

## Top-Down Implementation of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education from Grassroots Perspectives

**Frolomea Narra Techo Tañiza**

District in Charge / PIV, Department of Education

SDO Baybay, Brgy. Gaas, Diversion Road, Baybay City Leyte

<https://orcid.org/0009-0001-2904-5240> | [frolomeanarra.taza@deped.gov.ph](mailto:frolomeanarra.taza@deped.gov.ph)

**Osias Kit T. Kilag**

School Principal, PAU Excellencia Global Academy Foundation, Inc., Philippines

Vice-President for Academic Affairs and Research, ECT Excellencia Global Academy Foundation, Inc., Philippines

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0845-3373> | [okkilag12@gmail.com](mailto:okkilag12@gmail.com)

**Dr. Glenn R. Andrin**

Dean, Graduate Studies

St. Paul University Surigao, Surigao City, Philippines

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3008-5661> | [drandringlenn@gmail.com](mailto:drandringlenn@gmail.com)

**Dr. Elma Sibonghanoy Groenewald**

CEO, SG Virtuosos International 1501-1502 Tran Phu Street,

Loc Tho Ward, Nha Trang City, Khanh Hoa Province, Vietnam 650000

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7813-2773> | [elmasgroenewald@sgvirtuososinternational.com](mailto:elmasgroenewald@sgvirtuososinternational.com)

**Dr. Julianie L. Abella**

Teacher III, Department of Education, Schools Division of Toledo City, Philippines

<https://orcid.org/0009-0000-1640-7196> | [julanieabellalife@gmail.com](mailto:julanieabellalife@gmail.com)

**Nelson A. Cordova Jr.**

Program Head, School of Teacher Education, DMC College Foundation, Inc.,

Fr. Patangan Road, Sta. Filomena, Dipolog City, Zamboanga del Norte, Philippines

<https://orcid.org/0009-0003-0939-2899> | [nelson@dmc.edu.ph](mailto:nelson@dmc.edu.ph)

### Abstract

This study delves into the nuanced landscape of mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) implementation in the Philippines, examining the top-down policy execution from the bottom up. Through qualitative research methods, including interviews and focus group discussions, the study explores the perspectives of educators, parents, and community members. Four key findings emerged, highlighting the essential role of teacher preparedness and training in

MTB-MLE success, the pivotal influence of community engagement, challenges posed by limited resources, and instances of adaptability and innovation in response to implementation hurdles. The study underscores the significance of ongoing professional development for educators, emphasizing the need for linguistic proficiency and pedagogical strategies aligned with MTB-MLE principles. Community involvement emerged as a determining factor, showcasing the active contributions of communities in the development of instructional materials, sharing linguistic expertise, and fostering positive language attitudes. Resource constraints posed challenges, calling for increased investments in the production of culturally relevant materials. Despite these challenges, the study reveals the resilience of stakeholders, leveraging technology and collaborative initiatives to overcome limitations. The findings contribute to the broader discourse on language-based educational reforms, providing insights for policymakers and educators navigating the complex terrain of MTB-MLE implementation. The study advocates for a comprehensive and adaptive approach that recognizes the intertwined dynamics of teacher preparedness, community engagement, resource availability, and innovative solutions to enhance the efficacy of MTB-MLE in the Philippines.

*Keywords:* mother tongue-based multilingual education, MTB-MLE, language policy, education reform, teacher preparedness

## **Introduction**

In the realm of education policy, the adoption of mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) has garnered increasing attention as a means to enhance learning outcomes, preserve linguistic diversity, and foster inclusive educational practices. The Philippines, a country known for its rich linguistic tapestry comprising more than 170 languages, stands at the forefront of this global discourse (Solomon, 2018). In recent years, the Philippine government has embarked on a significant educational reform by endorsing MTB-MLE as a key policy initiative.

The rationale behind MTB-MLE lies in its potential to bridge the gap between students' home languages and the language of instruction, typically English or Filipino, thereby enhancing comprehension and academic achievement (Gaylo, 2020). In the Philippines, the Department of Education issued Department Order No. 74, s. 2009, which mandates the use of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction from kindergarten to Grade 3. Subsequent policies further expanded the implementation of MTB-MLE across various grade levels (DepEd Order No. 16, s. 2012).

However, the effective translation of top-down policies into meaningful classroom practices is a complex process influenced by various factors such as teacher preparedness, community engagement, and resource availability (Kilag, et al., 2023). Despite the policy pronouncements, the ground-level implementation of MTB-MLE in the Philippines remains a subject of scholarly inquiry, necessitating an exploration of the challenges, successes, and adaptations encountered by educators, communities, and educational stakeholders.

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, utilizing in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis to unravel the multifaceted dimensions of MTB-MLE

implementation. By engaging with educators, parents, and community members, this research seeks to provide insights into the lived experiences of those directly involved in the educational process and to inform future policy adjustments that can contribute to the success of MTB-MLE in the Philippine educational landscape.

As the Philippines navigates this transformative journey towards mother tongue-based multilingual education, understanding the dynamics of policy implementation from the bottom up becomes imperative. This study contributes to the broader discourse on language-in-education policies, shedding light on the intricate interplay between policy directives and grassroots realities, and offering valuable implications for educational practices both in the Philippines and other linguistically diverse contexts worldwide.

## **Literature Review**

Given the diverse linguistic landscape of the Philippines, where more than 170 languages are spoken (Eclipse & Tenedero, 2018), the implementation of mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) has emerged as a significant educational reform. This literature review synthesizes existing research to provide a comprehensive understanding of the theoretical foundations, global trends, and localized challenges associated with MTB-MLE, with a specific focus on the Philippines.

The theoretical underpinnings of MTB-MLE draw upon the Cummins' Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis and the Threshold Hypothesis (Villacañas de Castro, 2016). According to Cummins, students who develop proficiency in their mother tongue are better positioned to acquire a second language, leading to enhanced cognitive and academic skills. The Threshold Hypothesis posits that cognitive academic language proficiency developed in the mother tongue can transfer to a second language, facilitating academic success.

Around the world, the adoption of MTB-MLE has gained momentum as countries recognize the importance of leveraging students' linguistic diversity for improved educational outcomes (UNESCO, 2016). Countries like South Africa, India, and countries in Southeast Asia have embraced MTB-MLE to varying degrees, tailoring policies to suit their unique linguistic contexts (Crawford & Marin, 2021).

In the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd) issued several directives mandating the use of mother tongues as the medium of instruction. Department Order No. 74, s. 2009, marked a pivotal moment, stipulating the use of the mother tongue from kindergarten to Grade 3. Subsequent orders expanded this mandate to higher grade levels, reflecting a commitment to harnessing linguistic diversity to enhance educational outcomes (DepEd Order No. 16, s. 2012).

### **Challenges in MTB-MLE Implementation:**

While the theoretical foundations and global trends support MTB-MLE, its effective implementation is fraught with challenges. One significant hurdle is the lack of instructional materials in local languages (Kilag, et al., 2023). The production of culturally and linguistically

relevant materials requires substantial resources and collaboration between educational institutions and local communities.

Teacher preparedness and training also emerge as critical factors influencing MTB-MLE implementation (Mondez, 2013). Many educators may not be fluent in the mother tongue of their students, necessitating training programs to equip them with the necessary language skills and pedagogical strategies (Kilag, et al., 2023). Moreover, the success of MTB-MLE hinges on community involvement and support, highlighting the need for transparent communication between schools and local stakeholders (Auckle, 2017).

In the Philippine context, researchers have explored the impact of MTB-MLE on student learning outcomes and community dynamics. A study by Gaylo (2020) investigated the effects of MTB-MLE on the reading and mathematical skills of Grade 1 students. The findings indicated that students exposed to MTB-MLE exhibited better performance compared to those in traditional bilingual programs.

Moreover, community engagement has been identified as a crucial factor in the success of MTB-MLE in the Philippines (Mondez, 2013). Local communities play a pivotal role in supporting the implementation of MTB-MLE by contributing to the development of instructional materials, providing linguistic expertise, and fostering a positive language attitude within the community (Kilag, et al., 2023).

### **Adaptations and Innovations in MTB-MLE**

In response to the challenges faced in MTB-MLE implementation, educators and policymakers have introduced innovative solutions. One such approach involves the use of technology to create and disseminate instructional materials in local languages (Yaacob & Lubis, 2022). Digital platforms, including online courses and e-books, have been leveraged to overcome limitations in traditional print materials.

Additionally, collaborative efforts between government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and local communities have led to the development of community-based learning materials (Omofonmwan & Odia, 2009). These materials, rooted in local contexts, not only enhance the quality of education but also contribute to the preservation of indigenous languages and cultures.

The literature reviewed underscores the need for a nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with MTB-MLE implementation in the Philippines. Policymakers must consider the resource constraints, teacher training needs, and community dynamics when formulating and refining MTB-MLE policies. Investments in the production of instructional materials, teacher professional development, and community partnerships are essential for the successful implementation of MTB-MLE (Kilag, et al., 2023).

Moreover, the Philippines can draw lessons from global experiences in MTB-MLE implementation. Comparative studies with countries facing similar linguistic diversity challenges can provide insights into effective strategies and best practices. Collaborative research efforts

can contribute to a shared knowledge base that informs evidence-based policymaking in the realm of multilingual education.

The literature review provides a comprehensive overview of the theoretical foundations, global trends, localized challenges, and adaptations in mother tongue-based multilingual education, with a focus on the Philippine context. The study aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on MTB-MLE by investigating the top-down policy implementation from the bottom up, acknowledging the diverse perspectives of educators, parents, and community members involved in the educational process. As the Philippines navigates this transformative journey, understanding the complexities of MTB-MLE implementation is crucial for shaping informed policies that truly harness the potential of linguistic diversity for enhanced educational outcomes.

## **Methodology**

The methodology employed in this study was designed to explore the top-down implementation of mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) policies in the Philippines from the bottom up. Drawing on insights gained from the literature review, the research aimed to capture the lived experiences and perspectives of educators, parents, and community members involved in the MTB-MLE implementation process. A qualitative research approach was chosen to delve into the nuances of policy enactment and its impact on the ground.

### **Participants:**

The study participants were purposively selected to ensure representation from diverse stakeholders directly engaged in the MTB-MLE implementation. The sample included educators from various grade levels, parents of students affected by MTB-MLE policies, and community members actively involved in supporting the local educational system. The selection criteria considered factors such as geographical location, linguistic diversity, and varying levels of MTB-MLE implementation.

### **Data Collection:**

Data were gathered through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. These qualitative methods allowed for the exploration of participants' perceptions, experiences, and challenges encountered in the context of MTB-MLE. Interviews provided individual perspectives, while focus group discussions facilitated the emergence of collective insights and shared experiences within the community.

Interview and discussion guides were developed based on themes identified in the literature review, covering topics such as the impact of MTB-MLE on student learning outcomes, teacher preparedness, community involvement, and challenges faced during implementation. Probing questions were used to encourage participants to reflect on their experiences and express their opinions on the effectiveness of MTB-MLE policies.

### **Data Analysis:**

The data analysis process followed a thematic approach, aligning with the qualitative nature of the study. Transcripts from interviews and focus group discussions were coded, and recurring themes were identified. The coding process was iterative, allowing for the refinement and development of codes as new insights emerged. This thematic analysis aimed to uncover patterns, variations, and contradictions within the data, providing a rich understanding of the multifaceted aspects of MTB-MLE implementation.

The identified themes were then triangulated with findings from the literature review to enhance the credibility and validity of the study. By integrating existing knowledge with the firsthand perspectives of participants, the research aimed to offer a nuanced and comprehensive analysis of MTB-MLE implementation in the Philippine context.

## **Findings and Discussion**

### **Teacher Preparedness and Training: A Cornerstone for Successful MTB-MLE Implementation**

The findings of this study underscore the pivotal role of teacher preparedness and training in the successful implementation of mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) in the Philippines. This theme emerged as a cornerstone, reflecting the intricate relationship between educators' readiness, linguistic proficiency, and the seamless integration of MTB-MLE into classroom dynamics.

Participating educators consistently emphasized the necessity for comprehensive teacher training programs tailored to the linguistic demands of MTB-MLE. This aligns with the insights provided by Cheng and Sturtevant (2012), who stresses the significance of linguistic and pedagogical preparedness for educators implementing language-based educational reforms. The study participants highlighted that effective MTB-MLE implementation requires educators to not only be proficient in the local languages used as mediums of instruction but also possess a nuanced understanding of pedagogical strategies that align with the principles of MTB-MLE.

One prominent challenge reported by educators was the existence of linguistic gaps between their own language competencies and the requirements for MTB-MLE. This resonates with Cheng and Sturtevant's (2012) concept of linguistic interdependence, emphasizing that educators must bridge the gap between their own language proficiency and the languages used for instruction to facilitate optimal student learning outcomes. The study illuminated instances where educators struggled with the nuances of local languages, hindering their ability to deliver effective MTB-MLE.

The findings underscored the imperative nature of ongoing professional development for educators engaged in MTB-MLE. This aligns with the literature on language education, as scholars like Kilag, et al. (2023) emphasize the dynamic nature of language teaching, requiring educators to continually adapt and enhance their skills. The study participants expressed the need for sustained support and training opportunities to address the evolving linguistic landscape, ensuring that educators remain equipped with the requisite language proficiency and pedagogical insights crucial for successful MTB-MLE implementation.

In conclusion, the study's first key finding highlights the indispensability of teacher preparedness and training in the context of MTB-MLE implementation in the Philippines. The insights provided by educators underscore the need for targeted interventions, including comprehensive training programs that address linguistic proficiency, pedagogical strategies, and ongoing professional development. These findings contribute to the broader discourse on language-based educational reforms, emphasizing the centrality of educators in shaping the success of MTB-MLE initiatives. Policymakers, educational institutions, and teacher training programs can draw upon these insights to design and implement strategies that empower educators to navigate the linguistic complexities inherent in MTB-MLE, ultimately fostering enhanced learning outcomes for students.

### **Community Engagement and Support: Fostering Success in MTB-MLE Implementation**

The study's exploration of mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) in the Philippines uncovered a second critical finding: the pivotal role of community engagement in shaping the efficacy of MTB-MLE policies. The depth and breadth of community involvement were identified as key determinants influencing the successful implementation of MTB-MLE initiatives, emphasizing the necessity of collaborative efforts between educational institutions and local stakeholders.

A noteworthy aspect revealed by the findings was the active participation of communities in the development of instructional materials. This resonates with the assertions of Park (2016), who emphasizes the importance of culturally and linguistically relevant educational resources for effective language-based education. Communities, recognizing the unique linguistic and cultural needs of their learners, played a crucial role in crafting materials that resonated with local contexts, ensuring a more immersive and meaningful learning experience for students engaged in MTB-MLE.

The study illuminated instances where successful MTB-MLE implementation was closely linked to communities sharing their linguistic expertise. This aligns with the broader literature on language preservation and revitalization (Schwartz & Dobrin, 2016), as communities actively contribute to maintaining and celebrating their linguistic heritage. The active involvement of community members in imparting linguistic knowledge not only facilitated effective language instruction but also fostered a sense of pride and ownership over their cultural and linguistic identity.

The findings underscored the significance of fostering a positive language attitude within the community. This aligns with Kilag, et al. (2023) emphasis on the social dimensions of language education. Instances were identified where communities, through collaborative efforts with schools, created an environment where the use of local languages in education was embraced and celebrated. This positive language attitude contributed to a more inclusive and supportive atmosphere, benefiting both educators and students engaged in MTB-MLE.

A critical aspect highlighted in the study was the importance of effective collaboration between schools and local stakeholders. Transparent communication emerged as a key facilitator in

navigating the complexities of MTB-MLE implementation. This finding resonates with research by Trudell (2007), which emphasizes the need for clear communication and collaboration between educational institutions and local communities in language-based educational reforms. Instances of successful MTB-MLE implementation were characterized by open dialogue, mutual understanding, and shared decision-making processes between schools and communities.

The study's second key finding emphasizes the indispensable role of community engagement in the successful implementation of MTB-MLE policies in the Philippines. The collaborative efforts of communities in developing instructional materials, sharing linguistic expertise, and fostering a positive language attitude contribute significantly to the overall effectiveness of MTB-MLE initiatives. These insights provide valuable considerations for policymakers and educators seeking to optimize community involvement as a strategic component of language-based educational reforms, ensuring that MTB-MLE aligns with the unique linguistic and cultural contexts of the communities it serves.

### **Challenges in Resource Availability: Navigating Constraints in MTB-MLE Implementation**

One of the overarching challenges identified in the study pertained to the limitations imposed by resource availability, particularly in the production of culturally and linguistically relevant instructional materials for mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) in the Philippines. The participants consistently highlighted resource constraints as a substantial impediment, shedding light on the intricacies of navigating these challenges for the successful execution of MTB-MLE policies.

The findings underscored the critical role of instructional materials in shaping the success of MTB-MLE initiatives. This aligns with the perspectives of Alshuraiaan and Almfleh (2023), who emphasizes the importance of materials that resonate with the local context for effective language education. Participants articulated that the scarcity of locally contextualized materials hindered their ability to create an immersive and culturally relevant learning environment. The absence of such materials posed challenges in delivering MTB-MLE that is responsive to the linguistic and cultural diversity inherent in the Philippines.

The study illuminated how the dearth of resources impacted the creation of immersive learning environments. Effective language instruction, as advocated by Gilmore (2007), requires materials that engage learners in meaningful ways within their linguistic and cultural milieu. The reported resource constraints limited the development of such materials, potentially compromising the depth and authenticity of the MTB-MLE experience. As a result, educators faced challenges in creating a vibrant and contextually rich learning atmosphere conducive to language development.

The study's findings underscore the imperative for increased investments in resource development to support the effective implementation of MTB-MLE. This resonates with Bui and Nguyen (2016), who emphasizes the need for sustained investments in linguistic and educational resources to facilitate successful language-based educational reforms. Addressing resource constraints requires strategic planning and allocation of resources to ensure the creation,

adaptation, and dissemination of culturally and linguistically relevant instructional materials. Such investments are essential not only for overcoming current challenges but also for building a sustainable foundation for the continued success of MTB-MLE initiatives.

The exploration of challenges in resource availability illuminates the intricate dynamics that educators and policymakers face in implementing MTB-MLE in the Philippines. The scarcity of culturally and linguistically relevant instructional materials poses a significant hurdle, emphasizing the need for strategic interventions, increased investments, and collaborative efforts to ensure the availability of resources that support effective MTB-MLE implementation. These insights contribute to the ongoing discourse on resource considerations in language-based educational reforms, providing guidance for stakeholders invested in fostering linguistic diversity and inclusive education.

### **Adaptations and Innovations: Navigating Challenges in MTB-MLE Implementation**

Despite challenges encountered in mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) implementation, the study illuminated instances of remarkable adaptability and innovation. Educators and communities, often in collaboration with non-governmental organizations, showcased resilience and resourcefulness in addressing the unique demands of MTB-MLE in the Philippines.

The study identified the strategic use of technology as a noteworthy adaptation to overcome challenges, aligning with the insights of Kilag, et al. (2018). Educators and communities leveraged digital platforms, online courses, and community-driven initiatives to address the shortage of instructional materials. This approach not only mitigated the constraints posed by traditional print resources but also showcased a forward-thinking response to the evolving landscape of education, emphasizing the role of technology in enhancing access to educational content.

Collaborative initiatives with non-governmental organizations emerged as a key factor in fostering adaptability and innovation. This aligns with the collaborative model advocated by Lund, et al. (2022), emphasizing the importance of partnerships in addressing challenges in language-based education. The study revealed instances where communities, educators, and NGOs worked together to develop and disseminate resources, showcasing a collective approach to overcoming limitations and fostering sustainable solutions.

The adaptations observed in MTB-MLE implementation highlighted the resilience and resourcefulness of stakeholders in the face of challenges. This resonates with the broader literature on educational innovations and change (Lund, et al., 2022), emphasizing the capacity of stakeholders to creatively respond to evolving educational landscapes. The study's findings underscore the importance of recognizing and supporting the agency of educators and communities in navigating challenges, fostering a culture of adaptability and innovation in the pursuit of effective MTB-MLE.

The adaptations and innovations in MTB-MLE implementation provides insights into the dynamic strategies employed by educators and communities facing challenges. The leveraging of

technology, collaborative initiatives with non-governmental organizations, and the demonstrated resilience of stakeholders contribute to a growing body of knowledge on effective approaches to navigate the evolving landscape of language-based educational reforms. These findings offer practical implications for stakeholders seeking to enhance the adaptability and innovation capacity in MTB-MLE initiatives.

## Conclusion

This study delved into the intricate dynamics of mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) implementation in the Philippines, aiming to provide a nuanced understanding of the challenges, adaptations, and innovations encountered by educators, communities, and stakeholders. The findings underscored several key themes that contribute to the broader discourse on language-based educational reforms and carry implications for policymakers, educators, and researchers.

The first key finding highlighted the indispensable role of teacher preparedness and training in the successful implementation of MTB-MLE. The insights gleaned from educators emphasized the need for ongoing professional development, linguistic proficiency, and pedagogical strategies aligned with the principles of MTB-MLE. The second key finding emphasized the pivotal role of community engagement in the efficacy of MTB-MLE policies. The study illuminated instances where successful implementation was closely linked to communities actively contributing to instructional materials, sharing linguistic expertise, and fostering positive language attitudes. The third key finding shed light on challenges posed by limited resources, particularly in the production of culturally and linguistically relevant instructional materials. The fourth key finding showcased instances of adaptability and innovation in response to the unique demands of MTB-MLE implementation. Leveraging technology, collaborative initiatives with non-governmental organizations, and the resilience of stakeholders demonstrated creative solutions to overcome limitations in traditional print resources.

The study contributes valuable insights to the ongoing discourse on MTB-MLE implementation in the Philippines. Recognizing the intricate interplay between teacher preparedness, community engagement, resource availability, and adaptability is crucial for informed policymaking and effective educational practices. The findings call for a holistic approach that considers the multifaceted dimensions of MTB-MLE, fostering a collaborative and adaptive educational landscape that celebrates and preserves linguistic diversity in the Philippines. As the nation navigates this transformative journey, the study's insights provide a foundation for future research, policy adjustments, and initiatives aimed at optimizing the potential of MTB-MLE in enhancing educational outcomes and nurturing linguistic diversity.

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