

# Mother Tongue as a Learning Area in Grade 1 in Benguet Division

Marlyn P. Wacnag

**Abstract**—This study sought to determine the status of Mother Tongue as a learning area in Grade 1 among public elementary schools in Benguet Division. The descriptive-survey research design was used. A validated, reliability-tested questionnaire was used as data-gathering tool. A total enumeration of 24 school principals and 65 grade 1 teachers in the school division of Benguet participated in the study.

The findings revealed that the principals and teachers perceived much benefits derived from the mother tongue as a learning area in the basic education curriculum. The mother tongue curriculum content and organization were perceived as much relevant. The approaches and strategies applied in teaching mother tongue along listening skills, speaking skills, reading skills, writing skills, and critical thinking skills were perceived as much effective. The instructional materials used in teaching mother tongue are moderately adequate. The principals and teachers expressed an urgent need for a mother tongue library, mother tongue references, dictionaries, assessment materials, and multimedia mother tongue kits. Much serious challenges were encountered in teaching mother tongue, the most serious of which are funding, getting community support and empowerment, attitude of parents, stakeholders and other organizations and getting parents' support and involvement.

The relevant curriculum content and organization of the mother tongue, particularly its indigenous features, connects the learners to their roots, culture and heritage, instill pride in their beginnings, and develop a deeper sense of community and nationhood. The involvement and participation of parents and communities in curriculum development are essential to the success of a mother tongue education program. Varied approaches and methodologies which are effectively applied in teaching the mother tongue allow learners to learn, listen, speak, read, write and think critically in their first language and make them better prepared to become active, independent learners. The national government, local government units, communities, parents and stakeholders and other organizations and schools concerned are components of active learning communities who should demonstrate commitment, involvement and full support for the mother tongue program.

**Keywords**— instructional materials, learning area, Mother tongue, strategies

## I. INTRODUCTION

Language is a vital instrument in communication. Considering that it is clearly the key to communication and understanding in the classroom, instruction through a language

that learners do not speak, such as the second language (L2) can pose problems of instruction. This can make both learning and teaching difficult. This situation brings in the issue of mother tongue-based schooling for educational quality. Mother tongue-based bilingual programs use the learner's first language, known as the L1, to teach beginning reading and writing skills along with academic content. This enables the second or foreign language, known as L2, to be taught systematically so that learners can gradually transfer skills from the familiar language to the unfamiliar one [1].

The use of a familiar language (L1) to teach beginning literacy facilitates an understanding of sound-symbol-meaning correspondence. Learning to read is most efficient when pupils know the language. Transfer of linguistic and communicative skills is facilitated in mother tongue-based instruction. Once students have basic literacy skills in the L1 and communicative skills in the L2, they can begin reading and writing in the L2, efficiently transferring the literacy skills they have acquired in L1 [2, 3].

Data from three different countries: Eritrea, Cameroon, and the Philippines [4], consistently demonstrate that good to average students read fluently and with good comprehension by the end of Grade 2 and even below average students are reading well by the end of Grade 3 when learning to read in their mother tongue (L1). Also, it was investigated that the use of mother tongue (L1) in his monolingual Spanish-speaking classes in Puerto Rico and noted that a high percentage of students (over 80%) found the use of L1 in the classroom useful [5].

People's heart languages are central to culture, community, education and identity. When a child does not know his language well, people cannot say that he will be nurtured with his culture properly, as the relationship between language and culture is deeply rooted. The Education for All report notes that children who are members of ethnic or an indigenous group enter school with poorer prospects of success and emerge with fewer years of education and lower levels of achievement [6].

In addition, the report advises that to effectively teach the around 221 million children worldwide who speak a different language at home from the one used for instruction in schools, there is need to first teach them in their home language while gradually introducing the national or official language.

In the context of formal education, the term mother tongue (L1) is normally used to refer to the language a child learned first and usually speaks best [7]. Most supporters of mother tongue-based learning agreed that a child's home language can

Marlyn P. Wacnag, Ph. D., Professor, Indigenous People's Institute, Cordillera Career Development College, Buyagan, Poblacion, La Trinidad, Benguet, Philippines

effectively be used as a language of instruction in the early years of their schooling as a bridge to learning a foreign language [8]. This was supported by the comparative study conducted which indicates that teachers and students perceive the mother tongue as a legitimate tool to use in learning a second language [9]. Additionally, the level of development of children's mother tongue is a strong predictor of their second language development [10].

The child's initial acquisition of language is vital to his learning how to think [11]. Therefore, when an education system imposes foreign language on children, disregarding their initial contact with language and pattern of processing new information, it inhibits their development of cognitive function.

In the formal education settings, it is in order to assert that children are going to be most effectively taught when both children and teachers speak well the language of instruction. This idea was supported by [12] when she said that most children who begin their education in their mother tongue make a better start, demonstrate increased self-confidence and continue to perform better than those who start school in a new language. Children experience success in their early years in school if the medium of instruction is the children's first language, or mother tongue [13]. In addition, the use of mother tongue was instrumental in the reduction of failure rates caused by students' poor development of basic literacy [14].

The decision to implement mother tongue based education is research-based. In the Philippines, there have been several studies on MTBMLE over the years. Among these are the Iloilo Experiments (1948-1954 and 1961-1964); the Rizal Experiment (1960-1966); The First Language Component-Bridging Program in Ifugao Province (1986-1993); the Lingu Franca Project (1999-2001); and the Culture-Responsive Curriculum for Indigenous People-Third Elementary Education Project (CCIP-TEEP) study (2003-2007). The results of these studies show that when teachers use the pupils' mother tongue, they learn to read more quickly; they learn better in Math and Science; and they improve in cognitive skills. Also, it was confirmed in these studies that children who have learned to read and write in their first language, learn to speak, read and write in the second and third languages more quickly. Overall, those who begin school in their first language with careful bridging with the two second languages emerge as more competent in all areas of study [15].

In the context of this study, L1 refers to the use of a familiar language. This language is the mother tongue, or the learner's first language. The learner's second language is known as L2. In most cases, this is a foreign language. A third language which is also taught as a learning area, is known as third language, or L3. In Philippine setting, English is a second language (L2) to most Filipinos. The Philippine Constitution declares both English and Filipino to be the official languages of the Philippines. As such, three languages are taught in Philippine schools: Mother Tongue (L1), English (L2), and Filipino (L3).

One of the most significant pilot studies on mother

tongue-based multilingual education in the Philippines is the 1998 Lubuagan First Language Component (FLC) multilingual education pilot project. This was initiated through a partnership of educators from the Lubuagan community, the local government, the Department of Education (DepEd), and the Summer Institute of Linguistics, Inc. (SIL) International Philippines. The FLC program promoted the use of the children's first language in their basic education experience, complementing the ongoing education in Filipino and English, the two major languages of education as mandated by the country's Bilingual Education Policy (BEP). Children in the first, second, and third grades of Lubuagan public schools were taught the subject matter in their first language, Lilibuagan, and were then taught to handle the same subject matter using the two major languages: English and Filipino. The results were striking. Teachers observed high levels of participation among the pupils, and the teachers themselves began to use the first language orally to foster a more dynamic learning environment. In the 2006 National Achievement Tests for Third Grade Reading, Lubuagan pupils outperformed all other schools in the province by up to 30 percent for both Filipino and English. In 2007, first to third grade pupils from Lubuagan consistently outperformed the other schools in all subjects, including Math, Filipino, and English, by over 20 percent [16]. The Lubuagan Experience triggered DepEd Order No. 74, institutionalizing Mother Tongue-Based MLE, that is, the use of more than two languages for literacy and instruction.

In sum, it was observed that most of the literature on the use of mother tongue in schools, in foreign countries including the Philippines, state that the level of development of children's mother tongue is a strong predictor of their second language development. Children who come to school with a solid foundation in their mother tongue develop stronger literacy abilities in the school language. When parents and other caregivers are able to spend time with their children and tell stories or discuss issues with them in a way that develops their mother tongue vocabulary and concepts, children come to school well-prepared to learn the school language and succeed academically [17].

With the background provided, this study was conceptualized, with the aim of determining the status of mother tongue as a learning area in the public schools' Grade 1 classes in the division of Benguet. Specifically, answers to the following problems were sought:

1. How do the principals and teachers perceive the benefits derived from mother tongue as a learning area in Grade 1?

1.1 Are there significant differences in the perceptions of the principals and teachers regarding the benefits of mother tongue as a learning area?

2. How do the principals and teachers perceive the curriculum content and organization of mother tongue?

2.1 Are there significant differences in the perceptions of the principals and teachers regarding the curriculum content and organization of mother tongue?

3. How do the teachers and principals perceive the effectiveness of the identified strategies/approaches in teaching mother tongue?

3.1 Are there significant differences in the level of effectiveness of the identified strategies in teaching mother tongue as perceived by the two groups of respondents?

4. How adequate are the identified instructional materials in teaching mother tongue?

4.1 Are there significant differences in the perceived level of adequacy of instructional materials in teaching mother tongue according to group?

5. How serious are the challenges encountered in teaching mother tongue?

5.1 Are there significant differences in the perceived degree of seriousness of the challenges encountered in teaching mother tongue according to group?

## II. RESEARCH DESIGN

This study made use of the descriptive-survey research design. The 24 elementary school principals and 65 grade 1 teachers composed the population of the study. One central school and one non-central school per district in the division of Benguet served as locale of the study.

The items/indicators in the research tool were drawn from Mother Tongue Curriculum Guide by DepEd, Department Orders, UNESCO reports and articles on Mother Tongue education. It was subjected for reliability testing with 0.95 over-all coefficient of reliability, which indicates that the questionnaire is highly reliable.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### **Benefits derived from mother tongue as a learning area.**

The over-all perceived level of benefits derived from MT as a learning area is much as indicated by the mean of 3.01. Both principals and teachers consider "it is through MT that every human being first learns to formulate and express his ideas about himself and about the world in which he lives" as foremost benefit derived from MT as a learning area. As pointed out, children's cultural and linguistic experience in the home is the foundation of their future learning and teachers must build on that foundation rather than undermine it [18]. This implies that the mother tongue is a venue through which the learners' linguistic, cultural, and intellectual experiences they develop in their homes and communities are brought to the schools. This means that there is an interplay and intermix of meaningful experiences derived from the learners' home background and experiences derived from school.

On the other hand, the lowest in rank is "the level of development of children's mother tongue is a strong predictor of their second language development." This implies that the principals and teachers do not totally affirm the predictive role of MT in successful second language development. While MT can predict success in second language learning, there are other factors to consider in successful learning of second language and other learning languages particularly in learning

environments where diverse ethnolinguistic cultures are found.

The t-test analysis reveals that the computed t-ratio of 2.86 is greater than the tabled t-value of 2.00 at .05 level of significance. Therefore, there are significant differences in the perceived level of benefits derived from MT as a learning area according to group. The finding that the principals manifested a higher level of benefits derived from MT is attributed to the fact that, as principals and leaders of their respective schools, they attended trainings with respect to the MT ahead of their teachers and had to echo the MT policy among them. They have to be strongly sold to the idea of MT instruction before they "can sell" the idea among their teachers.

### **Mother tongue curriculum content and organization.**

The curriculum content and organization are perceived by the principals and teachers as much relevant with a mean of 3.13. The top three indicators imply that the MT curriculum enhances the development of communication skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing and critical thinking. Also, the MT curriculum is very much relevant as vehicle of the learners' culture and heritage. In this regard, by learning in the mother tongue, children's home culture and traditional knowledge are reinforced [19]. Children gain a better self-concept and develop a strong sense of their own identity. The curriculum content of the mother tongue also reinforces local culture and knowledge and bridges the formal school system and the children's home and community environment. This, in turn, facilitates parental involvement and strengthens community support for education.

In the Philippines, curriculum development involving mother-tongue based multilingual education involves the maximum participation and support from the local government units, parents and community [20].

The t-test analysis of the perceived relevance of mother tongue curriculum content and organization according to group shows a rejection of the null hypothesis with the computed t-ratio of 2.80 which is greater than the tabled t-value of 2.00 at .05 level of significance. Obviously, the principals manifested a higher level of appreciation regarding the relevance of mother tongue curriculum than the teachers. The result is attributed to the fact that as leaders, the principals had to undergo training on mother tongue instruction ahead of their teachers. They received first-hand information regarding mother tongue instruction. Most of the teachers learned about mother tongue program from echo conferences conducted by their respective school heads.

### **Effectiveness of approaches and strategies in teaching**

**mother tongue.** The over-all mean of 3.19 shows that the approaches and strategies used in teaching mother tongue are much effective. The areas are ranked, as follows: (1) Critical Thinking skills; (2) Listening skills; (3) Reading skills; (4) Writing skills; and (5) Speaking skills.

As noted, critical thinking topped the list, having garnered the highest mean of 3.30. This is so because the mother tongue facilitates thinking. Regarding this, it was averred that a child's initial acquisition of language is vital to their learning how to think [21].

**Listening Skills.** In the over-all analysis, the respondents perceived that the listening skills strategies are very much effective. Indeed, “listening stories” designed to be read aloud to children help develop their listening skills, memory, imagination and prediction skills. Teachers read the stories expressively and follow-up with questions about the content. Also, young children respond well to rhymes with rhythm and action. Furthermore, it was cited that games and riddles help stimulate learners’ thinking about words and develop greater understanding and listening comprehension [22].

**Reading Skills.** The approaches/strategies in teaching mother tongue reading skills were perceived as much effective. Simple story mapping and breaking up a big word into small words are analytic or top-down strategies. Building a sight vocabulary and arranging jumbled letters to form words are synthetic or bottom-up strategies. It is very effective to let the learners represent their knowledge of words using pictures, pictographs, and graphic representations [23].

**Speaking Skills.** The mean of 3.05 indicates that the speaking skills strategies are much effective. The top-ranking strategies are: (1) “Introducing oneself” game, (2) Using polite words in dialogs, (3) Conversation/Dialog, and (4) Reciting poems. Culturally appropriate words are embedded in these speaking activities. These activities enhance the ability to converse in the mother tongue.

**Writing Skills.** The mean of 3.15 reveals that writing skills strategies are much effective. The top-ranking indicators are: (1) Coloring a picture story; (2) Copying exercises; and (3) Describing a picture. These strategies were perceived as very much effective in developing writing skills. Picture study is a very popular strategy among pre-schoolers and grade one pupils. Also very common writing activity is copying exercises.

**Critical Thinking.** The critical thinking strategies are very much effective particularly in answering “why” questions in stories read and answering “how” questions in making projects. As emphasized, teaching thinking is not confined to basic questions of who, what, where and when [24]. Reading passages in the mother tongue involves “why” and “how” and “what would happen if...” questions. Critical thinking can be taught in all the areas of communication arts: reading, listening, speaking, and writing [25].

The t-test analysis shows that the computed t-ratio of 1.69 is less than the tabled t-value of 2.00 at .05 level of significance. Therefore, there are no significant differences in the perceived level of effectiveness of the approaches and strategies used in teaching mother tongue according to group.

**Adequacy of instructional materials used in teaching mother tongue.** The mean of 2.27 reveals that the instructional materials used in Mother Tongue are moderately adequate. This implies that there is still a long way to go as regards developing an adequate stock of instructional materials to be used in teaching mother tongue.

The top indicators are: (1) Mother Tongue Curriculum Guide (much adequate); (2) Teachers’ Instructional Modules in Mother Tongue (much adequate); and (3) Alphabet Chart in

Mother Tongue (much adequate). These materials are DepEd materials made available for teachers’ use in teaching mother tongue. The lowest in rank are: (1) Mother Tongue library; (2) Dictionaries on mother tongue; and (3) T.V. Sets for classroom use. Multi-media instructional materials involving audio-visual materials, filmstrips, and print are useful tools in mother tongue instruction. Television sets have the advantage of movement, action, sound over still pictures. Multi-media presentations tend to generate greater excitement among learners and make learning more satisfying and fun [26].

The t-test analysis shows that the computed t-ratio of 7.88 is greater than the tabled t-value of 2.00 at .05 level of significance. This means that there are significant differences in the perceived level of adequacy of instructional materials according to group. Although the means of both groups indicate a moderate level of adequacy of instructional materials used in teaching mother tongue, the teacher’s mean is higher than that of the principals. The mean differences caused the rejection of the null hypothesis.

**Challenges encountered in teaching mother tongue.** The challenges encountered in teaching mother tongue are much serious as shown by the over-all mean of 3.07. The ranking are as follows: other challenges, followed by school challenges and government challenges.

**Governmental Challenges.** In the over-all analysis, the governmental challenges in teaching mother tongue are much serious as indicated by the over-all mean of 2.94. The most challenging problems are funding, congressional support, and nationwide commitment for the program, political challenges in implementing a mother tongue educational program spring mainly from policies that are “top-down” impositions and principals, teachers and learners have to toe the line. Anent this, it was highlighted enabling citizens to “participate meaningfully in socioeconomic and political discourse [27].” For meaningful language advocacy, all segments of the population must participate in language planning and policy.

**School Challenges.** The mean of 3.12 indicates much serious school challenges encountered in teaching mother tongue. The most serious challenges are: (1) coming out with good, appropriate, adequate instructional materials such as books, workbooks, charts, dictionaries on mother tongue; (2) having good teachers who are competent in the mother tongue; and (3) adequate teacher orientation and preparation for teaching MT. Indeed, the lack of instructional materials hinders the effective transmission of content of the mother tongue [28]. In Kenya, providing adequate reading materials have proved challenging, because the issue of providing instructional materials in the mother tongue is heavily influenced by donor interests, evangelical motives, strong economic interests from publishing companies, and global power relations [29].

In the Philippines, government funding for the production of instructional materials in the mother tongue is monitored by DepEd. In DepEd Order 90, series of 2011, the funding guidelines specified that 50 percent of the allocated funds should go to the development and reproduction of the teaching

and learning materials; 20 percent for monitoring and evaluation; 15 percent for research and 15 percent for transportation [30].

**Other challenges.** The other challenges encountered in the teaching of mother tongue were perceived as much serious with a mean of 3.16. The most serious challenges are: (1) Getting community support and empowerment; (2) Having parents and other stakeholders and organizations clear their doubt and drop their skepticisms on the use of mother tongue in basic education; and (3) Eliciting parents' support and involvement.

The t-test analysis shows that the computed t-ratio of 0.44 is less than the tabled t-value of 2.00 at .05 level of significance. Therefore, there are no significant differences in the perceived degree of seriousness of challenges encountered in teaching the mother tongue.

In answer to the major problem of the study, the status of mother tongue as a learning area in Benguet Division is summarized in the table below:

TABLE I: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS REGARDING STATUS OF MOTHER TONGUE (MT) AS A LEARNING AREA IN BENGUET

Problems	Principals	Teachers	Overall Mean
Benefits derived from Mother Tongue as a Learning Area	3.27 (Very Much Beneficial)	2.91 (Much Beneficial)	3.01 (Much Beneficial)
	Ho Rejected	...	
Relevance of Mother Tongue Curriculum Content and Organization	3.34 (Very Much Relevant)	3.06 (Much Relevant)	3.13 (Much Relevant)
	Ho Rejected		
Effectiveness of Strategies/ Approaches Used in Teaching Mother Tongue	3.30 (Very Much Effective)	3.23 (Much Effective)	3.25 (Much Effective)
	Ho Not Rejected	...	
Adequacy of Instructional Materials Used in Teaching Mother Tongue	2.08 (Moderately Adequate)	2.34 (Moderately Adequate)	2.27 (Moderately Adequate)
	Ho Rejected		
Challenges Encountered in Teaching Mother Tongue	3.12 (Much Serious)	3.05 (Much Serious)	3.07 (Much Serious)
	Ho Not Rejected		

#### IV. CONCLUSION

In view of the various benefits derived from the mother tongue as a learning area, it is then most effective for schools particularly in basic education, to use the home language or mother tongue both as a subject and as a medium of instruction to build a strong foundation for the learner in the mastery of the basic communication skills and as a bridge to the learning of a second and third language.

The relevant curriculum content and organization of the mother tongue, particularly its indigenous features, connects the learners to their roots, culture and heritage, instill pride in their beginnings, and deeper sense of community and nationhood. The involvement and participation of parents and communities in curriculum development are essential to the success of a mother tongue education program.

Varied approaches and methodologies which are effectively applied in teaching the mother tongue allow learners to learn, listen, read, speak, write and think critically in their

first language and make them better prepared to become active, independent learners.

Successful implementation of the mother tongue program demands that teachers and administrators are fully equipped with adequate instructional materials. The production of culturally relevant teaching materials using the mother tongue, adequacy of printed texts, grammar dictionary, folk literature and multimedia instructional materials are much needed in teaching the mother tongue.

The implementation of the mother tongue program incurs much serious challenges that must be addressed. The national government, local government units, communities, parents and stakeholders and other organizations and schools concerned are components of active learning communities who should demonstrate commitment, involvement and full support for the mother tongue program. Mother tongue policies at the national, regional, and local levels can facilitate strong mother tongue education. A successful mother tongue-based education needs a sufficient number of well-trained teachers and adequate instructional materials.

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**Marlyn P. Wacnag** was born at Cervantes, Ilocos Sur on September 7, 1975. She is a graduate of Bachelor in Elementary Education (CUM LAUDE) in the University of Baguio in 1996; Master of Arts in Education major in educational management in Cordillera Career Development College in 2003; and Doctor of Philosophy major in development education in the University of Baguio in 2014.

She was a former Kindergarten Teacher, a College Professor, a Subject Coordinator, a Supervising Instructor for practice teaching, Assistant Dean, and Dean of the College of Teacher Education. At present, she is the Director of Indigenous People's Institute (Research and Extension) in Cordillera Career Development College (CCDC) in La Trinidad, Benguet.