

STRIKING THE BALANCE: MULTILINGUALISM IN EDUCATION

by:

LORNA V. GALAPON

Teacher II, Mariveles National High School - Poblacion

The language of instruction in Philippine education has long been a subject of discussion, with proponents of English, Filipino, and mother tongue instruction advocating for the advantages of their respective languages. Achieving balance is essential for fostering comprehensive learning, considering the diverse linguistic landscape of the Philippines.

In the Philippines, characterized by ethnic diversity with 181 documented individual languages, the Department of Education (DepEd) has incorporated Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) into the Enhanced Basic Education Program. This initiative mandates the use of students' familiar language (their first language) as the medium of instruction from Grade 1 to Grade 3. The Philippines stands as the first Southeast Asian country implementing a national policy for MTB-MLE in the primary school years, setting an example for neighboring nations.

MTB-MLE currently employs 19 languages, including Tagalog, Kapampangan, Pangasinan, Iloko, Bikol, Ybanag, Sinugbuanong Binisaya, Hiligaynon, Waray, Bahasa Sug, Maguindanaoan, Maranao, Chavacano, Ivatan, Sambal, Aklanon, Kinaray-a, Yakan, and Sinurigaanon. In turn, research underscores the advantages of teaching learners in their mother tongue during the early school years.

Despite MTB-MLE's success in enhancing early comprehension, challenges emerge as learners progress to higher grades. The introduction of Tagalog and English as second and third languages becomes a hurdle, affecting the reading comprehension rate of public school learners. Consequently, this impacts their competitiveness in English-

language regional contests, where private school contestants maintain an edge due to their continued use of English as the medium of instruction. Additionally, English and Filipino, as official languages, are being used in different aspects of society such as prints, broadcasts, courts, official documents, and more.

Filipino, as the national language, plays a crucial role in unifying a country marked by diverse languages and dialects. Instruction in Filipino ensures effective communication among citizens and active participation in the nation's cultural and political discourse. However, challenges arise in higher years, particularly in high school, where the majority of lessons utilize English materials, except for subjects such as Filipino and Araling Panlipunan.

English, recognized as a global language, opens doors to international opportunities in education and the job market. Proficiency in English enhances communication skills, crucial for success in a globalized world and the digital age. Despite these advantages, a considerable number of students still struggle to comprehend the English language, posing difficulties in understanding lessons.

Balancing the use of these languages is essential to uphold competency levels in comprehension, foster global competitiveness, and enrich national identity. The use of mother tongue in the early years enhances understanding but introduces challenges during the transition to higher grades. The national language, Filipino, serves as a unifying force but faces competition from English materials in high school. English opens doors to global opportunities but poses comprehension challenges for some students.

In conclusion, achieving a delicate equilibrium between these languages is crucial to creating brilliant and globally competitive Filipinos. Recognizing the pros and cons of each language of instruction allows for a more nuanced and effective approach to education, ensuring a well-rounded learning experience for all students in the Philippines.

References:

Mother Tongue-based learning makes lessons more interactive and easier for students | Department of Education. (2017). Deped.gov.ph. <https://www.deped.gov.ph/2016/10/24/mother-tongue-based-learning-makes-lessons-more-interactive-and-easier-for-students/>

Philippine Daily Inquirer. (2023, September). Use of first language or mother tongue does not work in the Philippines. INQUIRER.net; INQUIRER.net. <https://opinion.inquirer.net/166071/use-of-first-language-or-mother-tongue-does-not-work-in-the-philippines>

education_south. (2021, March 18). Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education in the Philippines : Its success and struggle - De educatione meridie. De Educatione Meridie. <https://varlyproject.blog/mother-tongue-based-multilingual-education-in-the-philippines-its-success-and-struggle/>