After 10 Years of MTB-MLE Implementation: Narratives of First-Hand Implementers

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ABSTRACT

In the current language in education policy in the Philippines, there is a minimal data on the experiences of first-hand implementers in MTB-MLE during its implementing years especially in the Davao City. This phenomenological research aimed to explore the experiences of the first-hand MTB-MLE implementers, and educational insights to sustain its implementation. Results revealed that the experiences of the first-hand implementers showed positivity and openness among them; considered MTB-MLE as a mandate, beneficial and fallible; adhered to training and development; helped prepare learning materials; and, implemented it in a multilingual setting. It has been proven that from the experiences, educational insights to sustain MTB-MLE were drawn such as: motivating factors to sustain; utilizing technology in multilingual classrooms; applying the strategies from trainings; and, actualizing the policy as a mandate. The first-hand implementers became familiar with government standards and understand that those standards are the foundation for the MTB-MLE curriculum; they understand that in following the MTB-MLE curriculum they will enable their students to achieve the government standards; hence, they would enable students to achieve the kind of learning the students deserve. On the part of the first-hand implementers, the occurrence of the identified experiences is a call for the policymakers and curriculum designers to monitor and evaluate the feedback coming from the grassroots in order to identify points crucial for the betterment of the language policy.

Keywords: *mother-tongue based, multilingual education, language policy, first-hand implementers, experiences and educational insights*

1. INTRODUCTION

It was reported that a bilingual approach not only improves educational outcomes in developing countries but could help close achievement gaps. In African continent, Kruger (2019) reiterated that only a couple of decades ago, 90% of Africans spoke only African languages, 70% of South Africans understood Zulu, while the arbitrary classification of different types of English in Africa was incorrect. More than half a century after UNESCO declared the importance of MTBE for minority children, "and despite a plethora of books, articles, numerous conventions, declarations and recommendations addressing this issue… most African countries continue to use" the European languages inherited from the colonizers (UNESCO, 2010). While some may see it as an opportunity offered to Africans to contribute to the global discourse, others see this as neocolonialism. For them, African languages face stigmatization because of English imperialism (Durodolu & Mojapelo, 2024). Yet, all languages are expected to have equal right to be "protected, respected and developed" (Krishnamurthy, 2022). This situation has led parents in some Asian countries, for instance, to the hard choice between fighting English imperialism or accepting English because of the socio-economic opportunities that it provides (Dharmaputra, 2018).

It has been published that United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has committed to support mother tongue-based education (MTBE) and

multilingual education and the diversity that is reflected in different languages and cultures (UNESCO, 2022). UNESCO is even more interested in disadvantaged groups of people. It is no surprise that one of the Millennium Development Goals is to offer universal primary education while promoting MTBE. Also, UNESCO championed that children must be educated in the language they know best for the maximization of learning, thus, promoting the use of mother tongue in the primary years of education, which led to the birth of the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education Policy (MTBMLE). The 1960 Convention and Recommendation against Discrimination in Education reechoed that every citizen of a country should enjoy the right to education even through the use of their mother tongue (UNESCO, 2023). Through the years, the resurgence of the MTB-MLE has been a sustained discussion as a call for universal education.

The institutionalization of mother tongue-based instruction in the early years of basic education existed as a trend among countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam, and Thailand (Kirkpatrick & Liddicoat, 2017). In these countries, the policy was actualized only at the community level, with the use of non-dominant languages allowed to some extent. However, in support of UNESCO's aim to empower children from communities with diverse mother tongues, the country implemented the MTB-MLE in all public schools, which tagged the Philippines as the only Southeast Asian country that institutionalized it as a national policy under the provisions of the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 or the RA 10533 (Evangelista-Garcia et al., 2024).

In the Philippines, Tupas & Martin (2017) explained that the legitimization of the mother tongues as languages of instruction has not come easy. It came on the heels of the continued dominance of bilingual education in the country – the mode of educational provision since the early 1970s during which a political compromise was reached to use both English and Tagalog-based Filipino as the two MOI in the schools. English was to be the MOI in the teaching of mathematics and science, and the national language was used to teach all other subjects in the curriculum. Dimaculangan & Gonzales (2020) believe that due to the last century that was mainly focused on English instruction, this new policy is a major paradigm shift. According to them, the success of MTB-MLE will highly depend on the change in attitude towards languages. This is a conclusion they reached after their study revealed some positive attitudes towards the MTB-MLE policy.

One of the changes in Basic Education Curriculum brought about by the new K-12 program is the introduction of Mother Tongue- Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) specifically in Kindergarten, Grades 1, 2 and 3 to support the goal of "Every Child- A- Reader and A – Writer" by Grade 1". Mother Tongue is used as a Medium of Instruction (MOI) for Grades 1, 2 and 3 in teaching Math, Araling Panlipunan (AP), Music, Arts, Physical Education and Health (MAPEH) and Edukasyon sa Pag-uugali (EsP). Mother tongue is taught as a separate Learning Area in Grades 1 and 2, and since the implementation of this ten-year old language policy, it had been coupled by researches justifying its need in the Philippine educational system.

Since there was minimal data on the experiences of the first-hand implementers, which are the teachers, it was necessary to delve into the narratives of teachers in a school district of Davao del Norte, specifically in the municipality of New Corella on the implementation of the language shift in education after ten years of its implementation. This academic endeavor was the soft ground of teachers' narratives about the implementation of MTB-MLE that would become the bird's eye view of the Department of Education officials to know any hindrance or challenges for them to enhance the practices of not just the teachers but of the entirety of the Department's implementing guidelines of the language policy as well.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to explore and describe the narratives of first-hand implementers of MTB-MLE. In ten years, the implementers were deemed to have experienced challenges and strategies during the implementation and how it shaped their individual perspectives and attitudes towards the implementation of the language education policy. With the hopes to make this study a springboard for future research in a similar field, the study delved into the participants' narratives. It came up with recommendations for the betterment of the enactment of the policy in the given context. The realities experienced by the teachers themselves were valid accounts of how the policy was scrutinized and critically assessed at their own level.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Philosophical Assumptions of the Study

Studying narratives inherently involves adopting a theory of representation (Vaara et al., 2016), which helps distinguish and evaluate narrative studies. Narrative research aligns with the interpretive stance in qualitative research, rejecting objectification and embracing the constructiveness of knowledge (Pregoner, 2024). Clandinin and Rosiek (2019) view narrative inquiry as a paradigm rooted in John Dewey's theory of experience, distinct from postpositivism, Marxism, and post-structuralism.

My research applied criteria like sequence, causality, unity, problem-solving, and intentionality (Dhungana, 2022). It explored how individual and collective narratives, such as teachers' perspectives on MTB-MLE, reflect broader societal constructs. Inspired by constructivist and interpretive approaches, I analyzed personal and shared stories to uncover deeper meanings (Denicolo, 2016).

Narrative analysis highlights how culture and language shape reality (Riessman, 1993). Using status and perspective questions (Baynham& De Fina, 2016) helped define narrative approaches and address methodological challenges, balancing "what" and "how" aspects. Cruz et al. (2024) emphasized the flexibility of qualitative methods, allowing researchers to study social issues in depth through open-ended inquiry, capturing participants' voices, and using reflexive analysis to contribute to the literature and inspire change.

This study will make use of one of the qualitative inquiries, which is narrative research. The narratives of the first-hand implementers of MTB-MLE were focused in order to draw ideas of sequences or succession of events from the time of the implementation up to present. The 10-year implementation of the policy is known in this qualitative research.

2.3 Research Participants and Sampling

The sample used for this study is both a purposive and convenience sample. From the purposive perspective, it included two separate groups of teachers from different public elementary schools in the municipality of New Corella. A key criterion for selecting this purposive sample was the inclusion of teachers as first-hand implementers of MTB-MLE amidst radical organizational changes from 2012 to the present. These changes are defined as either proposed changes or those that had already been implemented. The participants were selected because they were living the experience being investigated.

From the convenience perspective, the samples were chosen because the participants were easily accessible to the researcher. While convenience sampling introduces potential biases, such as limited generalizability and the possibility of excluding broader perspectives, measures were taken to mitigate these biases. For instance, the sample was purposively selected to include teachers with firsthand experience in the initial implementation of MTB-MLE to ensure relevance and depth. Additionally, the selection process ensured representation from various schools in New Corella, with each school having at least two teachers participate in the study. This approach helped minimize the risks associated with convenience sampling by balancing accessibility with purposive criteria.

For the final number of research participants, there were ten (10) grade school teachers from different schools in New Corella. Five (5) participated in in-depth interviews (IDI), and five (5) participated in focus group discussions (FGD). The rationale for the study was comprehensively explained to all MTB-MLE teachers in each school in New Corella, and participants were chosen after obtaining their approval. The number of respondents in each school was expected to reach at least five (5), allowing for negotiation and renegotiation of availability to ensure participation.

2.4 Research Instrument

The instruments used in this study were designed to align with the qualitative approach employed. The main instruments consisted of close-ended and open-ended questionnaires, interview guides, and observational protocols, including the researcher's notes on participants' body language while responding to questions. These tools were developed to gather comprehensive qualitative data and achieve the objectives of the study.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data-gathering instruments, an interview guide was prepared for both focus group discussions (FGD) and in-depth interviews (IDI). The guide included a maximum of 15 items per research question to maintain clarity and focus. The questions were designed to elicit participants' subjective responses and insights into their lived experiences as first-hand implementers of MTB-MLE. To refine the instruments and ensure their effectiveness, the interview guide underwent expert validation. Five experts in the field rigorously reviewed the instrument for content validity, assessing its alignment with the research objectives, clarity, relevance, and ability to capture the necessary data. The experts provided feedback, and revisions were made based on their recommendations to enhance the instrument's validity and reliability.

In addition to the interview guide, other tools included observation notes and a tape recorder for capturing qualitative data during the discussions. The FGD and IDI protocols were meticulously prepared to facilitate a smooth and organized flow of information. The discussions were carried out while the survey was still underway, providing an opportunity to substantiate the outcomes and allow participants to express their concerns narratively. Six participants were involved in the FGDs, and 10 participants in the IDIs, all of whom were individually approached by the researcher to ensure voluntary participation. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before the data collection process commenced.

2.5 Data Collection

Narrative research has become a key component of qualitative inquiry, gaining prominence in the 1990s with the emergence of narrative inquiry as a structured approach to studying human experiences (Butler-Kisber, 2019). For this study, ethical protocols were strictly adhered to, including obtaining approvals from relevant authorities and securing informed consent from participants.

The data collection process involved two primary methods: episodic narrative interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). The study employed Mueller's (2019) episodic narrative interview, a structured qualitative method designed to elicit bounded stories of participants' experiences. This method, rooted in principles of experience-centered narrative (Squire, 2013), combined semi-structured interviews, narrative inquiry, and episodic interviews, allowing for a nuanced exploration of participants' lived experiences. The interviews were guided by appreciative inquiry, emphasizing the understanding of exceptional and meaningful experiences.

Focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with another group of participants to complement and enhance the data collected from the interviews. The FGDs provided a platform for participants to engage in collaborative discussions, which enriched the thematic analysis with collective insights.

Observations were also integrated into the data collection process. The researcher paid close attention to non-verbal cues, body language, and contextual behaviors during the interviews and FGDs. While no formal observation tool was employed, observational data were documented in detailed field notes immediately after each session. These observations

were triangulated with the transcribed interviews and FGDs during thematic analysis, providing an additional layer of context to the participants' narratives.

Recorded interviews and FGDs were transcribed verbatim and encoded in a matrix for thematic analysis. The observational data were also included in the matrix to capture non-verbal cues and behaviors that enriched the understanding of participants' responses. Initial findings were validated by a data analyst to ensure credibility. All raw and processed data were securely stored to maintain confidentiality and ensure accessibility for reference.

2.6 Data Analysis

In the language planning and policy (LPP) model of Ricento and Hornbergers (1996), only the interpersonal level was the focus of this study, which was through the narratives of the teachers, herein referred to the first-hand implementers. Narrative research was a term that subsumes a group of approaches that in turn relied on the written or spoken words or visual representation of individuals. These approaches typically focused on the lives of individuals as told through their own stories. Clandinin and Connelly (2004) defined it as "a way of understanding and inquiring into experience through "collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus."

In this study, I used narrative analysis to understand how the first-hand implementers constructed their story and narrative from their own personal experience on the implementation of the MTB-MLE. That means there was a dual layer of interpretation in narrative analysis. First, the first-hand implementers interpreted their own lives through narrative. Then I interpreted the construction of that narrative.

Narrative analysis referred to a number of procedures for interpreting of the narratives generated in research: formal structural and functional (Ntinda, 2019). Formal structural means of analysis entailed exploring how a story was structured, how it was developed, and where the story started and ended. Functional analysis focused on what the narrative was "doing" or what was being conveyed in the story (e.g., moral tale or a success story) (Wong & Breheny, 2018).

In the thematic analysis, emphasis was on the content of a text, "what" was said more than "how" it was said, the "told" rather than the "telling". A (unacknowledged) philosophy of language underpinned the approach: language was a direct and unambiguous route to meaning. As Grounded Theorists do, investigators collected many stories and inductively created conceptual groupings from the data. A typology of narratives organized by theme was the typical representational strategy, with case studies or vignettes providing illustration.

The researcher took all required steps to carry out this study in compliance with the ethical standards for qualitative research. The researcher ensured that the participants understood all of the study's details and the concepts being presented to them. The researcher also needed to provide certain documents to the ethical committee of the graduate program, which was in charge of verification and approval.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Experiences of the First-Hand MTB-MLE Implementers

This study was conducted to look into the experiences of the first-hand implementers of MTB-MLE. This includes describing the following: teachers' stance on the implementation;

MTB-MLE as a mandate; training and development for first-hand implementers; preparation of learning materials; and, implementation in a multilingual setting. All of these are shown in Figure 1.

Teacher's Stance on the Implementation

Beyond the practical, pedagogical, and administrative approaches to the various challenges in the actualization of the policy, teachers' stance was accounted for from the perspectives and decisions teachers and coordinators pursued. Being a transition policy from Bilingual Education, the introduction of MTB-ME brought forth numerous changes in the system, which, for **T3**, required positivity and openness.

These valuable attitudes of the first-hand implementers of MTB-MLE somehow adhered to the result of the study of Andrino et al. (2020), which highlighted that the attitudes and practices of teachers toward the mandatory implementation of MTB-MLE played a vital role in the enhancement of the educational system in the country, and that the majority of the teachers possessed a favorable attitude towards the program.

Despite the difficulty in adapting with the mandate from the national policy makers, **T3** encouraged her fellow teachers to be positive and to be open to changes in terms of adapting to the mandate coming from the national down to the schools.

Moreover, **T6** added that they should indeed take things positively and that being obedient is the key. In her interview, she also shared that her teaching career is a vocation, hence, her optimism despite all. In reference to Berger et al. (2018), teachers' experiences revealed not only their challenges, but also the general classroom practices and methods of teaching that they made use of. While it was mentioned prior to the discussion of the participants' strategies that the data did not necessarily address the concerns mentioned above, it can be traced that most of their responses were directed to not only better their instruction, but also to solve or ease the challenges to assist their students, to secure learning, and to adapt to the demands of MTB-MLE as a national mandate. All these manifested their different outlooks and stances on the language policy as they were the ones at the core of the implementation.

MTB-MLE As a Mandate of the Department of Education

The five (5) individual interview participants and the three (3) focused group discussion participants supplied a variety of responses when asked about the language policy as a mandate of the Department of Education. Though varied, patterns can be traced according to how they viewed the mandate—from policy to practice.

Policy as a Mandate. One recurring theme that emerged from the responses of the participants was their notion of MTB-MLE as a mandate from the national government. Since this is part of the current educational curriculum, followed by all the schools in the country, they became acquainted with it as an order to follow, and had left them with no option but to comply.

T2 and **T5** highlighted that what was mandated had to be followed and had to be implemented accordingly.

It was affirmed by both **T1** and **FGD** Participants that the K-12 curriculum held them accountable for the implementation and it is their responsibility to sell it out.

While **T4** emphasized that teachers do not have the right to resist and defy from what has been institutionalized, FGD Participants underscored that despite its imperfection as a policy, they already got accustomed to it with the idea in mind that it is after all, a mandate that they have to conform to.

The participants had utterly emphasized in the beginning of every interview the fact that MTB-MLE was a mandate and part of the soul of the current educational curriculum. The adaptation, apart from the adding of senior high school, was the biggest reform in the current education system in the country. Hence, while responding participants were going back to the point that the policy was like their Bible, a reference of everything that they had to implement in the classrooms.

*Policy as Beneficial.*Another theme that arose from the take of the participants was the view on thepolicy as beneficial. There were a number of them who accentuated various advantagesof the policy that made it rewarding in their point of views. There were mentions in thelight of it as a subject area and a medium of instruction.

As a subject area that utilized contextualized examples, the students were more able to relate and understand, hence, grasping meaning and making connections in an early age were made possible.

As a medium of instruction in other areas excluding Math and Sciences, the students were aided in comprehension as well. To further testify on the benefits, there were instances where students' performances were positively affected by the occurrence of the policy. Slow learners were assisted, and the increase of their scores were manifestations of their improvement, as stated by **T1** and **T4.**

Moreover, the policy eased the anxiety of the students to communicate their opinions in class because of the assurance of being familiar with the language at home and in school.

Evident on the responses were testimonies to the projected benefits found in the utilization of mother tongue such as aiding in expression and communication. Similar to the previous study of Maragha(2024), there emerged a more dynamic and participative classroom environment with feelings of openness, belongingness, and comfortability improved, which generated enhancement in the cognitive and psychomotor aspects of learners.

Lastly, apart from the positive outcomes displayed on the learners, the policy benefited the teachers as well. **T1** noted that teachers who shared the struggle of using English as a medium of instruction have seen this policy as advantageous on their end.

Despite the issue concerning adhering to the policy out of compliance, the teachers remained positive as they viewed the policy beneficial not only for them but all the more for the students. During the interviews, participants were initially optimistic about the policy, especially those who have responsive and supportive implementation experiences. Most of them sounded proud of how the beauty of the usage of mother tongue and how it changed the way instructions were done. It was observable in the data that in every sharing of the participants about the significance and light of MTB-MLE, they had presented contradictory points after. Having said that, on the other side of the spectrum laid the drawbacks that contributed to their next view of the policy.

Policy as Fallible. The notion that the current language-in-education policy has its share of flaws and imperfections also surfaced. These were highlighted by the challenges and issues that had been faced by the participants in actualizing the mandate. Participants identified the argument that Davao has no orthography of its own, resulting in all its elements to be in Sinugbuanong Binisaya, a different variety from the one used here. This view on the policy was resonated by the FGD Participants as well.

With the use of a different orthography came the issues on the differentiated and unfamiliar terminologies used in learning materials and expectedly in class.

Similarly, in non-MTB subjects occurred the same issue in utilizing a different language than that of the Davao-based Bisaya. **T3** hinted that there happened a difficulty in unlocking terminologies in Math subject.

Moreover, **T2** noticed that there existed inconsistencies in the usage of such terminologies in different grade levels.

Additionally, **T3** accentuated the different challenges in the technicalities and content of the subject, particularly in it being a language program consisting of all the elements of language. Also, when exposed to other languages, like English, the students react differently compared to the usage of mother tongue.

Finally, as mentioned by **T3** the influence of the individual differences of the students, which is a given thing in a class, had been a challenge to deal with since the policy seemed to rule out the available contexts of its recipients.

The view on the policy as fallible was evidently present in the identification of the challenges and concerns that the participants raised as they responded to the first research question discussed above. During the eight implementing years of the policy, these teachers have been facing troubles and inconveniences, individualized or shared, in doing their job not only inside the classrooms, but also in dealing with all the stakeholders involved. Apparently, no policy was ever sleek and perfect. However, as the interviews were conducted, there were remarks that came from the participants about hesitations in disclosing challenges, or hopelessness regarding the promise of possible reforms as response to their pleas. Since I expected the said response from them, a clear assurance of confidentiality was given to them so that themes, like viewing the policy as fallible through their challenges, will be revealed.

Training and Development for First-Hand Implementers

In the implementation of the policy, teacher training sessions are regarded as a prime area to deal with as it aims to produce change in teachers' attitude, beliefs, and motivations (Paulson, 2012), as well as in strategies in lesson delivery and classroom management. I identified it as a source of concern (Dio &Jamora, 2014; Gacheche, 2010; Singh, 2014; Wa-Mbaleka, 2014). With that, another area identified in this study is the teacher training and development of the MTB-MLE educators and the challenges that came along with it.

For teaching training and development, contrary to the lack of training in Leyte and Baguio, as revealed in the studies of Bajas et. al (2017), DepEd Davao del Norte Division

seemed to provide the teachers with all the necessary trainings and seminars both in preparation and during the implementation of the policy.

Consistency of Trainings and Development. The participants inferred that DepEd had been consistent in that aspect. As FGD Participant 1 shared, "(*Training sessions) are handled well. From national to regional, down to division and district, and to the school's levels, training is done whenever there are necessary changes which really serve as our guide. No teacher is left behind in schools in terms of training.*" To supplement, FGD Participant 3 shared, "*Every year, they provided us with new inputs regarding MTB".*

These sessions were varied, which came in the form of Early Language Literacy and Numeracy (ELLN), Mid-year Performance Review and Evaluation (MPRE), and Learning Action Cell (LAC), to name a few, as specifically cited by **T4**, **T1**, and the majority for LAC, respectively. **T5** expounded that LAC sessions are solely for mother tongue where they are "*taught how to teach reading words, sound blending…"*

Moreover, these training sessions adhered to specific mechanisms. **T3** shared, "*When you are in public, the Division has programs. However, not everyone will be sent to the training. They will only choose selected teachers, and these teachers re-echo their learning to us.*" **T2** justified the large number of teacher attendeesas a factor to consider. Nevertheless, speaking on behalf of her fellow K-3 teachers in nearby Elementary School, **T3** insisted that they did not see it as a problem. "*We have meetings from time to time. We, in Grade 2, discuss ideas when a problem arises. There is also a monthly meeting where we can plan about the budget of work and subjects so that we could teach the lessons before the examinations. We cooperate with one another,*" she added. However, there were identifiedproblems in this area.

Re-echo of Trainings. The teachers who were sent for trainings were anxious of the tasks, i.e., re-echoing of what they have learned in the training. **T5** considered the post-training reports as a taxing requirement given their workload. The training demanded outputs from the attendees as monitoring.

The abrupt application of interventions as a post-training activity seemed to be also a challenge for **T2**.

Moreover, apart from the taxing reports, **T4** deemed simultaneous conduct of the training with the daily class schedule a challenging part in the teacher development.

She stressed that the LAC sessions conducted by the subject or grade level coordinators were scheduled after class dismissal which the time was supposed to be allotted for checking of papers and consultations for students.

Improper Designation of Teachers. A challenge on the designation of teachers was an issue. Two participating schools in Davao del Norte dealt with improper designation of teachers. As practiced across the country, trained teachers for MTB-MLE were supposed to be assigned to Kindergarten until Grade 3 levels. However, back in 2016, trained teachers, like the participants, witnessed co-teachers being transferred to the higher levels, while the new untrained ones were assigned to the K-3 classes. FGD Participant 3 shared that those teachers struggled in implementing the curriculum in class due to lack of training, and those who have been trained also had difficulty in implementing non-MTB-MLE based classes.

The challenge on designation was elaborated by FGD Participant 2. She mentioned that once teachers had been trained for MTB-MLE, they had to stick to the grade levels that the training was designed for, hence became the problem when inappropriately designated.

With the shuffling of teachers, it can be inferred that the teachers who were inappropriately designated were challenged, hence, they had to conduct extra measures as it was deemed necessary to adjust based on the level they were at, regardless of their training experience or the lack, worse, absence, thereof.

Preparation of Learning Materials

This highlighted part in this study was considered a challenge given the existing system of the Department of Education in providing learning materials to the local stakeholders of MTB-MLE. Prior to the implementation of the policy, the issue concerning the absence or lack of instructional materials in mother tongue was raised since the approach appeared to have been actualized in "a headlong rush" by the DepEd (Nolasco, 2012). This study revealed that the participating schools in Davao region were plagued with issues concerning books and guides.

Outdated Books. **T1** observed how the textbooks, utilized by both teachers and students, were outdated. With the content of the first released batch of textbooks retained, no changes had been applied despite the various supposed updates in the teacher's guide. Despite over a decade of introduction, the books intended for student consumption remained the same—similar to the situation in Leyte four (4) years ago. Bajas et. al. (2017) identified this issue as a problem after five year-course since the implementation of the policy. In 2020 and 2021, the situation remained the same but in Davao region.

The participants acknowledged the delivery of books to the schools. However, as **T3** observed, there occurred an incongruence between the book content and the curriculum guide. The teachers were expected to follow the curriculum guide and the sequence of competencies in implementing MTB-MLE. However, the textbooks had different organization hence the confusion.

Still stating observance of the textbooks as learning materials, **T3** and **T5** both mentioned that the indicated lessons in the books were unorganized in terms of its content. In MTB-MLE books, there were topics covered in a particular period that should have been in the other quarter. The discrepancy of content in the learning materials emerged as a problem in previous studies, particularly accentuated by Lartec(2014) conducted in Baguio.

Provision of learner support materials. This was one among the problems raised prior to the implementation of the policy (Dio &Jamora, 2014; Gacheche, 2010; Singh, 2014; Wa-Mbaleka, 2014). As the number of books distributed in schools was found to be insufficient for the number of students, the teachers were left with the responsibility of looking for alternative materials or providing them for the students.

The participants highlighted that the big number of students in every classroom led to the sharing of books, instead of ideally providing one for each. As the number of enrollees inconsistently rise and fall every academic year, the participants were worried about the allocation of books as guide for the learning of their students. It was said that the concerns were raised, but no response yet from the higher ups hence the band-aid solutions employed.

Throughout the course of implementation for each language policy, challenges in the micro and macro levels existed, which compelled policymakers to craft other laws—evident in the transition from Bilingual Education in 1987 to Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education in 2012. Problems concerning sociolinguistic design, curriculum, learning materials, and other factors that come with teaching in a multilingual setting posed serious challenges on the local stakeholders of the policy—from the teachers, to the students, and to the parents. Nevertheless, as it was mandated, teachers moved forward with various strategies at hand they employed in consideration of the respective classroom setting they operated in.

Implementation in a Multilingual Setting

Derived from the responses of the five (5) teachers in the individual interviews and three (3) school coordinators in the focused group discussion, I identified challenges in the particular areas, namely: MTB as a subject area; as a medium of instruction; and as a teaching-learning process. Among the areas, particularly as a subject area and as a medium of instruction, the root cause behind the occurrences of the majority of the problems was the utilization of SinugbuanongBinisaya instead of Davao Bisaya. The effective use of the dialect in the curriculum brought forth the problem concerning deep and unfamiliar terminologies, lack of equivalent vocabulary, and varying meanings in different Bisaya language variations, such as between the mandated language and the common language in the city.

As a Subject Area. In this part, aside from the identified absence of Davao Orthography, there are emerging themes or codes that can be viewed to have same challenging points, namely: unfamiliar and deep terminologies; lack of vocabulary equivalence; varying meanings in Bisaya language; difficulty in grammar and writing (spelling, capitalization and punctuation); and, teacher's uncertainty of students' mother tongue.

Stipulated in the Guidelines of DepEd Order 16, S. 2012, the implementation of MTB-MLE policy utilizes nineteen (19) major languages across the country. The one used in Davao region was SinugbuanongBinisaya, a language variation from Cebu, which prompted the emergence of challenges among teachers as well as learners and parents.

T4 remarked that the use of SinugbuanongBinisaya, especially in the guides, posed difficulty in her first years as an MTB Teacher. FGD Participants 1 and 2 affirmed the issue on the *absence of Davao-based orthography* which then necessitated the teachers to conduct lessons and classes in the former language variation.

In the first years of implementation, **T2** struggled with the terms as it came foreign to her vocabulary, which led her to use Google in search for its translations in English. Meanwhile, **T5** stressed that despite the program having been introduced for almost 10 years, there remained terms that she did not understand, perhaps caused by not using it too often in her classes. **T3** commented about unfamiliar terms as well.

While Lartec et al. (2014) noted that teachers were susceptible to carrying the burden being held responsible to teach, this study showed that parents as well had to deal with this, which they resolved through communicating with the teachers. Since the onset of the pandemic and the shift to distance learning, the parents were handed the challenge to study modules being left responsible for the facilitation of their children's learning at home.Alongside the problem concerning unfamiliar and deep terminologies was the *lack of equivalent vocabulary* in certain areas, as shared by **T3.**

As Lartec et. al. (2014) stressed in their study, not all words from the target language have equivalent terms in the first language or mother tongue, which made it more difficult for the teachers. These emerged as problems in earlier studies, particularly in "Strategies and Problems Encountered by Teachers in Implementing Mother Tongue-Based Instruction in a Multilingual Classroom" (2014) and in "Difficulties and Challenges Encountered by Teachers teaching in MTB-MLE" (2017).

Hence, similar to the previous studies, the interviewed teachers attested to lack of vocabulary as a factor that impedes the teaching and learning process. Moreover, even when there exist equivalent terminologies in English or Tagalog, the students remained unable to understand. Not only in actual face-to-face lectures, but these problems were manifested in textbooks as well. Furthermore, another challenge emerged regarding *varying meanings in Bisaya language,* as summed by **FGD Participant 1** and specified by **T2**.

A successful policy necessitates the need of an established orthographic system for mother tongue in a particular city. Moreover, Walter (2011) cautioned that the utilized mother tongue must be in accordance with the sociolinguistic designs of a community. With the use of SinugbuanongBinisaya instead of Davao Bisaya whose existence remained questioned and contested, the stakeholders dealt with issues concerning unfamiliar terminologies, vocabulary lack, and varying meanings, which solutions they considered to be impossible since it's already stipulated in the curriculum and the law.

Next to the major problem with the selection of the SinugbuanongBinisaya as the language in Davao was the difficulty in teaching lessons as a subject area in itself. Similar to English and Filipino, Mother Tongue is a language and a literary class. As shared by **T3**, students struggled in the areas in spelling, capitalization, and punctuations as part of lessons in *grammar and writing*.

Also included in the difficulty in grammar and writing, students had to learn lessons such as figurative languages as early as Grade 2, which the participants found unnecessary and inappropriate to the grade level.

Hence, when asked for her recommendation, she stressed the need to lessen the lessons and at the same time hinted problems in the curriculum being loaded and inappropriate for the age of the learners.

In "The Prospects of Multilingual Education and Literacy in the Philippines", Nolasco (2012) presented conditions needed to be met in attaining a successful implementation of the MTB-MLE policy, and one is a good curriculum. The complexity in itself as a grammar and literature subject posed difficulty on the learners and parents. To add is the issue concerning the loads that need to be taught in a grade level. With these areas of concern, there is a need for a comprehensive review in the curriculum design.

On the other hand, there were teachers who did not struggle as much in the language, but *uncertain about what mother tongue to use* which was a problem that emerged. They need to consider students whose mother tongues at home were not Bisaya. With this, teachers were challenged to adapt and teach the lessons at their level as experienced by **T1.**

FGD Participant 1 shared the same sentiment when it comes to dealing with non-Bisaya students particularly those who transferred from the private school that utilized foreign language, not necessarily their mother tongue. With Davao region with multilingual

settlers, teachers were expected to have encountered students whose languages at home were different from that of the expected Bisaya; hence, it became a challenge.

As a Medium of Instruction. The utilization of SinugbuanongBinisaya as the medium of instruction had led to challenges in teaching, particularly in non-MTB subjects and non-Bisaya learners, as well as in the transition years in the primary level. The teachers were unsure of the applicability of mother tongue in teaching science and math, and their way of translating words in mother tongue.

The participants, **T1** and **T4** claimed that teaching had become difficult with the utilization of SinugbuanongBinisaya as the medium of instruction, which then aggravated in teaching non-MTB subjects such as the Sciences and Mathematics.

T3 prompted a question on the *applicability of mother tongue in teaching Mathematics* given that there were terminologies that cannot be translated in Bisaya in terms of instruction.

In addition, despite the policy having been implemented for ten (10) years, **T2** mentioned that students remained unaccustomed to the uncommon technical terminologies in other subjects, like in Mathematics.

Particular in Mathematics, Oyzon et. al. (2014) concluded that utilizing the mother tongue and various dialects in instructing mathematical figures was not viable. Dio and Jamora (2014) as well raised the concern on the difficulty of translating numerical terms, which resulted in confusion and low scores in the standardized tests which used English as the language of instruction. The same study inferred that when teachers were incapable of interpreting or translating specialized terms to their dialect, learners were troubled in normalized assessments that use English.

Non-Bisaya speaking students struggled at dealing with the language of instruction in most of the subjects. **T3** highlighted that the *teachers served as translators* for them. FGD participants also affirmed that they had students whose mother tongue was English; hence, demanding teachers to translate words for them.

With over 180 languages, the Philippines had enacted constitutional actions in response to the multilingual setting that shaped language planning, especially in the educational sector. With that, it is expected that learners with diverse backgrounds evident in the languages that they speak at home pose difficulties on the part of teachers.

For the institutionalization of the program as a national policy, DepEd Order 74 S. 2009 required that mother tongue shall be used as the medium of instruction in all subject areas in kindergarten and the first three (3) years of elementary education. Meanwhile, English and Filipino will be taught as separate subjects through the transition program from Grade 4 to 6. The sudden transition from Bisaya in Grade 3 to English in Grade 4 posed a serious challenge among the teachers and the learners. With this set-up, the teachers needed to figure methods and approaches for the learners who had little to no knowledge in the English language as it became the prime medium of instruction.

*As a Teaching-Learning Process.*Challenges on the process of teaching and learning were also identified such as students' poor level of comprehension, language barrier between the teacher and students, and teachers' need to master the mother tongue. Regarding the teaching learning process, teaching MTB-MLE as a subject and being a medium of instruction were difficult in itself, yet together, it is all the more challenging in

consideration of the diverse backgrounds, skills, and levels of students in various areas such as in the macro skills.

T1 had observed the low scores of the students in written assessments as well as their *poor level of comprehension* in reading. With students' disinclination toward long instructions in MTB, their results were low. This occurred despite the use of the mother tongue that was perceived as a comfortable language for young learners. **T2** highlighted that the students were very participative and active in the classroom whenever they were asked to share their thoughts.

Nevertheless, the performance of the students depended on the intellectual level they were in, thus, making their individual differences in a very diverse class a challenge for **T3**.

Another challenge in the instruction department of MTB-MLE was the *language barriers* present at school. Dealing with non-Bisaya students and parents affected the teaching and learning process in the classroom setting.
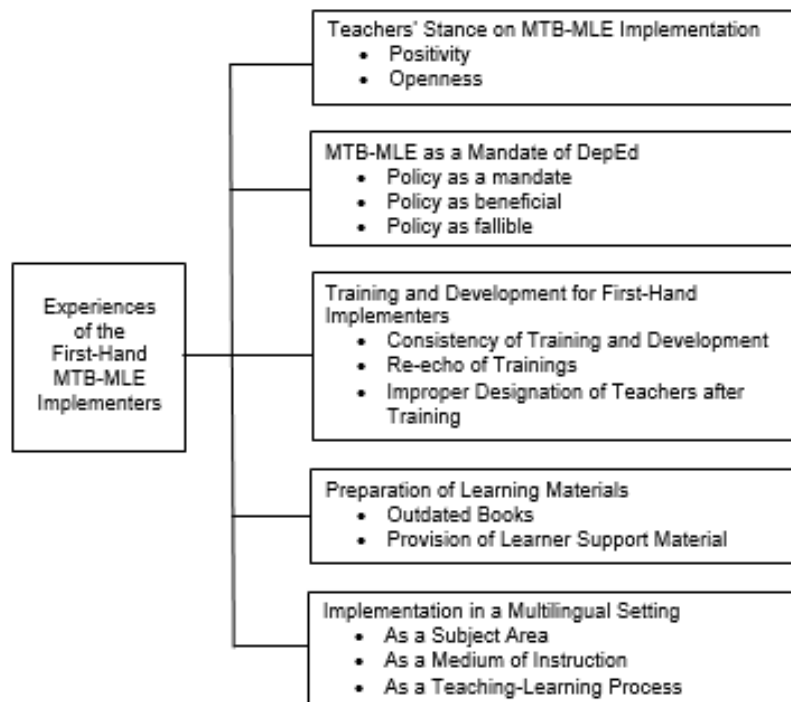
T5 highlighted that there were students and parents whose mother tongue or language used at home was not Bisaya. This posed a challenge for the teacher as it implied the need to exert more effort in teaching and translating to these students in comparison to the Bisaya native speakers.

Moreover, some of the non-Bisaya students were transferees from private schools, revealing first language's difference. With this set-up, teachers responded to the needs through adjustment and compromise in the discussions and activities by code-switching and looking for the easiest terms at the level of their students.

Lastly, while there was an identified struggle on the end of the students and parents, some teachers also had their share of challenges in implementing the policy in terms of the teaching process, especially for the non-Bisaya teachers.

As observed by FGD Participant 2, non-Bisaya teachers had to learn the local dialect yet, especially in understanding the basic terminologies. Moreover, they already were struggling in this area, let alone with the lessons written in SinugbuanongBinisaya. As the teachers have yet to *master the mother tongue* as necessitated in the policy, teaching students posed a challenge.

Lartec et al. (2014) concluded that being a multilingual teacher, therefore, is an advantage in the instruction involving students coming from different linguistic communities. The flexibility of teachers in a multilingual environment was regarded as of utmost importance in the betterment of lesson delivery. As noted, the flexibility of teachers in teaching a multilingual set of learners reflected that there were fewer problems in translation. It is a skill that is necessary to match the skill of translating inside the classroom for a better delivery of the lesson. If the teacher is knowledgeable enough of the language spoken by his/her students, then the demands of every learner to use his/her own language will be met.

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┌──────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│ Teachers' Stance on MTB-MLE Implementation     │
│   • Positivity                                  │
│   • Openness                                    │
└──────────────────────────────────────────────┘

┌──────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│ MTB-MLE as a Mandate of DepEd                   │
│   • Policy as a mandate                         │
│   • Policy as beneficial                        │
│   • Policy as fallible                          │
└──────────────────────────────────────────────┘

┌──────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│ Training and Development for First-Hand         │
│ Implementers                                    │
│   • Consistency of Training and Development     │
│   • Re-echo of Trainings                        │
│   • Improper Designation of Teachers after      │
│     Training                                    │
└──────────────────────────────────────────────┘

┌──────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│ Preparation of Learning Materials               │
│   • Outdated Books                              │
│   • Provision of Learner Support Material       │
└──────────────────────────────────────────────┘

┌──────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│ Implementation in a Multilingual Setting        │
│   • As a Subject Area                           │
│   • As a Medium of Instruction                  │
│   • As a Teaching-Learning Process              │
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Experiences of the First-Hand MTB-MLE Implementers
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Figure 1. Experiences of the First-Hand MTB-MLE Implementers

3.2 Educational Insights to Sustain MTB-MLE Implementation

Over the period of time since its implementation, MTB-MLE was viewed by many as one with a powerful effect in bringing out the potential of children in the learning process. This was attested by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) because of ample studies which already revealed that the use of mother tongue permits children to attain higher level of comprehension and acquire basic literacy skills and concepts rapidly (Espada &Pelingon, 2012). In order to give light on the 2nd research question of this study, which was the educational insights to sustain MTB-MLE implementation, the themes that are shown in Figure 2.

Motivating Factors to Sustain

Motivation to this mandated policy was hardly felt by the first-hand implementers during the first months or years, as evidenced on the previous discussions. However, teacher evaluation and collaboration were found to be the factors that this policy would continue. Teacher evaluation was conducted by administrative and fellow teaching staff, while collaboration with co-teachers aided everyone of unforeseen challenges that emerged in a normal classroom set-up.

Teacher evaluation. As part of the curriculum's mandate, schools assigned subject and grade level coordinators to assist teachers through conduct of evaluations and observations. These measures aimed to give opportunity for teachers' mentoring and feedback from their co-teachers.

The participants mentioned that they were expected to be observed during particular periods of the academic year. **T2** shared those observations were done quarterly in their school, which were facilitated by master teachers together with the school head. He highlighted that the feedback he got after every observation was helpful in improving his performance as an educator. It was for him a plus factor in coming up with more effective classroom strategies.

T4 resonated that the active assistance of the coordinators, who consulted with the District and Division offices, served as a big help. It was through them that the teachers were updated with the necessary information expected to be employed in an MTB-MLE classroom setup.

The same sentiments were mentioned by **T5** regarding the help of master teachers per grade level in assisting and training them.

Teacher Collaboration. Another theme that surfaced in the gathering of data was the help of the Learning Action Cell (LAC) Session for teachers to collaboratively plan and troubleshoot identified problems as cited by **T3**.

FGD Participant 2 resonated with the help of the Learning Action Cell (LAC) session particularly in refreshing and enhancing the skills they have to master.

Apart from administrative and teacher evaluation, collaboration among teachers was highlighted as key solutions, especially in addressing unforeseen problems on a weekday basis. **T1** mentioned that sharing of ideas to the other teachers was helpful.

An example of collaboration was when problems concerning language barriers, unlocking unfamiliar terminologies, or lack of equivalent vocabularies were experienced. **T2** shared those veteran teachers or ones more knowledgeable in the language were the ones to be consulted. When concerned of her delivery of lesson and instruction, she sought for pieces of advice from her fellow teachers who would positively offer her assistance.

The motivating factor mentioned regarding the positive impact of collaboration among teachers had also been revealed in the study of Bajaset.al (2017) where the response to the problems of teachers in dealing with unfamiliar terms and heavy workloads was the consultation among their colleagues. This meant that the shared experience of the teachers in terms of seeking for administrative support and co-teachers' assistance became beneficial in addressing their various school-based concerns which I would say can sustain the MTB-MLE policy in the Department of Education.

Utilizing Technology in Multilingual Classrooms

With the shift to 21st century learning, characterized by technological interventions, the teachers practiced the utilization of online sources to assist them in the implementation of MTB-MLE in the classroom. One of the strategies utilized by them was the convenient access of information through the internet. It assisted them in looking for definition of terms, available instructional materials, creative scaffolds, articles on improving teaching methods, and other data that helped address their concerns. Though there was only one participant who shared, I viewed this as an important educational factor that would sustain MTB-MLE policy.

T5 cited that using the World Wide Web for available references was helpful. She mentioned that googling terminologies was of help, as well as looking into articles about the different strategies and methodologies that can be applied in class.

Moreover, **T3** noticed that downloading online videos can be helpful in class discussions since the students can relate to audio-visual materials, especially when they are in Tagalog or English.

Apart from the mentioned sources, the first-hand implementers shared, though did not elaborate on the availability of DepEd groups and websites where teachers access different instructional resources, Daily Lesson Log (DLL), and other materials. Those were downloadable and varied according to every grade level and subject areas. DepEd Portal and DepEd Commons were among the many DepEd unofficial websites that they cited. The strategy of accessing these sites, even general MTB-MLE blog sites, was similar to the employed solution by the Skoropinski(2013). All these evidently depict the benefits of current technological innovations as assistance to the roles of the teachers.

Applying the Strategies from the Trainings

I firmly believed that the success of MTB MLE policy depends in large part on the teachers in the classroom. There were some basic suggestions for innovative and effective teacher education that supports successful MTB MLE in non-dominant language communities. The trainings however, helped the teachers in their personal way or doing its own initiative of delivering what was called upon them in a multilingual classroom.

T1 mentioned that the learnings from the training and seminars can help in coming up with strategies to best implement the policy. This can be done with the initiative of the teachers themselves. In their training and seminars, they were provided with resolutions to problems and strategies that they can apply. **T2** cited an example of a learning application in storytelling. During their training, they were taught to ideally conduct reading activities like storytelling.

The tangible manuals were materials that can also be used, according to **T5**. During the first seminar they had, manuals which teachers were expected to use as references were already provided.

Apart from employing the strategies taught in seminars and training, the teachers would add their personal touch in strategically managing their class. FGD Participant 3 mentioned that in whatever circumstances, the teacher will have to find solutions to the problems at hand.

Innovative sources of information and references were utilized by **T4,** particularly in unlocking deep terminologies. Utilization of materials that are not provided by DepEd was one of their ways to understand the foreign words. Still the teachers would have to find solutions to the problems at hand.

Since there was a mention of the difficulty comprehending terminologies in the Bisaya variation used in the schools in Davao region, code switching or usage of two or more languages during instruction was a helpful strategy. With the trouble in the utilized language, teachers identified the simplest terms to aid classroom communication and simplify lessons, especially in the presence of non-Bisaya learners.

T5 mentioned that there was an effort to look for the easiest term in all languages available that will help the students understand. She avoids speaking straight Bisaya in class since there are terms that are difficult to understand.

In coming up with instructional materials, teachers use various strategies to have effective tools for teaching. **T2** mentioned his strategy in teaching primary students using colorful and attractive instructional materials. These materials were designed in a manner that would catch and sustain the attention of the student.

In addition, **T2** pointed out that the different areas in the classroom, like walls, where students can easily see the materials, can be areas of learning different terminologies to master. Since he was teaching young learners, double effort was expected from him as the teacher to be consistent in creatively facilitating the class.

Technological advancements can also be used as assistant tools in teaching and learning in multilingual classrooms. The first-hand implementers strategically utilize technology like gadgets to present lessons interestingly and visually to students.

T3 highlighted the possibility of simultaneously teaching all language classes and their elements. Since the lessons and its progress were almost similar, this strategy was employed by **T3**.

Similar with **T2**, **T3** used materials from other subjects to teach another subject but different language use. Apart from "*hitting two birds in one stone*", they deemed it of help in lessening the production of materials. For instance, the stories used for MTB-MLE were used for English and Filipino.

Consequently, Malone and Paraide(2011) had said that language education in the early grades of MTB MLE required teachers to model reading and writing in the L1 and later in the L2. Teachers model reading when they read stories to their students in a fluent and interesting way. They model writing when students describe an experience or create a story together and then dictate the narrative to the teacher who writes it on the chalkboard.

Actualizing the Policy as a Mandate

In acknowledgment of the policy as crafted and mandated by DepEd as well as their roles in the department, no other course of action was made available but actualizing the policy as a mandate. Rather than being involved in a multidirectional process as projected by Ricento and Hornberger's model (1996), their statements seemed to hint that teacher adhered to the policy due to a top-down directive.

In Shohamy's Language Policy(2006), this top-down approach contributed to the culture of compliance among teachers as local stakeholders, which they enacted through carrying out national-directed orders. They have been under the department that situated them into a place of submission to the institutionalized policy in adherence as well to the expectations of the policy makers. Having been implemented and being under the Department of Education, the first-hand implementers were left with no other option but acceptance as expressed by **T5.**Evident in the response of FGD Participants was the absence of choice.

With the current situation, the first-hand implementers complied with the order and other requirements necessary for the actualization of the policy in the grassroot levels. As the first-hand implementers in the department, they were held responsible for implementing

the policy in classroom settings. With that, the first-hand implementers remarked that they just embraced it, and while doing so, FGD Participants stressed that the mandates called to be followed and done.

With the absence of choice, FGD Participant 3 prompted that teachers ought to love the policy while FGD Participant 1, after years of implementation, had seen its benefits, which helped her in carrying out the policy in the long run.

Data revealed that the first-hand implementers had varying views with respect to their school contexts, but they all were linked in the same overarching idea of it being a national mandate. This further influenced their perspectives and attitudes, as well as strategic practices, when benefits and drawbacks emerged while actualizing the policy in their classes.

In doing the job of being educators, the first-hand implementers were vocal of their oath to be committed in actualizing the provisions of the mandate. The attitude of compliance was evident every time they justified that MTB-MLE was after all, a mandate. The attitude of compliance showed submission to the higher ups and their management. At the grassroots, the strategies mentioned above were responses to the issues on the policy because they were never given any choice to decline, except for those who deviate, and just continue the implementation while relentlessly facing those problems every academic year. This theme revealed that teachers will comply despite all restrictions, therefore echoing that if the policy will be ironed, their compliance will be on the positive note of viewing the mandate.

The policy is beneficial that had brought into the region's K-3 educational system corresponded to the results of similar previous studies conducted, especially with the foundational empirical studies that prompted this shift of language policy in 2009 entitled the "Lingua Franca Project" and "Lubuagan First Language Component". All participants in this study, who were first-hand implementers acknowledged the goals and positive differences the language that had brought upon academic performance and class communication. Enabled by the use of the first language, students exhibited increased confidence and expressiveness during class discussions. Reaping the benefit of enhanced class participation, the teachers and coordinators were satisfied as it delivered its projected advantage.

Witnessing the positive results of using mother tongue, especially in improving student performance, FGD Participants recognized the motivation and the benefits that the policy had granted, which were founded on the claim of UNESCO (2012) that teaching with use of mother tongue as the language of instruction in the early grades of students enhances ability to learn better compared to the use of a second or a foreign language.

Alongside the development in the intellectual capabilities of the students, the teachers were pleased to witness the improved communication skills and increased confidence evident on the way they interact with their fellow classmates and teachers as shared by **T5.**

Apart from the benefits and advantages in intellectual and socio-emotional learning, the teachers were in satisfaction upon experiencing first-hand how the other projected advantages and goals in the DepEd Orders 74 of 2009 and 16 of 2012 transpired in their respective contexts, such as the development of socio-cultural awareness. The first-hand implementers also saw the policy in light of cultivating one's appreciation of culture

and identity through the language and localized samples in the materials, which FGD Participant 1 perceived as good.

Similarly, the sentiment of FGD Participant 1 was the same with **T3** as they presumed that DepEd implemented the policy with the aim of learning our mother tongue to develop cultural appreciation among us.

For **T3** who declared love and positivity, the policy was not taxing as it had given fun experience while discovering substantial information about our place and culture. In contrast to the notion that the terminologies seemed to pose a weight of difficulty, **T3** even had grown in fascination and appreciation with it.

In adherence to the mandate, teachers grappled with these areas of concerns. Being at the front line on a weekly basis dealing with challenges concerning the utilized language, diverse learners, lesson difficulties, unorganized book content, or curriculum-based defects produced corresponding effects in one's internal behaviors, which fall under teacher cognition. However, instead of resistance, some participants manifested an adaptive attitude in response to certain situations.

With regards to the issue of SinugbuanongBisaya's difficulty in terminologies, especially in teaching non-MTB subjects and even in consideration with non-Bisaya students, the participants shared that with time, practice, as well as assistance from fellow teachers whom they share the same challenges with, they had already adjusted and made progress in delivering lessons and instruction in class. A sample of adaptiveness reflected in practice was code-switching.

Not only to aid them when they themselves struggle in translation, but first-hand implementers resort to shifting from a language to another to ease the understanding of students.

Showing up for learners amid challenges and conflicts was expected from teachers. In times of troubles, as FGD Participant 3 put it, it was the teachers who provided immediate solutions. After acceptance or compliance came adaptiveness.

Moreover, Creese (2010) stated that individually and collectively teachers within their school communities will operate policy according to their local contexts, experiences and values, even where there is a strong element of statutory compliance. They will interact with policy not in a one-to-one reading of what is required, but in an interactive frame which involves their own interpretation within their own localized communities." A testimony for this derived in this study was **T5**'s experience and claims.

Further, **T5** acknowledged the national policy makers behind MTB-MLE and the order to implement in adherence to what was stipulated. However, due to her direct encounters with the defects or shortcomings of the policy, she deviated in her actualization based on what she perceived good for the welfare of her students.

Consequently, she justified her decision through banking on the benefits it brought to the learners. Testifying to what Alieto (2019) concluded in "Women of K-12: Exploring Teachers' Cognition in Language Policy Implementation", **T5**'s case showed that teachers' cognition is a byproduct of the direct observations and experiences, which further influences one's perspectives and attitudes towards a language policy. While confronting the challenges and weighing the strategies in consideration with the classroom context, there may arise decisions that may deviate from the dictated policy to resort to self-directed

practices. Teachers' perspectives and attitudes were reflected on the practices they pursued while being anchored on the learners' context. In the words of **T5**, "What is right is what is good for my students".
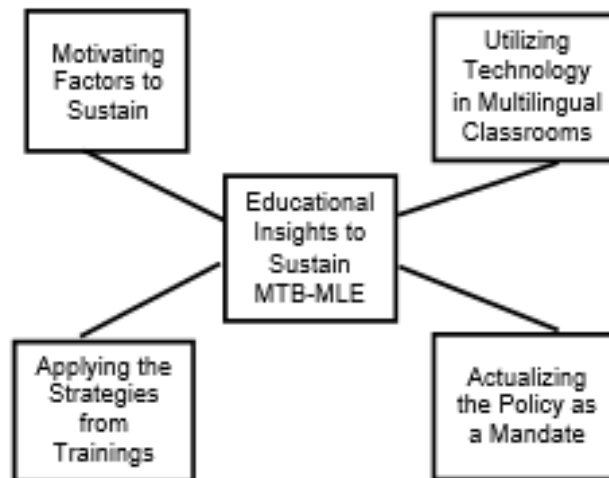
With all that has been mentioned, the suggestiveness of the participants in terms of identifying areas of the policy that has to be reformed, which are beyond their control, emerged as well. Gearing toward the betterment of the policy with the knowledge that the top-down implementation of the policy left them with no options but to comply, there came up recommendations directly rooted from the respective experiences of the teachers. Targeting the root cause of the majority of the challenges, the participants, especially **T2** stressed the need to conduct appropriate measures for the probable establishment of a Davao-based orthography.

In addition, reconsideration of the use of the mother tongue in non-MTB subjects like Math and English was propounded. **T2** presented the idea that unfamiliar terminologies should be avoided since other stakeholders, like students and parents, experience similar difficulties in comprehension.

Meanwhile, **T4** regarded that the current grade level implementation of the policy should be changed as it might prompt difficulties in transitioning from primary to elementary level.

Tones of encouragement and discouragement were present when asked of their recommendations as they remarked that they were only teachers who might not be acknowledged or whose opinions might be dismissed. Nevertheless, they resorted to answering in hopes of possible considerations given that the Department of Education planned to take appropriate measures in resolving issues with the current language policy, as announced by DepEd Secretary Leonor Briones last March 25, 2020.

Furthermore, Salem-Gervais and Raynaud (2020) mentioned that what the language policy stipulated does not necessarily coincide with what really happened inside the classrooms. However, in exploring the emerging themes from the responses of the participants about educational insights that can be drawn to sustain MTB-MLE policy, while some showed otherwise. Some teachers religiously committed to the terms of the policy that despite its discrepancies, they still devoutly and strategically looked for resolutions just so the requisitions would be met. On the other hand, some chose to deviate from the expectations of the mandate, proving that policy is different from practice. Such perspectives and attitudes unveiled the necessity to consider the accounts of the first-hand implementers in order to come up with a better view of the things that should be retained, the points that should be ameliorated, as well as the reforms that should be executed for MTB-MLE.

Figure 2. Educational Insights to Sustain MTB-MLE Implementation

importance of actualizing the policy as a mandate was underscored, ensuring that its goals are effectively realized and sustained in practice.

5. IMPLICATIONS

Worked with the limitations of this study, I tried to capture the experiential narratives of the first-hand implementers of MTB-MLE. In an MTB-MLE classrooms, the teachers are expected to help their students achieve a successful education, and so they must understand and follow some pedagogical approaches. First, they must begin with what the students already know, their own language and the knowledge and skills they have acquired through living in their own community, and use that as the foundation for teaching new content and concepts. Second, teachers must help their students to develop oral, written and higher-level thinking skills in the language they know best and, at the same time, support the students as they gradually learn the official school language.

In order to have an effective and sustainable MTB-MLE, this requires teachers who are fluent in speaking, reading and writing both their students' mother tongue and the official school language (Malone & Malone, 2011). However, a critical problem is that in most countries, there are too few certified teachers from local language communities who have the level of fluency needed to use both languages in the classroom. Also, without the advantage of MTB MLE, many of the students who do not speak the school language have done poorly in primary school. Relatively few of them have been able to progress through secondary school and even fewer have qualified for tertiary education institutions.

What was deemed important result of this study, and for the MTB-MLE to sustain is the curriculum, and the instructional materials in which the first-hand implementers need to emphasize. They became familiar with government standards (competencies) for each grade and understand that those standards are the foundation for the MTB-MLE curriculum; they understand that in following the MTB-MLE curriculum they will enable their students to achieve the government standards. In addition, since they became familiar with the MTB-MLE curriculum and instructional materials, and are confident in using all the materials to plan effective classroom activities, they would enable students to achieve the kind of learning the students deserve.

As Malone & Malone (2011) concluded, teacher education is clearly an essential component of successful and sustainable MTB-MLE. The issues involved are complex and still a "work in progress." The good news is: there has been progress. Relevant and useful collaborations among all stakeholders such as communities, teacher training institutions and government agencies, will help to develop and maintain teacher training programs that will produce effective MTB-MLE implementers.

As implementers, Fillmore (2014) stressed that teachers have inquired into different challenges, dilemmas, and successes in dealing with their daily teaching practices, carrying the pressure of being tagged as "experts" with respect to their classrooms. Alongside these experiences were their views and convictions in considering whether the running language policy, both as a subject area and a medium of instruction, was best suited for teaching in multilingual and multicultural contexts. Hence, studies continue to sprout highlighting the bottom-up approach of viewing the implementation process, taking into consideration the other stakeholders even the parents and other community members.

6. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The main purpose of this study was to explore and describe the narratives of first-hand implementers of MTB-MLE. In ten years, the implementers were believed to have experienced challenges and strategies during the implementation, of which the following are my future directions which are aligned with the findings of my study:

Department of Education (DepEd) Officials. As this becomes a bird's eye view to the officials and policy makers, this study will call for action to review and reassess the curriculum. Prior to the introduction of MTB-MLE as a policy to be institutionalized in 2009, the then Acting Chair of KomisyonsaWikang Filipino Ricardo Nolasco (2008) wrote conditions he deemed as requirements for a successful multilingual education to succeed in the Philippines. Two of the four characteristics in the criteria are as follows: a cognitively demanding curriculum, and error-free learning materials. With the current language policy defining the status quo which entailed the use of the mother tongue in subject areas as well as the number of units in an academic year per grade level, there is a prevailing suggestion among the teachers that the Education department must minimize the lessons and appropriate the content on the age and level of the learners.

School Heads. The school leaders may help resolve the challenges that the first-hand implementers are experiencing, especially in dealing with the language as a mode of instruction for other subjects. They may support the teachers' demand of learning materials in order to meet the government standards of education.

Teachers. As the first-hand implementers of the policy, they may be true to themselves in dealing with the challenges, and on how to be responsive to the needs of the students, especially in comprehension of using mother tongue for foreign subjects. No decree is perfect in policy and in practice. Given the ten implementing years, the occurrence of the identified experiences of teachers that shaped their perspectives and attitudes is a call for the policymakers and curriculum designers to monitor and evaluate the feedback coming from the grassroots in order to identify points crucial for the betterment of the language policy.

This study opens the door for future research on MTB-MLE in the Philippines or in other countries implementing the language policy. Very few studies have been done on the implications of challenges and strategies of using mother tongue in the primary education curriculum to the views of the teachers and the recommendations that come with it, particularly in a multilingual community in Davao del Norte.

A final area for consideration includes embarking on the new normal setup in the education sector. Future researchers may explore the dynamics and elements of teaching MTB-MLE through distance learning. Apart from the teachers, they may include the parents and students in assessing its implementation. This is an alternative to the ideal observational study that provides valuable insights on the ways in which MTB-MLE policy is practiced in the classroom.

Ethical Approval:

CONSENT:

All authors declare that 'written informed consent was obtained from the respondent (or other approved parties) for publication of this case report and accompanying images.

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