

The Grassroots Reality: A Scoping Review of the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) Implementation in the Philippines

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Abstract. This study employed a scoping review methodology and thematic analysis to examine the grassroots-level implementation of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) in the Philippines. The research emphasized the importance of exploring the experiences and perspectives of those directly involved in policy execution and recognizing their critical roles. Mapping the existing literature, the study identified four emerging themes: teacher preparedness and training; limited resources and difficulty in translation; language diversity and language selection difficulty; and community engagement and support. These themes underscored the complexities surrounding MTB-MLE implementation, highlighting areas for improvement and policy refinement. A functional framework was formulated to provide a structured approach to understanding and addressing the identified issues. The framework recommended in-service training and workshops for educators, resource development and iterative translation, language proficiency assessments for students, and community-based initiatives. These elements are crucial for overcoming current challenges and establishing a sustainable foundation for the ongoing success of MTB-MLE initiatives. Although MTB-MLE has positive policy aims, its implementation at the ground level remains a subject of academic inquiry due to specific limitations. This study aimed to contribute to the vital discussion on the complex interplay between language policy directives and grassroots realities and provide practical recommendations for improving MTB-MLE implementation and associated educational initiatives.

Keywords: MTB-MLE implementation; Philippines; Language policy; Grassroots reality; Functional framework.

1.0 Introduction

The implementation of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) in the Philippines is regarded as a pivotal policy initiative that is aimed at improving educational outcomes while celebrating linguistic diversity and cultural preservation. With over 170 spoken languages – a clear picture of the country's diverse linguistic landscape, MTB-MLE has resulted in a significant educational transformation (Eclipse & Tenedero, 2018).

In 2009, DepEd Order No. 74 institutionalized the use of the mother tongue in enhancing learning results from Kindergarten to Grade 3. Subsequently, DepEd Order No. 16 was issued in 2012 which directed the adoption of MTB-MLE in the K-12 Basic Education Program for the School Year 2012-2013. The directive included the policy's objectives, emphasizing its influence on the students' language, cognitive, and academic developments, as well as on their sociocultural awareness. In its implementation, the policy aims to use the learners' first language for instruction from Kindergarten through Grade 3, gradually transitioning to Filipino and English in higher grades. The justification for MTB-MLE stems from its ability to connect the native language with the language used for

teaching, which is often English or Filipino, hence improving comprehension and academic accomplishment (Gaylo, 2020).

Villacañas de Castro (2016) posits that MTB-MLE is anchored on Cummins' Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis and Threshold Hypothesis. Cummins postulated that students who are proficient in their mother tongue are more capable of learning a second language, which in turn improves their cognitive and academic abilities. The Threshold Hypothesis resonated with this notion, highlighting that cognitive academic language proficiency acquired in the mother tongue can be transferred to a second language, boosting academic performance.

Nonetheless, in the Philippine context, despite the seemingly optimistic policy intentions of MTB-MLE, its implementation at the ground level remains a topic of academic research since several problems are encountered due to specific constraints. Thus, there needs to be a continuing exploration of the challenges encountered by educators, communities, and educational stakeholders as they are directly involved in the policy execution. As Tañiza et al. (2024) put it, comprehending the dynamics of policy implementation from the grassroots level becomes imperative since what occurs at the ground level will impact the successful implementation of the language policy, either directly or indirectly.

In this light, this paper examined the grassroots reality of MTB-MLE implementation in the Philippines, with the aim of contributing to the important discussion on the interplay between language policy directives and grassroots realities and offering effective strategies for improving MTB-MLE implementation and related educational initiatives.

2.0 Methodology

This study employed a scoping review methodology and thematic analysis to examine the grassroots-level implementation of MTB-MLE in the Philippines. The scoping review was used to map existing literature on MTB-MLE, examining the extent, range, and nature of the research activity, as well as identifying the research gaps and key concepts in the literature. Thematic analysis was employed to extract and identify recurring themes related to the implementation process. This dual approach provided a comprehensive overview and in-depth understanding of the complexities surrounding MTB-MLE implementation, highlighting areas for improvement and policy refinement.

The data-gathering procedure involved several specific steps:

- a) **Identifying Relevant Studies:** A comprehensive search strategy was employed using academic databases such as PubMed, Google Scholar, JSTOR, and other relevant education-focused databases. Search terms included "Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education," "MTB-MLE implementation," "Philippines," "language education," and related keywords. Studies published in English between 2010 and 2024 were considered for inclusion.
- b) **Study Selection:** The selection process involved two stages: (a) title and abstract screening, and (b) full-text review. Two independent reviewers screened the titles and abstracts to identify potentially relevant studies. Full-text articles were retrieved for the selected studies and further assessed for eligibility.
- c) **Data Extraction:** A data extraction form was used to collect relevant information from the included studies.
- d) **Data Analysis:** A thematic analysis was conducted to identify recurring themes, patterns, and gaps in the research on MTB-MLE implementation in the Philippines. The extracted data was organized based on emerging themes.

3.0 Results and Discussions

3.1 The Grassroots Reality

While the implementation of MTB-MLE aims to enhance learning outcomes, preserve linguistic diversity, and foster inclusive educational practices in the country, existing literature highlights a significant gap between the policy's intended goals and the grassroots reality. As emphasized in the study conducted by Cansino (2023), the program's vision, as outlined in its policy, is commendable, but its implementation faces various shortcomings due to certain limitations. It is, therefore, critical to investigate the authentic, everyday experiences and perspectives of those who are directly involved in the policy execution and recognize their essential roles in its

potential reform and improvement. Ensuring that a top-down policy translates into effective pedagogies and meaningful classroom practices is a complicated process that takes into account various elements or factors.

Teacher Preparedness and Training

Whereas MTB-MLE promises increased accessibility and cultural preservation, research highlights the importance of ensuring teacher readiness and training for successful program implementation. Tañiza et al. (2024) recognized the pivotal role of teacher preparedness and training in the successful implementation of MTB-MLE. Exploring the perspectives of teachers, parents, and community members, their study underscored the need for extensive teacher training programs suited to the linguistic demands of MTB-MLE. The study participants emphasized that to produce satisfying outcomes, educators should be equipped with proficiency in the local languages used as mediums of instruction and a refined understanding of effective teaching strategies.

Educators, as the primary players and the cornerstone of policy execution, are expected to be well-trained to yield the desired learning outcomes from the students. However, in reality, this is not the case. From the policy's inception to the present, teachers have been confronted with several challenges attributed to their lack of proper training, resulting in discrepancies between policy objectives and actual practices. Teachers often lack adequate training in the pedagogical methods of MTB-MLE and the specific languages they are required to teach, leading to inconsistent application of the policy and affecting the quality of education.

Such is the case with the mountain school teachers in Cebu City. In the study conducted by Boligol et al. (2023), the teachers disclosed that neither proper training in MTB-MLE teaching nor a teacher's handbook or manual to serve as a reference had been provided for them since they first taught MTB-MLE. Most of them even lack background and orientation on the policy. More than a decade since its implementation, this sad truth persists. The same concern resonated in the case of the MTB-MLE teachers in Nueva Ecija (Aguasan et al., 2023) and Ilocos Sur (Sanchez et al., 2023), highlighting the dearth of training for those who teach and use MTB-MLE in class. Their struggles are rooted in the apparent mismatch between their own dialect and that of the students and the community. This has been a significant concern since language barriers create certain misconceptions among students and teachers that hinder the effective delivery of instruction. In other words, in the context of MTB-MLE, to glean the desired outcomes, teachers and students should share the same dialect to easily exchange ideas.

In addition, educators' lack of proper training can lead to feelings of inadequacy and hinder effective instruction. Cariaga's (2015) study exemplified this, as teachers reported struggling to explain scientific and English concepts using their students' mother tongue, suggesting fluency issues or a lack of appropriate pedagogical strategies.

The aforementioned studies underscore the need for robust support systems to equip teachers with the necessary skills and resources. Providing targeted professional development programs and fostering collaboration among educators can empower them to navigate the complexities of MTB-MLE confidently. In conclusion, effectively implementing MTB-MLE requires addressing teacher readiness. Through ongoing professional development, the educational system can empower teachers to deliver a high-quality MTB-MLE that strengthens student learning and cultural identity.

Limited Resources and Difficulty in Translation

Several studies have highlighted the challenges posed by limited resources and difficulty translating into effective implementation of MTB-MLE.

Firstly, the lack of readily available, localized resources emerged as a significant barrier. In the study conducted by Tañiza et al. (2024), the research participants reported that the scarcity of locally contextualized materials hindered their ability to establish an immersive and culturally relevant learning environment. This can be considered a pertinent concern since the absence of such materials challenges the intention of delivering MTB-MLE that responds to the language and cultural variety in the Philippines. The same concern was brought to the forefront by Mondey (2013), Aguasan et al. (2024), and Boligol et al. (2023). Their papers articulated that students cannot acquire their mother tongue formally if instructional materials are deficient. The sentiment was also echoed in Medilo's (2016) research, which documented the challenges teachers face due to the unavailability of

instructional materials in their students' mother tongue. The scarcity of resources affects teacher readiness and limits student access to appropriate learning materials.

Secondly, the complexity of translating academic language into local languages emerged as a key concern. Burton's (2013) study found that both teachers and parents expressed anxieties about translating specific terminology into languages like Bikol, hindering clear communication and student comprehension. This concern is further emphasized by Yap-Dequiña et al. (2022), whose research documented the difficulties teachers face in using multiple vernaculars due to the inherent challenges in translation.

Moreover, studies by Cabansag (2016) and Medilo (2016) highlighted the compounding effect of limited resources and translation difficulties. Cabansag emphasized the lack of resources alongside the perceived superiority of English as factors hindering MTB-MLE implementation. Similarly, Medilo highlighted how these limitations hinder the effective implementation of the policy.

Effective language instruction demands resources that engage learners in meaningful ways within their linguistic and cultural contexts (Gilmore, 2007). Therefore, the reported resource constraints and difficulty in translation may compromise the depth and authenticity of the MTB-MLE experience among students, which will be instrumental in achieving the desired outcomes of the policy. Nonetheless, Cansino (2023) emphasized that these ongoing issues are not attributed to the failure of the mother tongue as a principle. Instead, they are a manifestation of a gap in the implementation. He commented, "*The Department of Education was not ready, logistically speaking.*"

In conclusion, these studies paint a clear picture of the challenges faced by educators in implementing MTB-MLE. The difficulty translating academic language and the lack of readily available resources create significant roadblocks to effective instruction. Addressing these concerns necessitates strategic planning and resource allocation to guarantee creating, adapting, and disseminating culturally and linguistically relevant instructional materials. These investments are crucial for overcoming present challenges and establishing a sustainable foundation for the ongoing success of MTB-MLE initiatives (Tañiza et al., 2024).

Linguistic Diversity and Language Selection Difficulty

The rich tapestry of languages spoken in many regions implementing MTB-MLE presents both opportunities and challenges. This theme explores the complexities of language selection and its impact on program effectiveness.

A recurring theme is the difficulty in perfectly aligning instructional materials with students' specific mother tongues. Williams et al. (2014) identified this challenge, highlighting the emergence of various strategies at the school level to bridge the gap. This is further emphasized by Valerio's (2015) study, where teachers expressed uncertainty due to the lack of localized materials, hindering the effectiveness of instruction. Melchor (2020) reinforced this concern with a specific focus on Ilocano, highlighting the scarcity of quality materials and the challenges in implementing the program within this linguistic context.

These studies underscore the importance of local-level considerations. Burton (2014) emphasized the need for policy analysis and conceptual frameworks tailored to specific regions. Similarly, Metila et al. (2016) explored strategies for promoting social cohesion in linguistically diverse settings, suggesting the potential of a lingua franca approach.

Beyond practical considerations, a strong theoretical foundation is crucial for successful MTB-MLE implementation. Rossi et al. (2004) proposed a framework for program evaluation, emphasizing the need to assess program logic, delivery, and organization to ensure effectiveness. Hornberger (2002) added the concept of ideological and implementational spaces, highlighting the importance of societal acceptance and localized perspectives within educational systems.

In conclusion, navigating linguistic diversity in MTB-MLE requires a nuanced approach. Careful consideration of local languages, the development of context-specific instructional materials, and a strong theoretical foundation are all essential for ensuring program success. Effective MTB-MLE programs can be developed that celebrate

linguistic diversity and empower students to thrive by fostering collaboration between educators, policymakers, and local communities.

Community Engagement and Support

One important element to consider in the success of implementing MTB-MLE is community engagement and support, which underscores the fundamental impact of transparent communication between the schools and their stakeholders.

Existing studies, such as those of Tañiza et al. (2024) and Aguasan et al. (2024), acknowledged the need for more collaborative efforts between educational institutions and local stakeholders. Since communities recognize the learners' unique linguistic and cultural needs, their active involvement in crafting materials that mirror their local settings may ensure a more improved experience for students engaged in MTB-MLE. In addition to facilitating successful language instruction, community engagement instills in students a sense of pride and ownership in their cultural and linguistic identity.

Moreover, research by Skoropinski (2013) provided a positive outlook, highlighting the positive perceptions of parents and teachers in pilot schools across Mindanao. Their reported observations of increased student comprehension, improved reading skills, and stronger teacher-pupil relationships demonstrate the potential benefits of a well-supported program. This sentiment aligns with the findings of Rakusin (2024) in his study on the Bicol Region. Despite the linguistic complexities of the area, the research emphasized the importance of community support for successful MTB-MLE implementation.

Furthermore, studies by Burton (2013) and Rakusin (2024) highlighted the value of collaboration between teachers and communities. Burton's research in the Philippines found that teachers and parents believed in the program's potential despite facing resource limitations. However, they emphasized the need for collaborative relationships and community support to overcome these challenges. Similarly, Rakusin emphasized the importance of contextualized teaching materials, suggesting that community involvement in developing such resources could be beneficial.

While Purcia and Castante's (2023) study identified some teacher reservations about MTB-MLE, their recommendation to involve educators in curriculum development highlights the value of stakeholder engagement. The Department of Education can create a more effective and supported program by incorporating teacher expertise and addressing their concerns.

In conclusion, fostering strong relationships between schools and communities is essential for the success of MTB-MLE programs. Studies consistently point to the positive impact of community support on student learning and teacher morale. The findings offer valuable points of consideration for policymakers to look into the grassroots reality and optimize community involvement as a strategic component of language-based educational reforms, ensuring that MTB-MLE is consistent with the particular linguistic and cultural contexts of the communities it serves. By collaborating with stakeholders, developing culturally relevant resources, and fostering a shared vision for education, communities can play a vital role in building a thriving MTB-MLE environment.

3.2 Functional Framework for MTB-MLE Implementation in the Philippines

Based on the emerging themes, a functional framework was developed to provide a structured approach to understanding and addressing the grassroots reality when it comes to implementing MTB-MLE in the Philippines. The recurring themes are presented at the framework's core, including teacher preparedness and training, linguistic diversity and language selection difficulty, limited resources and difficulty in translation, and community engagement and support. Accompanied by the circular arrows, the themes that emerged from the scoping review on the implementation of the policy are revealed as self-perpetuating problems, where the same problems repeat themselves given their different contexts.

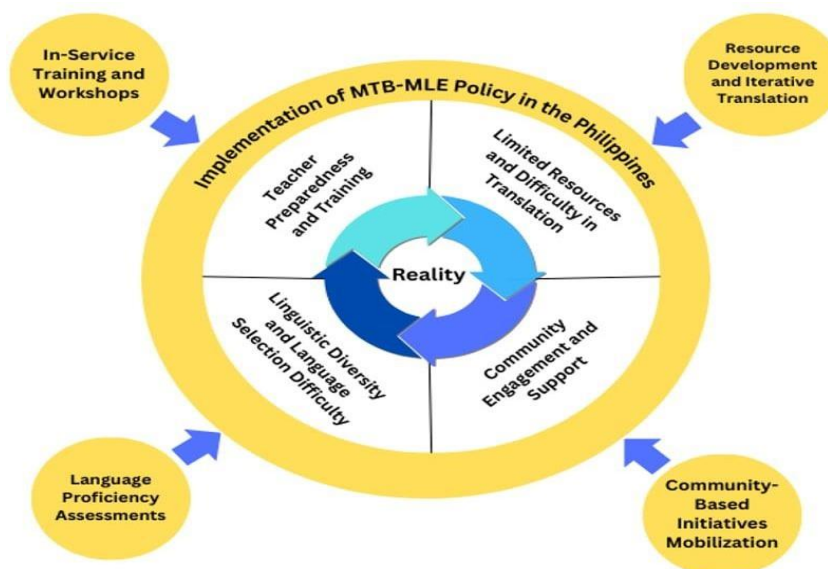


Figure 1. Functional Framework for MTB-MLE Implementation in the Philippines

Many teachers are not adequately trained to teach in the mother tongue. Also, deciding which languages to use as mediums of instruction in various regions is complex. As reported, there is often a lack of consensus on which dialects or language variations to prioritize, leading to implementation delays and inconsistencies. Aside from these, many mother tongues have a glaring shortage of teaching materials, textbooks, and resources. Also, a disconnect between schools and local communities is apparent, leading to limited support and understanding of the policy's benefits and difficulty in gaining the necessary local backing.

With these realities at the core of the implementation, several recommendations are presented, serving as facilitating forces in the effective implementation of the policy.

Firstly, in-service training and workshops may be done to enhance teacher readiness and competence in delivering MTB-MLE. Schools may conduct regular in-service training programs and workshops focusing on MTB-MLE pedagogy, lesson planning, and classroom management in a multilingual setting. Partnering with local universities and educational experts may provide teachers with ongoing professional development tailored to their specific linguistic contexts. This aligns with the study of Jimenez et al. (2015), which found in-service training for teachers on MTB-MLE policy as an essential move to improve their knowledge and confidence in implementing the policy.

Schools may focus on developing targeted training modules that address specific teaching strategies for multilingual classrooms. These modules should include differentiated instruction and culturally responsive pedagogy to ensure that teachers are well-equipped to handle the diverse linguistic needs of their students. Establishing Bayanihan Learning Circles (BLCs) may also provide opportunities for teachers to collaborate, share best practices, and discuss challenges they encounter. Moreover, incorporating simulation exercises and role-playing activities into workshops can give teachers hands-on experience in managing multilingual classrooms, making theoretical knowledge more practical and applicable. It must be noted that regular feedback sessions and follow-up workshops are essential for addressing ongoing challenges and continuously improving teaching practices.

Resource development and iterative translation are also suggested to create and distribute quality educational materials in various mother tongues. The study of Balane et al. (2018) found that the availability of mother tongue-based teaching materials and resources is a critical factor in the success of MTB-MLE policy implementation. Also,

schools may engage in an iterative translation process where local stakeholders review and refine the translated materials to ensure accuracy and relevance (Tan et al., 2020).

Creating localized educational materials through collaboration through the BLCs may ensure its content is culturally relevant and accurate. Pamanang Aklatan, or digital libraries of mother tongue-based resources easily accessible to teachers, students, and parents, may also be materialized to facilitate the wide distribution of high-quality materials. Establishing such resource centers within schools will provide teachers with access to a variety of MTB-MLE teaching materials, including books, visual aids, and digital resources. Aside from this, a cyclical review process for educational materials, where feedback from teachers and students is regularly incorporated, can help maintain the relevance and effectiveness of these resources. Additionally, organizing translation workshops that bring together teachers and local experts to translate and adapt educational content will foster a sense of ownership and ensure high-quality translations.

Thirdly, the conduct of language proficiency assessments to identify students' language abilities and place them in appropriate language tracks is also recommended (Mendoza et al., 2020). This is to assess students' language proficiency and provide targeted language support to ensure that they can access education in their mother tongue.

Comprehensive language proficiency assessment tools are crucial for evaluating students' listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills in their mother tongue. Implementing ongoing language assessments will allow for continuous monitoring of students' progress, enabling teachers to adjust their instructional strategies as needed. Based on assessment results, schools can provide targeted language support programs, such as tutoring or supplemental language classes, to ensure that all students achieve language proficiency. For this to be a success, training teachers on how to administer and interpret language proficiency assessments, and using the results to inform their teaching practices may be done to further support students' language development. It is also important to involve parents in the process by educating them on the importance of language assessments and how they can support their children's learning at home.

Lastly, it is imperative to mobilize community-based initiatives that involve parents, teachers, and local government units to foster community support and involvement in the MTB-MLE program (Gonzales et al., 2019). Schools may launch community outreach programs to educate parents and local leaders about the benefits of MTB-MLE. To build a strong support network, community participation may also be heightened through school activities, such as language festivals and cultural events.

Community-based initiatives are essential for fostering support and involvement in the MTB-MLE program. Conducting workshops for parents can educate them about the benefits of MTB-MLE and how they can contribute to their children's language development. Organizing cultural exchange programs and language festivals will also celebrate linguistic diversity and engage the community in the MTB-MLE program. This campaign may have a wider reach through public awareness campaigns through local media. Social media may also be utilized to highlight the importance and benefits of MTB-MLE, fostering broader community support. Furthermore, establishing volunteer programs where community members, including parents and local elders, assist in classrooms and share their linguistic and cultural knowledge, will further enrich the learning environment.

By implementing these comprehensive and specific recommendations, schools can significantly enhance the effectiveness of MTB-MLE programs ensuring that students receive high-quality education in their mother tongues while promoting linguistic and cultural diversity.

4.0 Conclusion

A scoping review of existing literature revealed key challenges in the implementation of MTB-MLE in the Philippines, including teacher preparedness and training, linguistic diversity and language selection difficulties, limited resources and translation challenges, and community engagement and support. To address these issues, the study proposed a functional framework, recommending the conduct of in-service training, resource development, language proficiency assessments, and community-based initiatives. These are perceived to be facilitating factors in the effective implementation of MTB-MLE.

After over a decade of MTB-MLE implementation in the Philippines, the policy continues to face grassroots challenges, necessitating policymakers' decisive actions. Hence, as the Philippines strives to improve its educational outcomes while honoring linguistic diversity and cultural heritage, it is imperative to maintain an ongoing dialogue with policymakers, communities, educators, and industry stakeholders. This collaborative approach ensures that policies like MTB-MLE are continually refined based on feedback and evolving needs.

5.0 Contributions of Authors

Czarina Alexandria P. Wata – project administration, conceptualization and research design, literature review and data collection, analysis and interpretation, writing and drafting, reviewing and editing; Charis G. Oraiz – literature review and data collection, analysis and interpretation, writing and drafting, visualization; John Louie D. Galang – conceptualization and research design, literature review and data collection, methodology, analysis and interpretation, writing and drafting; Cristian V. Dones – literature review and data collection, methodology, analysis and interpretation, writing and drafting.

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7.0 Conflict of Interests

All authors of this research declare that there is no conflict of interest pertaining to the publication of this paper.

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