

## **What it Feels Like to Introduce Your Mother: The Preservice Teachers' Perspectives**

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### ***Abstract:***

*Several studies have already been conducted regarding the use of mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) in instruction. However, there is a very limited data on the views and experiences of the preservice teachers in implementing MTB-MLE to the Waray pupils identified to have mixed vocabularies. This paper documented the experiences and views of 34 preservice teachers who were assigned at an MTB-MLE classroom of the Leyte Normal University-Integrated Laboratory School employing the descriptive single case study design. The data gathered through interviews, observations, and analysis of classroom documents were analyzed through open coding to generate themes and patterns. Results revealed the different benefits attributed to mother tongue instruction, the issues and challenges in its implementation, and the underlying misconceptions held by the preservice teachers. Recommendations of the study include the conduct of a re-orientation program and the inclusion of an intensive mother tongue course in the preservice teachers' curriculum.*

**Key Words:** *mother tongue instruction, multilingual education, preservice teachers, mixed vocabularies, Waray language*

### **Introduction**

Mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) in the Philippines was defined as the use of more than two languages for literacy and instruction which seeks to address the "high functional illiteracy of Filipinos" (Nolasco, 2009) where language plays a significant factor.

Studies assert that the use of mother tongue in teaching promotes the linguistic and educational development of children. (Cummins, 2001; Dumatog, 2003; Krashen, 2001). Malone (2004) further explained that a strong educational foundation in the first language is needed to bridge successfully into one or more additional languages and to continue using these languages for on-going education and for life-long learning.

Through Republic Act 10533 or the Basic Education Act of 2013, the K+12 curriculum was implemented by the Department of Education which mandated the use of mother tongue in the instruction from Kindergarten to Grade III. The Republic Act explicitly states that "the curriculum shall adhere to the principles and framework of MTB-MLE, which starts from where

the learners are and from what they already knew proceeding from the known to the unknown” (R.A. 10533, 2013).

However, Sanchez (2013) found out that the available literature on the topic rests on the assumption that the respondents have a strong linguistic foundation in their first language, thus, not addressing the emerging language trend among the Waray (Oyzon (2012). Likewise, Warner (2011) warned that not all sociolinguistic patterns are suitable for the use of mother tongue education.

This paper was, hence, conceptualized to provide a holistic view of the experiences and perceptions of the major stakeholders affected in the implementation of MTB-MLE in the Waray region of the Philippines. This paper, likewise, documented the challenges encountered by these preservice teachers in using the mother tongue approach to teaching that they have previously learned and how effective the method was to their pupils having a mixed tongue. A review of the studies published on the topic revealed a dearth of literature on the experiences and perspectives of preservice teachers implementing the Waray mother tongue program, particularly to children with mixed vocabularies. This paper is just one of the research initiatives in a developmental study with the ultimate aim of improving Waray mother tongue instruction.

### **Review of Literature**

Several studies stress the benefits of using mother tongue for instruction. Benson (2005) found an increase in female enrollment and active participation of parents; Khan (2016) found that MTB-MLE enhanced a student’s sense of classroom belongingness and receptiveness; Sario, Guiab, and Palting (2014) found that the use of mother tongue made pupils more active, participative, and interactive; and Vela (2015) revealed that teaching in the mother tongue results in better performance in science. Findings in the study of Mallareddy (2012) found also that neglected language skills development in the mother tongue resulted in the failure of the education system, especially at the undergraduate level.

Nolasco (2009), however, claimed that for MTB-MLE to work “there must be a development of good curricula, a pool of adequately trained teachers in the required languages, content and methodology, production of sufficient and suitable teaching materials, and the empowerment of the community”. However, the implementation falls short of these requirements.

Several studies highlighted the different concerns in MTB-MLE implementation. These include the lack of instructional materials, class size, shortages of suitably qualified teachers, preparation, and adequate training (Dio & Jamora, 2014; Gacheche, 2010; Singh, 2014; Wa-Mbaleka, 2014). Others argue the mismatch of instruction to the practical and actual use of the language in the child’s community (Hasselbring & Phil, (2015); Sanchez, 2013).

The attitude of the major stakeholders likewise affects its implementation. This includes the belief that English is the superior language (Khosa, 2012; Mahboob & Cruz, 2013) and

teaching through the mother tongue will hereby affect the students' proficiency in English. Burton (2013) likewise found out that teachers are covertly resisting the system because of future concerns about the outcomes of the MTB-MLE.

Despite these concerns, Rosekrans, Sherris, & Chatry-Komarek (2012) found that through this progressive powers of change, these problems in the implementation of MTB-MLE can be overcome through the development of standards of learning and materials, as well as innovative aspects of a constructivist teacher education approach (Rosekrans et al., 2012). Gacheche (2010) and Nolasco (2008) also highlighted the need to include greater resource allocation, political will, and clearer policy objectives. As there were no recent studies conducted to see how preservice teachers fare in an MTB classroom in the Waray region, a study on the views and perceptions of preservice teachers on MTB-MLE is then of utmost importance to see what can be done in terms of policy amendment and curriculum revision to improve program implementation.

The normalization process theory developed by May and Finch (2012) is used in this study. According to May and Finch, the normalization process theory is concerned with the social organization of the work (implementation), of making practices routine elements of everyday life (embedding), and of sustaining embedded practices in their social contexts (integration). Being a new policy in the Philippines, there is a need for MTB-MLE to be routinely and properly embedded in the social context of the preservice teachers. This will assist them in their instruction, improve their perception of the program, and ultimately help their pupils to learn.

This study then explored the different perspectives of the preservice teachers who had their practice teaching in a classroom implementing MTB-MLE. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do preservice teachers perceive mother tongue instruction?
2. What are the successes and challenges met by the preservice teachers in the implementation of MTB-MLE to pupils with mixed vocabularies?

## **Methodology**

### **Design**

A descriptive single case study design as described by Baxter P. & Jack S. (2008) was used to determine the preservice teachers' perspectives and experiences on the implementation of MTB-MLE.

### **Respondents**

The participants of this study were 34 preservice teachers who had their practice teaching at the Grade One class implementing MTB-MLE at the Leyte Normal University-Integrated Laboratory School for the school year 2015-2016.

## Data Gathering Procedure and Data Analysis

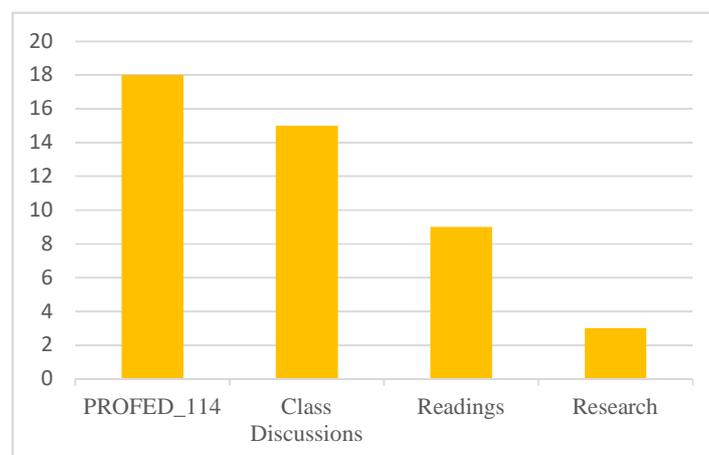
A methodological triangulation as described by Diehl, D., Guion, L., & McDonald, D. (2011) was used in the study. The preservice teachers' perspectives were explored through interviews, observations, and analysis of existing classroom documents. The interviews were done at the end of the first semester. An informed consent was acquired before the inception of the data collection emphasizing that participation is volitional and confidential and that they could withdraw participation at any time. The risks and benefits in the study were fully explained to the participants. Saturation point was considered in gathering the data. Thereafter, themes and patterns in the responses and behaviors during the interviews and direct observations were transcribed, recorded, and analyzed to determine respondents' perspectives of mother tongue instruction as well as their varied experiences. The existing classroom documents such as notebooks, books, and paper works given as quizzes or assignments to students were also looked into.

## Findings

Findings of the study revealed the different perspectives and experiences of the preservice teachers with regard to the implementation of MTB-MLE. These 34 preservice teachers had their practice teaching at the Grade One class of the Leyte Normal University-Integrated Laboratory School for the school year 2015-2016.

Eighteen participants identified their background knowledge of MTB-MLE to come from their course PROFED\_114 with the descriptive title Seminar in Teaching Education and Special Topics, 15 identified class discussions and training given by their professional education teacher, nine listed readings of materials written in Waray, and three identified the conduct of research studies. This distribution is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Preservice teachers' background knowledge of MTB-MLE



### **Benefits of the Mother Tongue Instruction**

The answers revealed four categories on the benefits of mother tongue instruction as perceived by the preservice teachers. These include Instruction, Language Acquisition, Social and Economic Development, and Promotion of Cultural Awareness.

#### **Instruction**

Twenty participants perceived mother tongue instruction to be effective in teaching young children. Sixteen of them noticed how active children were in class discussions. This can be gleaned from the answer of one participant saying that:

“Children actively participate in class activities. You can see that they are even competing as to who can recite first.”

On the part of the teachers, seven preservice teachers mentioned that they became confident in facing the children. They said that they can explain well the lesson and clarify misconceptions spontaneously.

“I have less things to think about like...is my English correct? Baga, nakakabaton ako dayon hin pakiana nira. (chuckles) (I can spontaneously answer their queries.)

#### **Language Acquisition**

Twelve participants viewed mother tongue-based multilingual education as an effective step to ensure a strong linguistic foundation not only of the Waray children but even of themselves.

“MTB-MLE will help Waray children to speak Waray. They don't speak Waray anymore.”

“The Grade One pupils speak in Waray, English, or Filipino. Mostly a combination of this language. But we try to talk to them in English since they talk to us in English.”

“Teaching in Waray also helps me develop how I speak or write in Waray. I learned that my Waray is disorganized kasi di ko man hiya ginpapansin kun ngayayakan na ako (because I do not usually notice how I speak). Now, I am conscious.”

#### **Promotion of Cultural Awareness**

Six participants viewed MTB-MLE to help preserve the Waray culture and language. One participant shared that:

“If no one will speak in Waray, there will be no Waray people. In our seminar, I learned that many languages becomes (become) extinct. I don't like that to happen in my language.”

“MTB-MLE makes us look at our community, even at us...iton keenly ba. Gathering stories, songs, riddles, siday is difficult to guide you in teaching pero naenjoy ako pagresearch. Lab-i na iton makatatawa na jokes (But, I enjoy researching especially the funny jokes.)”

### **Social and Economic Development**

MTB-MLE was also viewed to promote the social development of the pupils and even of themselves as preservice teachers.

“It is easy for them (the pupils) to make friends easily. At first, you will laugh at how they talk to one another. Mayda na-English, na-Tagalog, na-Waray but they understand tas (and) they play with each other,” shared by one participant.

Another shared that they (preservice teachers) tend to make friends whenever they roam around the community, even learned to talk with their neighbors to clarify Waray concepts they do not know of.

“We have an eighty-plus (year old) neighbour. Waray pa kami mgkaurustorya kay ada la man ako pirme sulod balay kun waray ko klase. Nkadaop la ako iya han waray may maaram nga iba kun ano iton “balangaw”. (We have never talked with each other eversince because I normally just stay inside the house when there are no classes. I just dared to approach her when no one could tell me the meaning of the Waray word balangaw (rainbow).) Then, we started talking about Waray terms ngan mga istorya hit kababalaghan (and horror stories)...hahaha! (laughs).”

Some participants view mother tongue to reduce dropout rates in schools and to induce a high enrolment rate. When asked how they got this perception, all three of them identified mother tongue research articles and seminars to be their source. One participant even implied that mother tongue instruction will help boost the country’s economy. He said that “MTB-MLE will help us have a high economic status”.

When asked deeply about his thoughts, he tried to establish a connection between enrolment and drop-out rate, active participation in class, and community involvement.

“One goal of MTB-MLE is community involvement. I learned that in our class. So, mkakabulig na an ira parents, mga kabugtuan, grandparents ha school work. (The parents, siblings, and even grandparents can already help in doing school work). Children will also be interested to go to school and participate in class since they will not think already (anymore) about their language-kun asya na or dire (if it is appropriate or not). The pupils will stay in school, graduate, work, and then help our country.”

## **Challenges and Issues in the Implementation of MTB-MLE**

The answers likewise revealed the different challenges and issues in the implementation of the MTB-MLE in the school as perceived by the preservice teachers. Four categories emerged related to Instruction, Lack of Instructional Materials, Language Confusion, and Cultural Conflict.

### **Instruction**

Four participants shared that some of the Waray words are unfamiliar making it too difficult for them to teach. “They (pupils) are not familiar with the Waray terms of colors, numbers...so they cannot memorize fast.”

Five participants said that MTB-MLE makes the lesson hard for the English-speaking pupils. “We need to translate the words for them to at least help them”, shared by one participant.

Two participants implied the need for qualified and well-trained teachers. One participant shared that: “It will be difficult for the teachers especially those handling multilingual class. What if there is a Bisaya pupils (pupil) and the teacher do (does) not know Bisaya? What will she do?”

Another two participants shared their views on the span of time it needs to fully implement MTB-MLE. “It will take a long time to be adopted (adapted) by teachers, students, and parents. There are no books yet and their attitude must also change.”

Likewise, one participant expressed her concern on the financial capability of the government in funding the program. She said that:

“MTB-MLE needs a lot of money to implement. Just imagine...different books for every language.”

One participant had a different view of MTB-MLE. She said:

“MTB-MLE contributes difficulties to the old curriculum. Waray pa hiya klaro until now. (It is still not clear.) Pwede man di ba hiya supplemental nga language pagteach pareho han una. (The L1 can be used as a supplemental language in teaching, as before.)

### **Lack of Instructional Material**

Most participants identified the lack of instructional materials to be a major issue in mother tongue implementation. Seventeen of them pinpointed the difficulties met in preparing their lessons without books and other reference materials. Also, most received questions from parents and guardians who themselves were not familiar with the Waray terms. Below were some of the views of the participants:

“We had to research and ask many people so we can have stories everyday to share especially in the Mother tongue subject... or poems, to motivate the children.”

“I prepare the lesson plan first in English then I translate it in Waray. Sometimes, I cannot find the right word and my co-practice teachers cannot help me.”

“I am not confident with my spelling of Waray words. I want to find a book in Waray with the correct spelling I can copy kay bagan iba-iba man (because the spelling is inconsistent)”

After classes, many parents approach (would approach) us and ask about the assignments kay they can't understand liwat. Many of them are angry if they can't understand.” (Many of them would get angry if they can't understand the assignment.

### **Language Confusion**

Three preservice teachers mentioned that MTB-MLE makes the pupils confused. One participant shared:

“Like han amon usa nga English-speaking, di na hiya maaram what to use in speaking. Di na lugod hiya nagsasaba-saba.” (Like our one English-speaking pupil, he doesn't know anymore what language to use. In the end, he tends to keep quiet.)

“Some pupils would correct their classmates answering in English so the child feels that his answer is wrong though it is correct.”

### **Cultural Conflict**

One surprising view was given by a participant who said that mother tongue instruction will increase ethnic conflict. When asked to expound on this view, he said that:

“Giving importance to our language is good. So it makes us feel unique or...important...or superior. So we want to make everybody feel that. This is the same with other cultures or... ethnic groups. So in the process, ethnic groups will clash.”

### **Perspectives on Mother Tongue Instruction**

Majority of the preservice teachers identified the use of mother tongue to be effective in teaching young children especially in encouraging them to actively participate in class. This confirms the findings in the study of Khan (2016) that mother tongue instruction inculcates a sense of belongingness to the learners. It may be the acceptance of whatever language used by the children in the class that pushes them to speak as opposed to the child discrimination and oppression experienced before when a particular language was mandated to be exclusively used. Another great benefit of MTB-MLE is the promotion of community involvement especially of the old folks who were more learned in the Waray culture.

On the other hand, one observation of a participant that his pupil opts not to speak anymore because of language confusion and insecurity especially when classmates tend to correct the vocabulary he uses argues with the findings of Khan (2016) and Sario, Guiab, and Palting (2014). This may be because their studies assume that the learners have a strong

linguistic foundation in their first language and not those possessing a mixed tongue. It may also imply a lack of proper dissemination and orientation on the part of the pupils and their primary caregivers as to what the MTB-MLE concept is.

The answers suggested, too, that the preservice teachers had less difficulty in discussing topics using the mother tongue, except those who themselves were not Waray speakers. However, the difficulty of some pupils to grasp Waray concepts is a different matter altogether. Teacher effectiveness measures how well the pupils learned and not how well the teachers delivered. The answers of the participants which revealed that Waray children do not speak in Waray fluently anymore and that they mostly use a combination of languages confirm the findings of Oyzon (2010) that there is an emerging language trend among the Waray children. Studies then on better approaches for MTB-MLE the should be done targeting this type of learners as suggested in the study of Sanchez (2013) to solve these instructional difficulties.

It may be gleaned from the answers as well that some of the difficulties experienced by these preservice teachers were related to poor planning and implementation of the program such as the lack of instructional materials and adequately trained teachers confirming the findings of Wa-Mbaleka (2014). In the same manner, the different misconceptions revealed in the answers could be linked to poor dissemination, training, and orientation of the preservice teachers. The answer of five participants saying that mother tongue instruction is advantageous to native speakers, of two participants equating the goal of the program to the domination of L1 from other languages, and of five participants stating that MTB-MLE makes lessons difficult for English-speaking children implies a limited understanding of the mother tongue program.

Malone (2004) has defined mother tongue as a language the child has learned first and is using most. Hence, the preservice teachers should understand that the mother tongue of the pupil could either be Waray, Filipino, English, or any other language. Waray instruction should not be forced, else, this misconception will lead to academic cruelty which the program wishes to avert. Mother tongue instruction is also not about dominance of languages but of preservation of one's identity and culture. The concept of language supremacy, especially of the English language, is what the mother tongue program wishes to overturn.

An in-depth understanding of MTB-MLE is likewise needed for the preservice teachers to realize that mother tongue instruction is not about memorization as implied by four participants with one saying that: "They (pupils) are not familiar with the Waray terms of colors, numbers...so they cannot memorize fast." nor translation of words from Waray to English or vice versa as inferred by five participants with one stating that: "We need to translate the words for them to at least help them". One goal of the program is to promote language authenticity which could not be preserved through translation and memorization.

Another participant has a distorted view of MTB-MLE believing that the program will create cultural discord instead of the unity it is promoting despite cultural diversity. The participant was found to have a very limited background of MTB-MLE which was merely

confined to concepts learned in their PROFED\_114 subject. As to the language confusion by the pupils, this was already explained under the interdependence theory of Cummins (2000) which asserts that a solid foundation in their L1 is a strong predictor of L2 and L3 success.

The normalization process suggested by May and Finch (2012) was not fully actualized because of the problems met in the program's implementation which adversely affected the preservice teachers' practice and exposure in the field. However, having a first-hand experience of these problems and issues may arouse social responsibility and motivate them to study and conduct researches on how to fully integrate MTB-MLE on the lives of the Waray who are already speaking a mixed tongue. The process of embedding may then be successful through them.

### **Conclusion**

The answers suggest that the implementation of MTB-MLE in the Philippines is still a work in progress, particularly in the Waray region, with a very minimal consideration given to learners who are already speaking a mixed tongue. The support and prioritization of the national government, then, as well as the political will of the Department of Education will define the success or failure of this MTB-MLE curriculum (Medilo, 2016).

The challenges and issues met by the preservice teachers may be attributed to the fact that their exposure concerned pupils having mixed vocabularies as opposed to those having a strong linguistic foundation in their mother tongue. The latter was seen to be the research focus in mother tongue instruction (Cummins, 2000; Dekker, 2003; Malone, 2004), especially in its pedagogical considerations, in which these practice teachers were trained for.

Other problems leaned more on the insufficiency of instructional materials and background knowledge of MTB-MLE, lack of proficiency of the preservice teachers in the mother tongue used for instruction, and the attitudinal problems of the parents and community stakeholders hindering its successful implementation. Most of these problems have long been identified in a series of studies conducted in the country, however, its resolution is yet to be seen.

There were already initiatives by the institution concerned in this study in providing MTB-MLE background knowledge to their education students but these are still found wanting in adequately preparing the practice teachers for their field exposure. More so, if there is a mismatch in their preparation and actual field experience.

### **Suggestions and Recommendations**

There are still a lot of things to do to improve mother tongue instruction and to ensure its maximum benefits. A curriculum review, constant monitoring, and regular conduct of training and re-orientation programs are needed to provide the needs of the preservice and in-service teachers, the students, and of the school. Understanding how mother tongue instruction works will ensure their participation in school and will minimize queries and questions raised.

An in-depth training or an intensive course is needed to adequately prepare the preservice teachers for field exposure. Pedagogies for mother tongue should be introduced to them as well as a series of training to gain proficiency in their own mother tongue before teaching. Hence, the need for proficient and well-experienced mentors before their practice teaching. Also, a well-thought-out plan for their practice teaching assignment is needed matching their mother tongue to that of their learners.

The Waray 101 course offered in the university should be changed from an elective to a mandatory course for all education students. There is a need as well to intensify their training and instruction with the inclusion of effective classroom pedagogies to assist the students. Being one of the major languages in Region 8, Cebuano could also be offered by the university as one of the courses to assist those whose mother tongue is Cebuano and those who will in the future teach Cebuano pupils. The offered course should not be limited to Waray.

In their practice teaching, this study also recommends for the consideration of the preservice teachers' mother tongue in giving them assignments in the field. Their mother tongue should be matched with the mother tongue used by the would-be pupils to help both the pupils and the teacher.

Since this study is limited only to the perspectives of the preservice teachers in one laboratory classroom in a university implementing MTB-MLE and only for a duration of one semester, the conduct of studies focusing on the perspectives of other stakeholders is likewise recommended. Similar studies may also be done in other schools in the Waray region to verify results. The length of observation may also be lengthened. In the study of Romaine (1995), he said that public attitudes should also be looked into aside from the academic studies on multilingualism. Failure to investigate the attitudes of major stakeholders will lead to the program's downfall.

Further studies about the experiences of MTB-MLE in-service and preservice teachers are highly recommended to gain a deeper understanding of how MTB-MLE works in the real setting. These studies could even go beyond to find out instructional problems through experimental, correlational and curriculum evaluation studies.

Lastly, research initiatives should also focus on developing appropriate teaching methods for learners who are using a mixed tongue.

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