istriktopaggamit hit waray as a medium of instruction pero complicated it ira books.*' (The problem with DepEd is its very strict policy in using Waray as a medium of instruction but their books are complicated). This sentiment comes from a Teacher (No. 2) who believes that when materials are not contextualized they fail to address the real learning needs of the children; thus, reducing opportunities for maximum development of potentials. Parents who are aware of this problem reported that 'The mother tongue books being used are just photocopies from the public schools,' implying disappointment as well expressing a plea for teachers to take measures in settling this issue.

#### 4.2 Factors causing the challenges in MTB MLE

In this section we present some factors which participants believe are causing their difficulties in coping with MTBMLE.

The use of archaic terms in lieu of daily contemporary lingo and as translations for academic language is creating complications in the teaching-learning process. Since mother tongue is taught as a separate subject, part of the content includes age-old terminologies which parents, teachers and students are not using in their daily conversations. For instance, among the months of the year, the English word 'June' is termed 'Purukpokay' in the policy-based mother tongue while at home parents use June or 'Hunyo', a Spanish term which points to 'June.' Noticeably, 'Hunyo' is closer to June than 'Purukpokay' both in sound and spelling. Even if

children read, pronounce or use the term in school, retention is reduced due to its deviance from the language at home. 'Waray-Waray an amunbook ha mother tongue, MAPEH, Math, Science ngan HEKASI, it ibanawords di konaiintindihan.' (Our book in Mother Tongue, MAPEH, Math, Science and HEKASI are in Waray. I don't understand some words', says Child No. 4 who feels alienated from the current language used in all the subjects. Since most children do not possess the vocabulary required for them to interact in the target language, they will likely feel the increasing demand to perform communication functions beyond their capacity (Greenwood, 2017).

The *mix-up of terms in mother tongue, national and foreign language* also results in confusion among the learners. For instance, 'triangle' in English is a common term even among the ordinary peasants, who, upon hearing it can instantly conceptualize an image of a three-sided polygon. However, when that word is translated into 'undukay' in the school-based Waray- a term which the natives do not literally use, it becomes difficult to conceptualize the image because their attention tends to focus more on form, not the meaning; on pronunciation instead of abstraction; thus, causing delay in understanding. Apart from 'undukay' the children will also study its national language counterpart-Filipino version which is 'tatsulok'. However, compared to 'undukay' 'tatsulok' is nearer to *triangle* because it is a combination of two words 'tatlo' (three) and *sulok* (sides).

Apart from usage, it is to be noted that the Waray language is highly phonetic because it has only three major vowel sounds-/a/, /i/ and /u/ while English has eleven. The variations in sounding off the symbol /u/ can create confusion. For example, 'unat' (stretch) in Waray has only one vowel sound /oo/ as in the word 'ultra' while in English there are words like *umbrella* or *unit* whose initial letters also begin with 'u' but which are sounded differently.

The *translation of other subject areas into mother tongue* poses a challenge because the number of more terminologies to read, understand, memorize and use accumulates in the children's brain oftentimes causing a 'mental traffic'. In other words, it can slow down the process of acquiring

and applying the concepts. The literal translations of particular phrases can range up to ten (10) syllables such as that of 'place value' which when translated is transformed into '*balor hit kinahimumutangan*.' In the phrase, '*balor*' means 'value' while 'hit kinahimumutangan' points to 'place.' The teachers suggest that we adopt technical, scientific, mathematical and other terms that do not have a mother tongue counterpart.

There is a *mismatch between trainings and expected outcomes*. This issue specifies training children in the mother tongue for competitions and national examinations which are held in English, resulting in frustrations over defeat. The children lose, not because they do not know about the content but because the language of the competition was different from the language of practice.

Apart from competitions, incompatibility is likewise evident in language priorities at home and in school. For instance, in order to prepare children for global interface, more parents today introduce English as early as infancy. They use bits of English when speaking to them. However, under the mother tongue policy, the children from kindergarten up till grade three are mandated to use an official mother tongue in the classroom whose form slightly deviates from what the parents may be using at home. Soon after the children have acquired a firm grasp of the mother tongue by grade four, the mother tongue exits and stands by at the backstage while English takes the limelight again because children will now be learning higher order concepts and skills specifically in English. When asked if this observation is happening, this is what Parent No. 5 said, '*My grade four child can already speak straight Waray*.' Teacher No. 3 added, "*An grade four yanaWinaray it iragamittikang ha first and second grading. Maski ha English subject it ira baton WaraymaskiEnglish it akpaki-ana.*" (Grade four pupils are using Waray from first to the third quarter. Even in my English subject, they answer in Waray). This suggests that the grade four children may experience a slowing down of learning due to the language transition from mother tongue to English.

With regards to the student teachers, Teacher No. 3 expressed that, '*Mag-upay naitohiramagsurathin lesson plan ha mother tongue. Itona kon concern iton English kay dirinalugod* (They are good in writing lesson plans in the mother tongue. My only concern is their poor lesson plans in English.' According to her, the difficulty lies in preparing for the licensure exam and demonstration of lessons in the private schools which are written in English. By focusing on the mother tongue during practicum, they, too, are experiencing a *mismatch in training and expected outcomes*.

The *divergence of the mother tongue at home and in school* creates confusion among the children, parents and teachers due to the inclusion of age-old words in the mother tongue vocabulary. The words commonly known as 'archaic' may sound poetic and formal; yet they are no longer used by most native speakers today. They are words taken from the old literary manuscripts of the earlier generations and have long been replaced by evolving words in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The *lack of contextualized materials in the mother tongue* pushes administrators and teachers to adopt materials whose content, activities, language and culture appropriateness are in question. Instead of the school contextualizing materials to suit the children's needs, the children are the ones struggling to fit into the materials that are borrowed from others and which fail to address their real needs; thus, children have lower chances of maximizing their full potentials. The participants here are trying to point out that in crafting materials in the mother tongue, it would be more appropriate to use the common terms in day-to-day life rather than translate the content verbatim and substitute technical terms with archaic words.

#### 4.3 Addressing the challenges of MTB MLE

When asked whether MTB MLE should be sustained or not, twelve (12) out of thirteen (13) participants expressed that '*the mother tongue should not be used as medium of instruction*' due to the multiple issues arising from its implementation. For instance, Parent No. 5 explicitly expressed, 'I am not in favor to have Mother Tongue taught as a subject,' while Parent No. 3 reasoned out,

'We, parents don't also know the meaning of some words in Waray because it's the first time for us to meet such difficult terms.' The last statement seems to describe the anxiety of the parent over the fact that if they, themselves don't understand the words, how much more the children? It further suggests that the unanswered questions of the parents could be one reason for resisting the policy apart from the complexity of the mother tongue's structure and new vocabulary. Parents' report that their children achieve higher in English than in the mother tongue likewise confirms Filipino children's general preference for English than the native languages (Wa-Mbaleka, 2015). This is not unusual because English is the language Filipinos commonly use in fora, symposia, correspondence, information dissemination/ media, education, business and finance and other disciplines is English.

Meanwhile, teachers are suggesting that mother tongue should only be used for interacting with children and facilitating learning. Teacher No. 2 explained, '*Naeexpresshan bata (The child can express)* or even the teacher can explain the concepts easily when using the mother tongue *conversationally*.' They also suggested that other subject areas need not be translated into the mother tongue because like what Teacher No. 2 believes, 'Even the teaching of English can be done using the mother tongue.' Teacher No. 1 explains that, 'Like *ha* Math, Science, English *hiya*, we use the concept in English *peropag*-explain mother tongue. For instance, Math and Science can still use English for its content but in explaining the concepts, the mother tongue can be used. We use mother tongue as a medium of instruction *para pagpaintedihankabataan* (to help children understand)'.

The participants reasoned out that when used for ordinary, informal conversations, the mother tongue can provide a fluid exchange of ideas in a less threatening way but teaching it as a subject may block comprehension and cause a delay in learning. "*Pag conversational, magkaritito, peropagkadinangan hitonsakton agudnaka construct hitonsentence hit paragraph, makurina.*" (They are good when using the mother tongue for conversations; but when it comes to formal usage

like constructing sentences and paragraph it becomes complicated.)

When the children were asked in which language they want to be taught best, Children Nos. 1, 2 and 3 replied without hesitance, 'English /a.' (English only) while the child who speaks Waray most of the time at home and in school answered, 'Winaray gad' (The mother tongue Waray). Interestingly, the response of Child No. 5 who is now in grade 4 was not surprising since he has attained mastery and confidence in the mother tongue. This implies that the participants' choice for the language of instruction had to do with their instrumental motivations-i.e., for economic reasons but more for ease and convenience.

### **5. Discussion and Conclusions**

This study reveals the journey of young children who are using the mother tongue in ways that bring them more confusion than understanding. They re-learn a mother tongue they have already acquired naturally, resulting in a dysfunction in interaction and learning. This context contradicts findings from earlier studies (Wa-Mbaleka, 2015; Robberecht, 2007; Abdullah, 2015; Espada, 2012; UNESCO, 2007; McEachern, 2010; Nunan and Bailey, 2009) that strongly claim the multiple benefits of using the mother tongue in the classroom. Furthermore, there is a contrast between what mother tongue theorists (Krashen, 1977; Kosonen, 2005; McEachern, 2010; Decker and Dumatog, 2003; Espada, 2012, UNESCO, 2008) propose which is to use mother tongue to facilitate learning and how implementers interpret it which is to create a mother tongue in their own image and impose it on the young learners. The first context provides a premise that the mother tongue of the child could be any or a combination of languages- English, Waray or Filipino. The randomness of its usage as well as the absence of complex rules and structures allow the child to interact freely even when studying a foreign language as in the case of other Asian countries. In the second context, the form of the language is altered based on the implementers' idea of a suitable medium of instruction. The teachers' role is to initiate the first steps of intellectualization of the mother tongue in the classroom while the children stand as pioneers—the carriers of the

revised form of mother tongue to the next generations.

The MTB MLE policy, therefore, can create a polarity of functions—that is, accelerate or delay learning based on the context by which it is understood and implemented. When used as a means to understand concepts, it can speed up comprehension. When it is taught as a subject in isolation, it can take the shape of a second language effecting a sense of linearity because learning is taught within the limits of time, human and material resources and activities. The current milieu finds the newly-integrated archaic words irrelevant not just because they are not used at home but because children find them too complex to use and phonetic structure too complex to pronounce and use for conversations.

Another interesting finding is the participants' view of code-switching as a challenge rather than as a potential. This view stems from a previous orientation of monolingualism promoting 'one form of language' which could isolate multilingual students and 'restrict their options for voice' (Smitherman, 2003). This contradicts Canagarajah's (2011) optimistic view of code-switching as an effective tool for expressing one's thoughts. She calls it '*translanguaging*, a neologism which stands for a communication system that makes use of multiple languages used to negotiate for communication.' This mode of transaction transforms code-switching into an avenue for developing competence in different languages rather than focusing on just one language. It is based on a premise that for multilingual children, languages are not isolated fragments but are entries in a catalogue which are accessed for certain communicative purposes and which comprise a well-organized system working in symbiosis. If the MTB MLE policy were to be implemented more authentically, it should conform to Canagarajah's (2011) context which clearly addresses multilingualism.

The testimonies of most participants that English is easier and more convenient to use as medium of instruction seem to confirm Wa-Mbaleka's (2014) assumption that English could actually be the latent mother tongue of most



Filipinos. This is also strengthened by current practice among Filipino parents, at large, who emphasize the learning of English at an early age for economic reasons (Kirkpatrick, 2011).

The limitation in the study points to a lack of cases willing to participate in the various grade levels. Although we utilized maximal variation in choosing the samples, we could have invited more participants from every level in order to obtain a wider range of perspective. We therefore encourage future researchers to include more participants from diverse groups involved in this program. We also suggest that a similar study be conducted in the public and private schools to see whether results would vary or remain consistent.

Overall, the main contribution of this study is its ability to unearth the latent vulnerabilities surrounding the implementation of the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education Policy. This study also captured blunt realities confronting the students, teachers and parents who are directly affected by the policy one of which is a weak prospect of promoting MTBMLE successfully in all contexts. The results will serve as a solid empirical basis for the formulation of reform policies, innovations and programs that will create a path for all learners to experience a smooth flow of thinking and processing of information in any language, be it mother tongue or foreign language or both.

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