

THE PERILS OF MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION IN THE PHILIPPINES

by:

Jacqueline T. Cruz

Teacher I, Jose C. Payumo Jr. Memorial High School

Multilingual education programs require careful planning in order to prepare children for linguistic and academic competency in English and additional languages. Multilingual programs are founded on research demonstrating the model's efficacy in guiding students to linguistic fluency and academic success in several languages.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization UNESCO (2003) defines the word as the use of at least three languages in education, such as the mother tongue, a regional or national language, and an international language. The 1999 Resolution of the UNESCO General Conference reinforced the notion that only multilingual education can fulfill the requirements of global and national involvement and the special needs of culturally and linguistically different groups. The UNESCO encourages bilingual and/or multilingual education at all levels as a method of promoting social and gender equality and as a crucial component of linguistically diverse society.

In the 2012-2013 academic year, the public school system in the Philippines implemented a multilingual policy. The policy, which is implemented as the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education program, localizes the language of early literacy and teaching, the curriculum's content, and the support structures. This signifies a departure from the country's lengthy history of standardized curricula with their one-size-fits-all approach and Western, colonial paradigms, as well as linguistic policies that favored the colonizer's language (English) and/or national language.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, multilingualism has educational, cognitive, social, and economic benefits for students who acquire multiple language proficiency.

Increased executive function, attentional control, and task switching (mental flexibility) are the cognitive benefits. It may also prevent the onset of age-related cognitive decline and diseases such as Alzheimer's, and it may result in more intellectual flexibility.

In terms of educational benefits, dual language programs can result in comparable or superior accomplishment for students compared to English-only schools or monolingual schools. Additionally, improved learning results in numerous areas are attainable. Multilingual education is also related with higher high school graduation rates for immigrant children. It can also lead to better levels of creativity and abstract thought and reasoning. In addition, it fosters greater metalinguistic awareness to facilitate future language learning.

Additionally, society and culture gain from multilingual education. This may lead to an increase in the development of empathy by fostering a stronger knowledge of other foreign cultures. Connection to heritage cultures should also be strengthened. Most significantly, it fosters global awareness, decreased discrimination, increased self-esteem, and greater intergroup interactions.

Regarding its contribution to economic development, it can increase employment prospects in a variety of public and commercial sectors.

However, multilingual education implementation in the Philippines is not entirely successful. There have been complaints indicating a lack of planning and resources.

Nery's (2018) analysis of the implementation of Mother Tongue-based Multilingual Education in the Philippines reveals characteristics that tend to maintain institutional continuity rather than institutional change. The local implementers were not

supplied with the necessary resources or capabilities for transformation. Moreover, the resource or capacity shortages appeared to be supported by a persistent command or hierarchical structure. To overcome the burden of this status quo, suggestions are provided. These include rules geared at bolstering the practice of teacher expertise and instructional leadership, as well as changing the program's administration to align the school language with the home language.

Another problem noted by Burton (2013) was that teachers' and parents' perceptions of MTB-MLE focused on the policy's short-term advantages and long-term downsides. While both groups were overwhelmingly delighted with the gain in student understanding, they raised concern about the future consequences for studying in Bikol rather than in English. They publicly supported the policy in terms of complying with the rules, although hidden resistance was noticed in their words and actions. The ramifications of these findings are around the administration of language policy. As a remedy, language policy should be implemented through interactions between the top and bottom levels that take into account local context.

For the progressive implementation of multilingual education, research-based planning is required. Doing so without thorough consideration may defeat its intended aim and result in more severe problems.

References:

- Burton, L. (2013). Mother tongue-based multilingual education in the Philippines: studying a top-down policy from the bottom up. University Digital Conservancy. Retrieved from <https://conservancy.umn.edu/handle/11299/152603>
- Nery, M. (2018). From Policy to Local Practice: an Implementation Study of the Mother Tongue-based Multilingual Education in the Philippines. Columbia Universities Libraries. <https://doi.org/10.7916/D8HH7XMR>

Multilingual Education (n.d.) International Bureau of Education – UNESCO. Retrieved from <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/glossary-curriculum-terminology/m/multilingual-education>