



ISSUES AND CONCERNS IN TEACHING MOTHER TONGUE-BASED MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION DURING THE PANDEMIC

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54476/ioer-imrj/521443>

ABSTRACT

Ten years have passed since the implementation of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) in the Philippines, in line with the K to 12 Curriculum. It was expected to be implemented in all public schools, particularly for students from Kindergarten to Grade 3. This program has been a significant change in the education system and in the study of the Filipino language in the country. It is a response to strengthening regional languages and addressing the decline of certain existing languages in the country. However, over time, the implementation of MTB-MLE remains a challenge for schools. The unforeseen crisis that has reshaped the world has also become an obstacle. In this context, this study aims to identify and analyze the various issues and concerns of parents and teachers in teaching Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education during the pandemic in the town of Talugtug. Using Husserlian Descriptive Phenomenology as the research design, focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted to gather data, and Colaizzi's seven steps of data analysis were employed for data analysis. The study revealed that there are issues, concerns, and challenges experienced by teachers and parents in teaching and implementing MTB-MLE. The identified issues, concerns, and challenges include the lack of instructional materials, transliteration, and vocabulary, inadequate teacher training, and a shortage of guidebooks. It was also discovered that MTB-MLE significantly contributes to the academic development of students and is crucial because students better understand the lessons being taught. However, parents were not adequately prepared to teach these lessons. Based on the study's data, an action plan was developed as a guide to provide solutions to the issues and concerns of teachers and parents in teaching MTB-MLE.

Keywords: issues, concerns, teacher, parent, Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education

INTRODUCTION

The Philippines is an archipelagic nation composed of more than seven thousand islands,

making it one of the countries classified as an archipelago. The sea divides each group of islands, resulting in separate communities with their spoken languages. This is the reason why the

P – ISSN 2651 - 7701 | E – ISSN 2651 – 771X | www.ioer-imrj.com

AGUASAN, J.B., DE OCAMPO, K.B., DOMINGO, E.A., PACOL, J.M., PARCHAMENTO, J.A., SANTOS, M.A.V., FABRIGAS, N.P., *Issues and Concerns in Teaching Mother Tongue- Based Multilingual Education during the Pandemic*, pp. 127 – 137



Philippines has 184 languages (Lewis & Simons, 2010). The country is rich in language and culture, and recognizing this wealth, the government has created initiatives to acknowledge and utilize the languages present in the country, as stated in Article 14, Section 6-9, which mandates the implementation of programs aimed at developing the existing languages in the nation. Regionalism in language refers to the recognition of the initial languages used in the teaching of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE). However, not all existing languages in the country are included in the languages used in the program or in the learning process of students in grades K-3.

The first language or mother tongue is learned from childhood. Given its many languages and the importance of language planning, the Philippines is the only Southeast Asian country with a national policy for teaching the first language, or Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE). DepEd Order 31, s. 2012 stresses promoting languages other than English and Filipino, the official education languages. The Philippines' usage of the first language addresses students' need for simple comprehension and helps preserve local languages. This allows students to freely express themselves in their language and clearly explain their views and ideas. Indigenous languages help pupils learn Filipino and English faster, according to other studies. It also improved children's natural language communication.

Students understand classroom talk better when teachers use their first language. Teachers can also instruct students faster. Thus, students and teachers feel more comfortable sharing their perspectives and ideas in class, which boosts class engagement, speaking, learning, and communication (Walter & Dekker, 2011). However, using the primary language helps children engage

and achieve in academics, therefore this strategy benefits student learning.

UNESCO (2003) goal is "Education for All," guaranteeing that everyone has the right to quality education in their first language. Many of the Philippines' neighbors acknowledge the necessity of speaking the first language, which helps them progress. The country's Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education program is currently under debate. Removing MTB-MLE from the curriculum has been suggested. The program needs reviews, research, and language planning. According to Constantino's (2014) study, language policies must be implemented with an annual evaluation, local teachers who are fluent in the language, authentic local language teaching materials, a large budget for planning, implementation, and evaluation, and collaboration between the Department of Education and local NGOs.

The implementation of a language policy has three components that can be given attention: the language system, social system, and planning system (Ausiko, 2010). These factors affect language policy implementation. MTB-MLE in the country helps pupils learn and understand classroom lessons. This language policy is educational.

The epidemic has impacted education worldwide. To prepare for global crises, schools must determine how they have implemented education in the new normal (Tria, 2022; Karalis, 2020). In the study, Noval (2021) found that pandemic teachers have obstacles. They've struggled with internet connectivity, module construction, collection, and correction, health issues, and a lack of learning tools. However, parents and guardians have partnered with teachers to overcome the new normal's schooling obstacles. Thus, this study examines instructors' and parents' pandemic-related instructional experiences.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objective of this study is to determine and identify the issues, concerns, challenges, and effects of teaching MTB-MLE for teachers and parents during the pandemic. Collective perspectives will be gathered through interviews with participants, including teachers from Kindergarten to Grade 3 and parents representing as class presidents. The study also aims to identify the strategies used to overcome the problems encountered in teaching using the first language during the pandemic. This research will contribute to gathering data and information about the issues, concerns, challenges, and the impact of using the first language in the field of learning and teaching. The study will also emphasize the importance of establishing a good relationship between teachers and parents in implementing school activities.

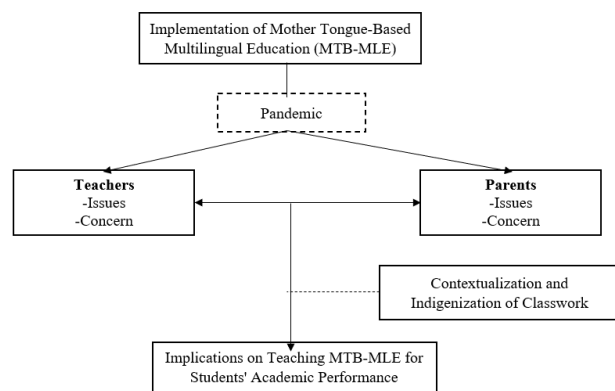


Figure 1. Paradigm of the Study

The conceptual framework illustrates the overall flow of the study. This study revolves around the issues and concerns of teachers and parents regarding the teaching and implementation of MTB-MLE in the town of Talugtog. It can be observed in the framework that the three theories will guide the formulation of questions and the examination of responses from teachers and parents. By using Colaizzi's seven steps of data analysis, the issues and concerns of teachers and

parents will be compared to develop a proposed Action Plan that can assist in the implementation of the program.

Theoretical Framework. This section presents the theories that provided the foundation for the study, revealing that there are various theories related to the topic. Firstly, Cummins' Role of Language Proficiency Theory (1894) focuses on the use of the first language as the medium of instruction, bilingualism, and the acquisition of academic skills. It also emphasizes the goal of assessing language proficiency in bilingual education by placing students in a class that utilizes the language that promotes their learning. This theory supports the idea that students easily comprehend the subject matter when taught using their first language as the medium of instruction, resulting in effective learning and student performance.

Secondly, Spolsky's Language Policy Theory (2004) states that language policy theory involves granting individuals the right to choose the language they speak based on the community they belong to.

The third theory is Bruner's Theory of Instruction (1995), which emphasizes the important role played by teachers in teaching and the process of learning. This theory emphasizes investing in the development of proficiency in the first language as the most effective approach to assist students in learning and becoming bilingual.

Language proficiency is attained by students through its usage to achieve the highest goals in speaking and writing. This implies that students should be bridged and supported through the exchange of information and conversation. Therefore, a teacher who has doubts about this program should have a positive attitude to implement the MTB-MLE program effectively.



METHODOLOGY

Research Design. Teachers and parents' experiences and obstacles implementing MTB-MLE during the epidemic were described using Husserlian Descriptive Phenomenology and Colaizzi's Seven Steps of Data Analysis. Descriptive phenomenology, developed by Edmund Husserl, seeks to understand, describe, and analyze a phenomenon as experienced (Augusto, 2019). Gaddi (2016) used Colaizzi's Seven Steps of Data Analysis to help academics understand data to find its main themes.

Instrument Used in Data Collection. The guiding question served as the instrument for conducting Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with teachers and parents in Talugtug, Nueva Ecija. Amparo (2020) interviewed Iloilo City teachers regarding MTB-MLE implementation using FGDs. The researchers explained the study's goal in interviews using leading questions.

Steps in the Study. The triangulation method ensured more thorough, accurate data collection for the study. The pre-investigation phase involved conversations, leading questions for individual participants, FGDs, transcribed responses, and social media validation. Colaizzi's Seven Steps of Data Analysis structured the data thematically. Augusto's 2019 study listed seven steps: (1) Reading all the descriptions (protocols) to understand the participants' situation, (2) Extracting significant statements, (3) Formulating or creating meaning from the significant statements, (4) Organizing the derived meanings into thematic clusters, (5) Integrating the results into a comprehensive or comprehensive description of the topic under investigation, (6) Developing a comprehensive or complete description of the phenomenon, and (7) Presenting.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Issues and Concerns in Teaching MTB-MLE during Pandemic

The implementation of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) has brought about various issues and concerns in the educational landscape. This section discusses MTB-MLE teaching issues. We want to illuminate the challenges educators and stakeholders have in integrating MTB-MLE into the curriculum by thoroughly examining these topics.

Table 1
The First Language of Teachers and Parents as Participants

	Tagalog	Ilokano
Teachers	32	34
Parents	21	45
Total	53	79

The results and discussion address the identified difficulties, including teacher training, MTB-MLE instructional techniques, instructional resources, and contemporary learning approaches in the context of the epidemic. These difficulties affect MTB-MLE teaching and learning.

The debate also addresses teacher and parent concerns about MTB-MLE program planning and language selection. Teachers need more training, teaching materials are scarce, and parents and modules need to help students learn.

This section explores these issues and concerns to better understand MTB-MLE teaching obstacles and inform ideas and interventions to overcome them. This study lays the groundwork for future research and evidence-based MTB-MLE deployment in educational contexts.

Talugtug has 22 public primary schools. 66 MTB-MLE teachers and 66 Parent-Teacher Association presidents from each school level



participated in the study. The town's proximity to Pangasinan explains why more participants speak Ilokano. In Nueva Ecija, Tagalog is spoken by 67.7% of the population, followed by Ilokano at 29.93%, and other languages including Kapampangan, Pangasinan, Bikol, and Ilonggo (PSA, 2015). Location greatly affects a town's language.

2. Issues and Concerns of Teachers and Parents in Teaching MTB-MLE

Table 2
Issues and Concerns of Teachers and Parents in Teaching MTB-MLE

Issues and Concern of the Teachers	Issues and Concerns of the Parents
The issue needs a solution to succeed. Talugtug elementary school teachers have expressed concerns about MTB-MLE teaching and execution. Transliteration, terminology, and counting students in Ilokano and Tagalog are some of these challenges. MTB-MLE teaching and implementation has also worried teachers. Concerns must be addressed to attain goals. Teachers complain about a lack of MTB-MLE training, language proficiency, and Tagalog dictionaries with deeper meanings.	Parents are their children's first teachers, thus it's crucial to grasp their MTB-MLE program challenges. Only first-grade parents had trouble explaining complex words. However, three parents thanked the software for making teaching their children easier. Three out of four parents voiced worries. They worry about the lack of guidebooks and dictionaries to better clarify complex words..

It is noticeable that teachers face more issues compared to parents. Among the teachers, three expressed their concerns, while only one parent did so. The primary issue faced by the teachers is the lack of instructional materials, while the parent mentioned the difficulty in explaining Tagalog words with deeper meanings. The participants who mentioned having issues in teaching and implementing MTB-MLE are all native speakers of Ilokano. In terms of concerns, all teachers shared their concerns. The lack of training in teaching the Mother Tongue-Based

Multilingual Education program is the main concern of the teachers, while the lack of language resources and guidebooks was the shared concern of three parents from Kindergarten, Grades 1, 2, and 3.

In a study conducted by Ansar (2017), similar problems were identified, including the lack of teaching materials, transliteration issues, code-mixing, and code-switching, inadequate language proficiency, and problems with teacher and student personalities. Additionally, according to a study by the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) in 2019, teachers lack intensive training in using the mother tongue for instruction, as most teachers who teach this program are not native speakers of the language.

3. Challenges of Teachers and Parents in the Implementation of MTB-MLE

Table 3
Challenges of Teachers and Parents in the Implementation of MTB-MLE

Challenges for Teachers	Challenges for Parents
Before accomplishing goals, everyone faces problems. Teachers struggle to implement Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE). Lack of educational materials, insufficient skills in teaching the native language, and the time-consuming nature of explaining profound Tagalog vocabulary and creating instructional aids are these problems.	Understanding their challenges as home educators and pandemic partners is crucial. Two parents described their program implementation and teaching challenges. They include Ilokano-speaking parents. A Tagalog-speaking parent said they had no problems executing the curriculum, but they battled teaching their child in Tagalog owing to their poor expertise. Only primary school. The Ilokano-speaking parent also noted having trouble educating their child, especially with words with deep meanings, which takes time. This parent's lack of education and Tagalog skills make teaching their child difficult.



The study conducted by Williams et al. (2014) found that teachers struggle with language proficiency, MTB-MLE program issues, student issues, lack of educational materials, and inadequate preparation. Since not all Talugtug instructors speak Tagalog and not all Tagalog-speaking teachers can teach in Tagalog, the Kindergarten teacher highlighted language skills and knowledge as a major issue. Curry and Lillis (2014) state that speaking a student's first language does not inevitably qualify a teacher to teach it. Teachers need formal training in multilingual techniques. Perez (2016) said, "The biggest challenge of the program is still the lack of training for teachers, materials, and community support."

Teachers endure more problems than parents. The Kindergarten teacher says language skills and knowledge are their biggest problem in teaching and implementation. Many teachers speak Ilokano, explaining their main issue, according to researchers. According to the parents, they struggle to teach, especially complex vocabulary, because of their inadequate language proficiency. Ilokano-speaking parents and teachers also struggled. Since Ilokano is their native language, teaching words with deep meanings is complicated and takes more time.

4. Methods Employed by Teachers and Parents to Overcome Challenges and Issues

According to Tavoosy and Jelveh (2019) suggest using creative methods to make classroom lessons interesting and engaging. Interactive methods and modern technologies can engage students. Instructional materials also aid learning. Visual aids increase children's Filipino language acquisition.

Despite facing identical obstacles, people used different methods to overcome them. Teachers must overcome many obstacles to teach

kids well. Parents overcome problems by instilling tenacity. They say training their kids helps them improve and learn more. Parents and the home environment are crucial to students' comprehensive learning, regardless of educational techniques and materials.

Table 4
Methods Employed by Teachers and Parents to Overcome Challenges and Issues

Methods Employed by Teachers to Overcome Challenges and Issues	Approaches Employed by Parents to Overcome Challenges and Issues
To make sure pupils have enough textbooks, teachers borrow and photocopy. Teachers manage despite their lack of first-language competency and instructional materials. They employ pictographs to help students understand MTB-MLE materials. They use their free time to create lesson plans and other teaching tools to help students understand class discussions. Teaching tactics also help teachers with MTB-MLE.	Parents offer solutions to shared problems. They emphasize instruction. "I admit that I didn't finish my education, so even though I find it difficult, I strive to teach my child because I don't want them to end up like me, lacking knowledge," said one parent. Teaching my child teaches me." Parents who stay home with their kids have helped them learn the first language.

Teachers must interact with kids' families to motivate them to succeed in school. Parents' education involvement is crucial (Waanders, 2007). The first language education and home language come from parents (Caldas, 2013).

5. Importance of Using the First Language in the Field of Learning and Teaching

A third-grade teacher said using the first language in teaching and learning shows respect and pride for the Philippines, which has over 170 languages. The teacher stressed, "We should not forget this but rather take pride in who we are and where we come from." Using regional languages as a medium of instruction helps students not only



understand classroom lessons more quickly but also maintain their cultural identity.

Table 5
Importance of Using the First Language in the Field of Learning and Teaching

The Importance of Using the First Language for Teachers	The Importance of Using the First Language for Parents
<p>Teachers claim learners learn faster when they use their first language because they comprehend it. As students confidently offer their views in class, teachers notice fewer absences. "MTB-MLE reduces dropouts and repeaters in schools" because language is the main reason kids fail to understand class discussions, one teacher said. Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education benefits students, instructors, and parents. It improves their first language. This helps teachers teach. They feel more driven to teach when they perceive that pupils understand and are interested, avoiding class napping.</p>	<p>Tagalog-first training helps youngsters learn better, which pleases parents. They say, "It is extremely important" because, like teachers, they see how their children's written and speaking skills have improved since Tagalog became the language of teaching. The first language enhances teaching and learning.</p>

Teachers and parents agree that learning and teaching in the first language is crucial. Participants say it's vital because kids learn better and can express their thoughts. Teachers feel more secure teaching when pupils understand, and students feel confident expressing their views in the language being used.

According to Almario (2014), there is no doubt that the Philippines needs Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE). He

asserts that Filipino children learn faster when they are taught in their language, and those who learn to read and write in their first language are quicker to learn other competencies. It is emphasized that the use of the first language is important because it enables students to understand classroom discussions more quickly.

6. The Role of MTB-MLE in the Academic Development of Students for Teachers and Parents

Table 6
The Role of MTB-MLE in the Academic Development of Students for Teachers and Parents

The Impact of MTB-MLE on Students' Academic Development for Teachers	The Impact of MTB-MLE on Students' Academic Development for Parents
<p>According to a third-grade teacher, kids' development can only be measured by their subject knowledge. Teachers have found that MTB-MLE helps pupils' academic growth. It helps students grasp lessons. MTB-MLE also made classroom discussions livelier as students were more comfortable voicing their ideas and opinions in the language being utilized.</p>	<p>MTB-MLE helps pupils study more. Parents say using the first language helps kids love learning and school. Walter and Dekker (2011) found that first-language learners are more literate.</p>

According to a study conducted by Burton (2013), learning a first language helps students strengthen and enhance their academic abilities. Students become actively engaged in classroom activities, and there is a reduction in the number of students who drop out of school because they are no longer afraid or worried about using their language. Furthermore, the critical thinking skills of students are developed.

In line with this, Adeyanju (2003) emphasizes that language is one of the most crucial factors that impact education. Therefore,

we cannot achieve education for unless students are given the opportunity or chance to learn their first language. It serves as a guide or key for every student's learning.

Teachers and parents agree that MTB-MLE helps pupils succeed academically. They found that students learn better when they understand the lessons, and classroom conversations are livelier when students feel comfortable sharing their thoughts or asking questions based on their learning. The study found that classroom conversations improve learning. When speaking their first language, individuals can better communicate their ideas and grasp the discussions since they are using words they use at home and in school. Learning takes into account abilities, intelligence, views, facts, and principles, as well as contemporary technology and other knowledge that keeps growing.

CONCLUSIONS

The use of the first language spoken at home serves as a foundation for teaching and learning the first language of students in grades K-3. It is important to align the language used at home with the language used in school to facilitate the understanding of each concept taught, aiming for conceptualization and localization. It is also crucial to involve parents in program planning and teaching activities in MTB-MLE because the program is learner-centered, and during the pandemic, parents become the partners of students in achieving the learning goals.

Based on the issues and concerns raised by teachers and parents regarding the teaching of MTB-MLE at present, the primary focus should be on clear and systematic planning by the community regarding the language to be used in grades K-3 in Talugtug, Nueva Ecija. A concern raised by teachers and parents is the lack of sufficient training for those who teach and use MTB-MLE in

class. Another concern is the shortage of adequate teaching materials within and outside the school. The current mode of learning poses a challenge for teachers and parents because the responsibility for student learning in grades K-3 lies in the hands of parents and modules.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The researchers prepared an Action Plan to address the issues, concerns, and problems mentioned by teachers and parents about MTB-MLE in Talugtug, Nueva Ecija.

1. Language Planning Committee: (a) Assemble educators, parents, and community people. (a) The committee will create Talugtug MTB-MLE language policies, guidelines, and strategies.
2. Training and Professional Development: (a) Provide thorough MTB-MLE methodology, approach, and best practices training for teachers and school administrators. (a) Conduct workshops, seminars, and mentoring with educational institutions and language experts.
3. Curriculum and Materials Development: (a) Review and adapt the curriculum to match MTB-MLE concepts and objectives. (b) Create local language teaching materials, textbooks, and learning tools to enhance effective teaching and learning.
4. Parent and Community Engagement: (a) Educate parents and community members about MTB-MLE. (a) Include parents in language and educational planning.
5. Resource Mobilization: (a) Ask government agencies, NGOs, and other stakeholders for help with teaching materials, technology, and infrastructure. (a) Establish MTB-MLE funding partnerships with local businesses and organizations.



6. Monitoring and Evaluation: (a) Create a system to track MTB-MLE implementation progress and effectiveness. (a) Ask instructors, parents, and students for input to improve and make changes.

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P – ISSN 2651 - 7701 | E – ISSN 2651 – 771X | www.ioer-imrj.com

AGUASAN, J.B., DE OCAMPO, K.B., DOMINGO, E.A., PACOL, J.M., PARCHAMENTO, J.A., SANTOS, M.A.V., FABRIGAS, N.P., *Issues and Concerns in Teaching Mother Tongue- Based Multilingual Education during the Pandemic*, pp. 127 – 137



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