

Language Attitude toward the Use of Mother Tongue after a Decade of Implementing the MTB-MLE: A Brief Review

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Abstract

Reviewing the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) after a decade of its implementation in the Philippines is imperative as it may address concerns and recommendations that are vital in the success of the policy itself. As the policy is a language policy, the language attitude is an area which the present policy review primarily delves in. The present paper primarily reviews literatures on the language attitude of the public school teachers towards the use of the mother tongue as the language of instruction (LOI). It also pays attention to the importance and issues of multilingual education which are directly connected to the implementation itself. Finally, it offers future research directions that will provide a more in-depth understanding on the situations that pertain to the implementation.

Keywords: MTB-MLE, language attitude, mother tongue, multilingual education

Introduction

When language policy becomes the center of discourse in Philippine education, many attentions are set on the Department of Education (DepEd), the agency in the Philippines responsible for the implementation of policies from the kindergarten to senior high school, including the alternative learning system. The policies implemented by the Department are surely deemed necessary to make sure that no student will be left behind, and all students will become successful global citizens. Among the policies that claim to contribute to achieving the said goal is the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB MLE).

The implementation of MTB-MLE has not been easy and without problems. For years, media and politicians have something to say about its implementation itself and stakeholders have varying attitudes toward it. On September 13, 2022, the suspension of the implementation of the policy was deliberated in the Congress (Ugalde, 2022). House Bills such as 2188, 3925 and 6125 aim to suspend the implementation (Hernando-Malipot, 2022; Linguistic Society of the Philippines, 2020). Apolonio (2022) made a recommendation for DepEd to conduct a re-evaluation on the policy and another recommendation to only use MT as auxiliary in the teaching-learning process. Regarding the latter, Apolonio (2022) cited DO 52, s. 1987, the policy on bilingual education in the Philippines. In that policy, a local vernacular should be used as an auxiliary language at the first and second grade level. This might argue that MTB-MLE policy is unconstitutional.

This paper is a review of MTB-MLE in relation to language attitude of the stakeholders, particularly the Filipino teachers, toward the policy in terms of the use of the mother tongue as the language of instruction (LOI). Considering the language attitude of the public school teachers is a good way to start the review for two reasons: (1) language attitude has an impact on any policy in education (Christ, 1997) especially when the policy involves a language and (2) the teachers them-

selves, particularly those who teach at kindergarten through third grade, are the ones who have been on the front line since the policy was implemented in 2012.

This paper starts with the overview of the multilingual education and MTB-MLE, and the literatures relevant to them are also introduced. Subsequently, the concept of language attitude and the studies pertaining to it are presented. Then, a discussion that presents the language attitudes of the teachers on the use of MT in the implementation of MTB-MLE is provided. Finally, the paper presents future research directions.

Multilingual Education: Rationale and Issues

Rationale

Not only that multilingualism is an interesting subject, but it is a part of life, maybe not of all, but of many people as Edwards (1994) stressed “multilingualism is a powerful fact of life around the world, a circumstance arising, at the simplest level, from the need to communicate across speech communities” (p.1).

This concept of multilingualism has been taken seriously by many entities to the extent that a number of education policies were made in support for it which is seen in the Philippines in its implementation of MTB-MLE. Cenoz (2009) defined multilingual education as the way, with the use of at least two languages, for schools as multilingualism and multi-literacy become their goal.

Countries that implemented multilingual education as policy surely saw the benefits their learners can gain from it. According to Okal (2014), a child who is able to speak more than one language from an early age is better in terms of perception and intellectual flexibility than the one who only speaks one language. The next section (Overview of MTB-MLE in the Philippines) further presents the benefits of the multilingual education in the context of the MTB-MLE in the Philippines.

Issues

In the midst of the benefits multilingual education brings, there are also issues or problems encountered.

Shortage of learning materials

One problem in the implementation of a multilingual program has to do with the development and production of learning materials in the language that is nominated as the language of instruction. This requires collaboration among educators and other members in the community (Benson, 2004). In the Philippines, teachers have experienced the shortage of learning materials in mother-tongue which really made their teaching experience very difficult (Lartec, Bendanillo, Binas-o, Belisario, Bucang, & Cammagay, 2014; Cabansag, 2016).

Lack of teacher training

Another problem has to do with teacher training. Multilingualism requires not only a teacher who is able to use the LOI both in writing and speaking, but also one who is able to effectively use the LOI in delivering the lessons because this might have been the case that teachers, before the multilingual education was introduced, were used to teaching in one language only. In the Philippines, a lack of teacher training was also experienced by teacher in the implementation of the MTB-MLE (Anudin, 2018; Lartec et al., 2014).

High policy cost

Moreover, the implementation of multilingual education is perceived by many as too costly (Ball, 2010). Thomas and Collier (1997) and Patrinos and Velez (1996) suggested that the high cost of implementing the program outweighs the benefits from the educational efficiency. In

addition, the production and maintenance of learning materials, and even the trainings to be done for teachers requires considerable expense. (Alberto, Rañola & Gabinete, 2016 ; Wa-Mbaleka, 2015; Hillman, 2015). On conducting a study about the MTB-MLE in the Philippines, Namanya (2017) maintained that the policy will cause the developing nations, even the countries that have many languages therein to use much funding.

Overview of MTB-MLE in the Philippines

MTB-MLE is a language-in-policy in education implemented by the Philippine National Government through one of its education agencies, the Department of Education (DepEd, 2016; Gempeso & Mendez, 2021). It has been implemented since 2012 (DepEd, 2012). It has been for the Kindergarten through Grade 3 in almost all subject (DepEd, 2016). Filipino and English subjects are exceptions (DepEd, 2016). At first, there were twelve languages as a mother-tongue to be used in schools (DepEd, 2012)—Bikol, Chavacano, Hiligaynon, Kapampangan, Ilocano, Maranao, Maguin-danaoan, Pangasinense, Sinigbuanong Bisaya, Tagalog, Tausug and Waray—however, seven more languages were added in 2013—Aklanon, Ivatan, Kinaray-a, Sambal, Surigaonon, Yakan, and Ybanag (DepEd, 2013)—and that makes nineteen languages altogether.

In stressing the rationale of the program, DepEd (2016) stated:

MTBMLE is education, formal or non - formal, in which the learner's mother tongue and additional languages are used in the classroom. Learners begin their education in the language they understand best - their mother tongue - and develop a strong foundation in their mother language before adding additional languages. Research stresses the fact that children with a solid foundation in their mother tongue develop stronger literacy abilities in the school language. (p.2)

In the statements above, it can be seen that the program gives importance to the first language (L1) or the mother-tongue (MT) as it is used in the beginning of the students' learning. It is also stated that the said program is based on scientific researches which found that mother-tongue is more helpful in matters of developing the learners' literacy abilities.

The use of MT as the language of instruction (LOI) in Philippine classrooms is also supported by several organizations such as the Philippine Business for Education, the National Economic Development Authority (NEDA), the Komisyon ng Wikang Filipino, and the Linguistic Society of the Philippines.

In addition, DepEd (2016) listed four areas of development which MTB-MLE would lead the learners to: language; cognitive; academic, and socio-cultural developments.

Concerning cognitive development, DepEd (2016) explained that with the use of mother-tongue, students will have a solid foundation for their learning, and this will drive them to their success.

When it comes to cognitive development, the agency said that this is where students develop higher order thinking skills through the mother-tongue-applied activities.

Academically speaking, DepEd (2016) believes that MTB-MLE will help students achieve the skills needed in all subject matter and it will help them to be prepared for the next stages of basic education.

Regarding socio-cultural development, through the program, students will be able to value their heritage, language and culture, and they will have respect what others have in terms of the three aforementioned aspects.

For the implementation of MTB-MLE, two models have been utilized. One is the Multiple Monolingual Model and the other one is the Lingua Franca Model. In the first model, there is a

clustering among the students in relation to their mother-tongue which is their first language, while in the second, the students will learn another language which is not their MT and will be taught it (Metila, Pradilla & Williams, 2016).

Language Attitude: Importance and Factors

Language attitude is defined as “a disposition consisting of the three aspects of reactions to languages or language varieties” (Xuan & Yihong, 2017) namely the affective component, behavioral orientations and cognitive component.

Importance

The importance of language attitude is seen in areas like language policy. In showing the connection between language policy and language attitude, Baker (1992) pointed out:

Where languages are in danger of decline or extinction, or when cultures and languages are overtly being conserved by, for example, educational policies, changing attitudes is often prominently on the agenda. It is usually accepted that whatever the language policy, planning or provision, the favorability or unfavorability of attitudes in the population fundamentally affects the success or otherwise of language preservation. Thus changing attitudes is often a major part of the formal or hidden agenda of language planning. (p.5)

This aspect of language attitude should always be considered because any policy that concerns multilingual education has an effect to the community it serves or to the other agents that help it carrying it out.

Factors Influencing Language Attitude

Baker (1992) asserted, at least during the year of her writing, that there was no model on the determinants of language attitudes, and made a list of possible factors instead. She listed six: age, gender, school, ability, language background, and cultural background.

Age

When it comes to age as a factor influencing attitude, Baker (1992) related this to the process of socialization. This has to do with “the accompaniments of changing age that are the causes (e.g. heterosexual relationships, mass media influences, influence of peer groups)” (Baker, 1992, p. 42).

Gender

Concerning gender, Baker (1992) used the report from the study that focused on the perception of the girls and boys toward the Welsh language. She stated that the attitudes of the girls toward the said language are more favorable when compared to those of the boys.

School

In reference to the school, Roberts (1985, 1987, as cited by Baker, 1992) found that teachers in schools or the school themselves can have an influence on the attitudes of the students toward a language regardless of whether it is a language spoken by the majority or by the minority. Baker (1992) suggested that the extracurricular activities in schools can add to that effect.

Ability

To explain the “ability” as a factor that influences language attitude, Baker (1992) made a link between the ability in a language and the attitude towards it. To explain this further, Baker used works from W.R Jones (1949 &1950) and Gardner (1985) on which she based this relationship which is directly proportional: “the higher the achievement, proficiency, ability in a language, the more favourable the attitude” (p. 44).

Language background

In terms of language background, Baker (1992) referred this to “the language usage of family and friends, community and youth culture, mass media and identification models, peer groups and ‘pop’ culture” (p. 44).

Cultural background

Cultural background has to do with active participation or involvement in a culture where the language is given important which will lead to having a favorable attitude toward that language (Baker, 1992).

Other factors

Apart from the factors listed by Baker, there are other factors given by several researchers such as economic factors, ethnicity, language policy, occupation, political factor, religion, social class, sociocultural factor, and the prestige and power of the language (Juvrianto, 2016; Larasati & Simatupang, 2020 Liu, Zhang & Fang, 2021; Yazigy, 2015).

Language Attitudes on the Implementation of MTB-MLE in the Philippines

When it comes to studies on language attitudes towards the implementation of MTB-MLE in the Philippines which includes teacher and student experiences, there are only a few studies conducted as far as what the world wide web provides.

Is it beneficial for Learners?

According to all the teacher respondents of Anudin (2018), the use of Chavacano as LOI does not produce a better performance among the learners in subjects like Math and Science. Also, majority of the respondents do not believe that Chavacano will lead the learners to easily learning the English language. However, on the other hand, the respondents hold the view that the use of mother-tongue would have a positive impact on the academic advancement of the learners. Chavacano, as a vernacular, is widely spoken in Zamboanga City where Anudin (2018) conducted his study.

In another study, Alieto (2018) found out that there was a positivity among the pre-service teachers on the use of Chavacano as mother-tongue as LOI. They believe that mother-tongue can establish a better communication between the teacher and the students in that the mother-tongue can be used “as plausible coping option” (Alieto, 2018, p. 141). Using sentiment analysis, Arispe et al. (2019) found out that teachers expressed positive sentiments at 57% when it comes to teaching in Bikol MTB-MLE, and noticed that activeness in classrooms discussions are demonstrated by the learners.

In Yap-Dequiña and Oliva (2022), the teacher-respondents were interviewed and saw the benefits of MTB-MLE in the learning process. According to them, there was a deeper understanding, active participation, active sharing of thoughts or ideas, and increase of confidence among the learners because of the use of the mother-tongue as LOI.

Parba (2018) found out that the teacher respondents saw the benefits of mother-tongue as LOI both in pedagogy and learning process though at first they had a negative attitude toward it.

What’s their preference? Mother Tongue? Filipino? Or English?

In Anudin (2018), it was found out there were teachers who are not in favor of using Chavacano as LOI. Also, almost half of the respondents prefer English or Filipino over the said language. However, among the three, the use of the English language has been the first option of the respondents for the learning process.

Adriano, Franco and Estrella (2021) reported that that though the attitude of the respondents—parents, teachers and students—is positive toward MTB-MLE as a policy, yet they, especially, the parents and the teachers, still prefer English to be used as the LOI.

Mahboob and Cruz (2013), in their attitudinal survey, discovered that the respondents who were mostly teachers and students, showed a little interest in other languages apart from the English language to be used as the language of instruction from basic education to higher education and would rather choose the English language. The same interest in the English language is also seen among some of the teacher respondents of Parba (2018), who consider English as a way “to participate in a globalized world” though they see the benefits of the use of MT as previously discussed.

In Oda and Vizconde (2021), the respondents who were fifth-grade students and mostly spoke Kapampangan as their first language showed more positivity toward Filipino as compared to the other two languages: English and Kapampangan. Also, it was found out that they prefer Filipino to be used as LOI. Filipino is one of the two languages that are primarily used in the implementation of the 1987 Policy on Bilingual Education (DepEd, 1987). The other one is the English language.

The preference for the English language over the mother-tongue and over the Filipino language for the most part cannot be denied in the Philippines since it has been a part of the Philippine culture for several decades and might be because of the prestige the English language has on the global stage.

Future Research Directions

Despite the importance of language attitude, especially in education system, it appears that there are limited researches conducted about it in relation to MTB-MLE. Given the discussions above, the following future research directions can be considered:

1. Research that will focus on other languages that are also used as MOI. The studies conducted in relation to language attitude towards MTB-MLE do not represent all the languages in the Philippines since there are only 19 Philippine languages used in the implemented, a number far from 180 languages existing in the Philippines (Ethnologue, 2005). As stated previously, the Multiple Monolingual Model is one of the two models that are utilized in the implementation of the MTB-MLE. This stage is where students are clustered according to their mother-tongue which is their first language and which will be used in teaching them. Having only 19 languages used in the implementation implicates that this model is compromised which several literatures show.

2. Research that will focus on a particular variety of a language that is widely used in communities that should have been used instead of another variety which seems to have more prestige. An example of this is the Cebuano language. Cebuano as a language has several varieties, however, in the implementation only one variety is considered. It seems that this is a “one-size-fits-all” approach.

3. Research that will consider other research locales given that the Philippines is a geographical diverse country. When it comes to the locale of the study, the areas (known to the author of this paper) where the studies on language attitude towards MTB-MLE took place are Albay (Arispe et al., 2019), Zamboanga City (Alieto, 2018; Anudin, 2018), and Pampanga (Oda & Vizconde, 2021). This number is not sufficient to have a much deeper understanding on the status of the implementation in relation to the use of MT.

Conclusion

Given the literature reviews, it can be seen that the study on language attitude is so important to investigate in relation to educational policies as it can influence whatever policy will be implemented, especially when policies involve the use of a language. In the case MTB-MLE, the use of MT as the LOI has become a major concern among educators and has been a controversial topic which deserves a serious attention especially from stakeholders.

In the case of the Philippine context, there were studies that saw both the positive and negative sentiments of the public school teachers regarding the use of MT in the implementation of MTB-MLE. These findings are considered vital in reviewing the said policy as what the present paper attempts.

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