

MOTHER TONGUE-BASED MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION: THE ATTITUDES AND CHALLENGES FACED BY HIGH SCHOOL AND SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS IN ZAMBOANGA DEL SUR

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ABSTRACT

The study illustrates the attitudes of public high school and senior high school teachers in Zamboanga del Sur, Philippines towards Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTBMLE) policy; the challenges they experienced that are attributed to it; and their suggestions in improving such language education policy. The study adapted the modified version of Ejieh's (2004) questionnaire, such modifications were done by Tonio and Ella (2019) in their study for it to fit in the Philippine educational context. Using Chronbach's Alpha, Tonio and Ella's (2019) modified questionnaire garnered a 0.80 rating for reliability. The questionnaire was administered online, and the data were obtained from 70 secondary teachers of sixteen (16) public high schools in the Zamboanga del Sur province. The data were analyzed using the frequency and mean computation as well as thematic analysis. The results indicate that generally, the teachers disagree that the MTB-MLE policy is in good principle as they believe that it will not make the lessons interesting to students, and that it will not enable them to understand their lessons easily. In addition, some of the most recurring challenges associated with the policy include reading and instruction comprehension difficulties, degradation of English language literacy and proficiency, language and/or communication barrier between the teacher and the students, poor vocabulary and other grammar issues, teaching difficulty in Math, and difficulty in learning a second language (L2). Some recommendations obtained from the participants include the call for additional funding and support to MTB-MLE teachers, abolishing the policy and switching to the old curriculum, and revising some aspects of the policy to better suit the linguistic diversity of the country.

Keywords: MTBLME, teachers, attitudes, challenges, recommendations

Introduction

Education in the Philippines undergoes quite a number of changes over time. One of the most monumental and yet radical change in the country's system of education is the implementation of the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) Policy which was an inclusion in the K to 12 program as mandated by Republic Act 10533 (Philippines Department of Education, 2012). The MTB-MLE Policy orders the use of more than two languages to increase literacy and instruction in subjects like mathematics, science, health and social studies (Nolasco, 2018). In addition, this program seeks to deter if not to lessen the "high functional illiteracy of Filipinos" (Nolasco, 2018, p. 2 as cited in Medilo, 2018) wherein language is considered as an important contributing factor. It is believed that using mother tongue offers a myriad of positive impacts on education as it develops and encourages children's expressiveness, activeness, and participation in learning, (Berowa & Agbayani, 2019), it helps improve students' academic skills (Cummins, 2000; Thomas & Collier, 1997; Walter & Dekker, 2011 as cited in Burton, 2013), improves literacy and skills in the English language (Cummins, 2000 as cited in Burton, 2013), it helps students gain higher academic achievement (Walter & Dekker, 2011 as cited in

Burton, 2013), it develops critical thinking (Brock-Utne, 2006 as cited in Burton, 2013), and it enables stronger classroom participation (Benson, 2000; Dutcher, 1995 as cited in Burton, 2013), among others.

On the same note, Walter (2011 as cited in Medilo, 2018) argued that using mother tongue in education is of great importance because of its capability of producing proficient readers in a span of 2-3 years (Walter, 2011, p. 24) as well as its benefits to learners with average ability and potential. Although the positive impacts of MTB-MLE in education is extensive, Nolasco (2018) argues that the change in LOI in the educational curriculum will not be enough to ensure that the policy will function in a highly diverse and multilingual country like the Philippines. He posits that community support and empowerment as one of the defining factors of a successful implementation must be present. This claim also supports Naom and Sarah's (2014 as cited in Berowa & Agbayani, 2019) proposition that the goals of the program will only be realized when puts to the core the attitudes of teachers with the policy and not just the program implementation.

Baker (1988 as cited in Tonio & Ella, 2019), argues that when teachers think on the language they use in class, their views frequently emerge. Their attitudes, whether consciously or unconsciously, have a significant impact on the growth or deterioration, repair or destruction, of language. Meanwhile, Garrett (2010) defines attitude as a "disposition to react favorably or unfavorably to a class of objects" (p.20). Studies centered around teachers' attitudes regarding MTB-MLE and how their attitude affect the implementation process were conducted years after the policy's inception.

In 2013, Burton discovered that teachers' and parents' perceptions of MTB-MLE were mostly focused on the policy's short-term benefits and long-term disadvantages. In addition, the participants in the study expressed concerns as to how learning Bikol instead of English would implicate into their children's futures aside from expressing the overwhelming benefits that the policy might bring in terms of student learning.

Valerio's (2015) research indicated that teachers agree with the statements concerning MTB-MLE to a degree. Teachers are also unsure whether the instructional materials they currently have can ensure that students learn what they need to learn due to the lack of localized translation and concerns that mother tongue-based instruction will not improve students' academic performance in the long run, according to the study. Furthermore, according to Alieto's (2018) research, teachers have a slightly favorable view toward the mother tongue.

In 2019, Berowa and Agbayani revealed that teachers showed favorable attitudes towards the MTB-MLE policy despite the challenges they have at hand. Furthermore, Tonio and Ella's (2019) study found that pre-service teachers have a favorable attitude about adopting the mother tongue as the medium of instruction, that they support the policy's implementation, and that they are willing to attend training to teach in the mother tongue.

Alieto (2018) emphasized the importance of establishing positive attitudes among implementers in order to ensure a successful implementation of the policy. Additionally, Sutton and Levinson (2001) believe that teachers' attitude toward MTB-MLE should be given attention as they play key roles in the implementation and that their actions shape the policy. As a result, it is critical to include the perspectives of all stakeholders in various linguistic communities, as this aids in assessing language status and enacting language policies (Callan & Gallois, 1987).

Taking the aforementioned evidence and reasons into consideration, this study investigates the attitudes of high school and senior high school public teachers who are at the receiving end of the MTB-MLE policy implementation. It also captures the challenges they face that are one way or another linked and related to the MTB-MLE implementation in the primary levels. Lastly, this research solicits suggestions and recommendations from teachers working in the frontlines teaching students who are products of the MTB-MLE policy from the bottom-up. Through this study, we aim not only to shed light on the attitudes of teachers but also to give a clearer picture on their experiences in the grassroots. We aim to discover the effects of the policy in the secondary education sector and to prove the veracity of claims pertaining to the benefits of using mother tongue in instruction as mentioned in previous studies backing up the goals and objectives of the policy. At the point of finality, utilizing the study's findings along with respondent recommendations, the study aims to offer input to policymakers for consideration to improve the policy implementation and as guidance as they issue directives that would alter and radically change the course of the country's educational quality.

1.2 Review of Related Literature and Study

1.2.1 Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTBMLE)

Language policy in the Philippines is a complex issue because of the linguistic and cultural diversity of its inhabitants (Tonio & Ella, 2019). Taking into consideration the more or less 7000 islands and 181 distinct languages, crafting and implementing language policies in the educational sector that could serve and cater to the

needs of the whole country becomes a challenge (Lewis, Simons, & Fennig, 2013). As a matter of practice, the country's educational curriculum undergoes a couple of revisions and modifications every ten years. As a result, language policies in the Philippines have changed dramatically and fluctuated over the previous century, with practically every generation having a distinct policy (Burton, 2013). In the recent years, the 1974 and 1987 Bilingual Education Policies institutionalized English and Filipino as the official languages of instruction albeit a great majority of the population do not use and speak both languages as their L1 (Burton, 2013).

The swift phases of changes in the Filipino society in terms of education and global demands pushed lawmakers to update the curriculum that could serve to the ever-changing demands of the 21st century (Valerio, 2015). With the challenges brought by the Bilingual Education Policy, the Department of Education (DepEd) in 2009, issued an order which institutionalized the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE).

This order mandates the use of the learners' first language (L1) as the language of instruction (LOI) in all subject areas from pre-kindergarten to grade three, with Filipino and English taught as separate subjects, as it is thought to speed up the acquisition of literacy skills as indicated below:

- 1) Learners learn to read more quickly when in their first language (L1);
- 2) Pupils who have learned to read and write in their first language learn to speak, read, and write in a second language (L2) and third language (L3) more quickly than those who are taught in a second or third language first; and
- 3) In terms of cognitive development and its effects on other academic areas, pupils taught to read and write in their first language acquire such competencies more quickly (Philippines Department of Education, 2009, p. 1).

In 2012, a new order was issued stating the specific guidelines for MTB-MLE, such reform was embedded in the newly adopted K to 12 Basic Education Program (Philippines Department of Education, 2012). Twelve major languages were identified as languages of instruction (LOI) thereby prompting the shift to mother tongue instruction. The order also gave emphasis to the four areas of development that the new policy has a direct influence: (1) language development which serves as the foundation of a strong education that will lead to success both in school and in lifelong learning; (2) cognitive development which centers on students' Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS); (3) academic development which equips learners to take a full-on grasp and mastery of the competencies in different learning areas; and (4) socio-cultural awareness which evokes and enhances a sense of nationalism as well as pride of the student's heritage, language, and culture (Philippines Department of Education, 2012).

The potential benefits of mother tongue instruction especially for language minority students were revealed in several research studies conducted in the Philippines and elsewhere which prompted policy makers to revise the country's educational curriculum.

Ramires, Yuen, and Yamey (1991), Thomas and Collier's (1997) study in the United States, and a study conducted in the Philippines by Walter and Dekker (2011) showed similar results that students learn better and experience higher academic achievement when their first language (L1) is used in school as compared to learners who learn using their second or third language (L2 or L3). Such findings support the idea that strong first language skills help children's cognitive development and make it easier for them to navigate subject matter (Cummins, 2000; Mallozzi & Malloy, 2007).

In addition, other studies show learning a second language will become easy and efficient when it is founded on a learner's ability and understanding of their L1 (Cummins, 2000). Other studies conducted outside of the Western context, although with less methodological rigor, yielded similar results (Burton, 2013). One of the most prominent initiatives in the study of MTB-MLE is the Ife Project in Nigeria which ran from 1970-1978.

The study found that students who learned using their L1 for six years outperformed students who only learned in their L1 for three years in terms of overall academic achievement gains. Despite having had fewer years with English as the LOI, the first group showed no significant difference in English proficiency from the second group (Fafunwa, Macauley, & Sokoya, 1989 as cited in Burton, 2013 p. 28-29).

In the Philippines, the Lubuagan project, a longitudinal study conducted with grade one to three students in Lubuagan, Cordillera Mountains, aimed at finding out the relationship of academic proficiency and the use of mother tongue found out that students in the experimental schools (where mother tongue was used as the LOI) scored significantly higher in Math, Reading, Filipino, and English compared to their counterparts in the control group (Walter & Dekker, 2011).

Aside from enhanced academic abilities (Cummins, 2000; Thomas & Collier, 1997; Walter & Dekker, 2011 as cited in Burton, 2013), other benefits of education using the mother tongue include more participation inside the class (Benson, 2000; Dutcher, 1995 as cited in Burton, 2013); increased accessibility of education (Benson, 2004c; Smits, Huisman, & Kruijff, 2008 as cited in Burton, 2013); and development of critical thinking skills (Brock-Utne, 2006 as cited in Burton, 2013). Several researches also pointed out that education using the mother tongue impacts pride in terms of culture (Cummins, 2000; Wright and Taylor, 1995 as cited in Burton, 2013); increases participation of parents in the education of their students (Cummins, 2000; Dutcher, 1995; D'Emilio, 1995 as cited in Burton, 2013); and an increase in the achievement of girls (Benson, 2005; Hovens, 2002 as cited in Burton, 2013). In addition, one of the most notable benefits of mother tongue instruction is the foundation it provides in the acquisition of additional languages (Cummins, 2000; Thomas & Collier, 1997 as cited in Burton, 2013).

Language research in terms of attitude is an area of sociolinguistics that investigates and aims at providing critical information such as predicting language scene in multicultural areas where contact and competition exist (Wang & Ladegaard, 2008 as cited in Alieto, 2018), it also helps in understanding issues related to language like language maintenance or language shift (Letsholo, 2009). Moreover, studies on the determination of language attitudes help in determining language status and the institutionalization of language policies, adding to its essentiality (Callan & Gallois, 1987). It is very much important to look into the attitudes of teachers with regards the MTB-MLE considering their critical role in the success or failure of its implementation.

1.2.2 Teachers' Attitude towards Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education

Haugen (1956 as cited in Grosjean, 1982) argues that “whenever languages are in contact, one is likely to find certain prevalent attitudes of favor or disfavor towards the languages involved. These can have profound effect on the psychology of the individuals and on their use of the languages” (p.118). Language contact and competitions in multicultural areas are some of the important phenomena that language attitude research takes into account as this sociolinguistic inquiry (Wang & Ladegaard, 2018) helps us understand the nature of language and the issues related to it, which include but not limited to maintenance or shift (Letsholo, 2009). The Philippines, like many other countries worldwide, is a country where linguistic power struggle is inevitable since more than 180 languages are found in different sociolinguistic settings. People in regions and provinces far from Manila, for example, have some level of resistance to Filipino, the national language (Wa-Mbaleka, 2014), partly because Tagalog is probably the source of more than 90% of Filipino words and only one-third of Filipinos are proficient in Tagalog (Smolicz & Nical, 1997). Language attitude plays a vital role in accounting for which languages are learned, used, and preferred by bilinguals (Grosjean, 1982); and in the determination of the status of a language and in institutionalizing language policies (Callan & Gallois, 1987). In addition, awareness of language attitudes in communities with multicultural contexts are proven to have a significant role in the appropriation of language policies. Lastly, Jones (2012) asserts that attitudes toward a language as well as its use as the LOI affects the implementation of any policy.

As the Philippine educational system underwent a radical shift in its language policy through the adoption of the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education wherein the language of instruction (LOI) was changed to mother tongue instead of Filipino/Tagalog and English alone (Philippines Department of Education, 2012), it is expected that this new language policy could afford Filipinos with a sustainable future (Gallego & Zubiri, 2013) through advanced cognitive development (Cummins, 2000; Mallozzi & Malloy, 2007 as cited in Burton, 2013), enhanced academic skills and achievement (Cummins, 2000; Thomas & Collier, 1997; Walter & Dekker, 2011 as cited in Burton, 2013), and improved literacy in gaining additional languages (Cummins, 2000; Thomas & Collier, 1997 as cited in Burton, 2013), among others, as mentioned in the previous part of the discussion.

However, Akinnaso (1993), in reviewing related literature and studies on programs based on the mother tongue, posits that positive results could not be guaranteed if the only consideration is the use of mother tongue alone. This supports Nolasco's (2008) claim that in the Philippine context, the change in LOI alone will not be enough for the MTB-MLE policy to work and yield favorable results. The way in which policies are implemented should be taken consideration in a local and national standpoint as scholars from anthropological traditions argue that in retrospect, top-down language policies give heavy footing and lean towards expert knowledge compared to local knowledge (Canagarajah, 2005; Rajagopalan, 2005). Although majority of the studies mentioned earlier validate the use of MTB-MLE, it however, does not give consideration or account towards the understanding of language learning in a local scale (Burton, 2013). It is imperative to understand that context plays a crucial role in shaping the policies to be implemented, and those who work on the ground level have their own knowledge, based on hands-on and context-specific experience about the strategies, may it be effective or not, even though they are mostly unrecognized in scholarly literature (Canagarajah, 1993; Pennycook, 1989 as cited in Burton, 2013, p. 29-30).

In the Philippine context of the MTB-MLE implementation, Nolasco (2008) cited community support as well as empowerment as one of the crucial conditions that needs to be met to ensure the success of the program, this was

further supported by Fullan (2003) and Shohamy (2006) arguing that less attention has been given to the grassroots level where implementation of the program will actually occur. Naom and Sarah (2014) argues that the MTB-MLE policy implementation are faced with major drawbacks which include but not limited to teacher preparedness, resources, and attitudes along with challenges of having a multilingual classroom. Nolasco (2008) also added that the attitude of teachers, may it be positive or negative, toward the use of mother tongue as the LOI are one of the most recurring issues in the implementation process, taking into consideration that teachers and parents are one of the key stakeholder groups playing integral roles for carrying out and enacting the educational policy are often forgotten in the process.

Teachers play an enormously vital role as they stand as frontliners in the implementation of any educational policy (Berowa & Agbayani, 2019). Any institution or system of education cannot successfully operate if not because of them, and that without their support and participation, any policy will be rendered as a good as a failure (Stone, 2012). This goes without saying that teachers' attitudes toward MTBMLE should be given attention since they shape and directly impact their students inside the classroom, in essence, their actions can be constituted as the policy in itself (Sutton & Levinson, 2001).

Seeing the importance of identifying teachers' attitudes toward the mother tongue education policy, several studies were conducted since the inception of the MTBMLE in 2012 to provide empirical data that would guide policymakers and individuals working in the education sector.

Burton's study in 2013 focused on the understanding, ideologies, and practices of both the teachers and parents as to how it correlates to the language policy of a national relevance being apportioned at the grassroots. In addition, it also analyzed the many challenges that teachers face as to the implementation of the policy. The study took place in one of the school districts in Bikol, Philippines. Given that they were the only group who have implemented the MTB-MLE, the study focused on teachers in the Grade 1 level. The study discovered that teachers' and parents' perceptions of MTB-MLE were mostly focused on the policy's short-term benefits and long-term disadvantages. Aside from expressing the overwhelming benefits of the policy in terms of student learning, the participants also expressed concerns as to how learning Bikol instead of English would implicate into their children's futures. Additionally, she pointed out the choice that policy makers have, whether they would release top-down directives that oftentimes do not consider local contexts where teachers, parents, and other key stakeholders play critical roles, and where policy implementation takes place, or they can be involved in making decisions regarding which policy will be implemented and vetoed.

In 2015, Valerio conducted a study under the same light—to determine the perceptions of Grades 1-3 teachers regarding the mother tongue-based instruction in the country. The study gathered data from 64 elementary teachers from the province of Quirino, Philippines where a major number of respondents were Ilokano. The study found out that the teachers slightly agree with the statements regarding the MTBE. In addition, one of the key revelations stated in the study is the respondents' lack of confidence as to the instructional materials they presently have and use whether it can ascertain or not their appreciation of the policy since localized translations are mostly unavailable. They were also unsure if the use of mother tongue in instruction can improve and elevate academic performance.

Alieto in 2018 explored the language attitudes and willingness of pre-service teachers regarding the use of mother tongue as the LOI. His study found out that the respondents' 'slightly positive' attitude towards the policy can be understood as a development towards progress in the development of attitudes certain indigenous languages. He also pointed out the willingness of pre-service teachers in using mother tongue as the LOI in the primary level of education. He further stressed the necessity of ensuring positive attitudes of key implementers to yield success in implementing the MTB-MLE.

In 2019, Berowa and Agbayani, as well as Tonio and Ella conducted similar studies on the attitudes of teachers and pre-service teachers. Berowa and Agbayani (2019) found out that teachers in the primary grades showed favorable attitude towards the MTB-MLE despite the myriad challenges they face in terms of instructional and learning materials. Their finding is quite synonymous to that of Tonio and Ella's (2019), as the former pointed out that pre-service teachers enrolled in Elementary Education veered positive attitude regarding the policy and that they are willing to undergo training in teaching using the mother tongue while implying support for the newly instituted language policy in education.

There is no doubt that indeed, it is important to determine the attitudes of teachers as to the LOI in both the teaching and learning process as it influences policy implementation (Jones, 2012), and that a common MOI is necessary in facilitating communication among the teacher and the students (Ejeh, 2004) which contributes to success in terms of implementing the MTB-MLE policy. Therefore, there is a need to know what is happening at the bottom of the process in order to make sound decisions as to where the MTB-MLE program is headed since the key implementors are situated in the community level. However, previous studies like the ones mentioned in this

chapter only focused on the attitudes and perceptions of teachers and pre-service teachers in the primary/elementary levels, thereby creating a gap in the general understanding of the attitudes of teachers in the country in general.

As the first few batches of learners taught in the mother tongue reach high school, it is important to seek the attitudes of teachers in the secondary level as it may give policy makers a glimpse of how the MTB-MLE policy is doing and how it impacted the current state of the educational system. It will also determine what the teachers in the secondary level feel and the challenges they face as the receiving end since the MTB-MLE policy is primarily implemented in the primary level. Although the policy has garnered quite a few recognitions and accolades since the country was able to follow the trail of the worldwide trend, it is also undeniably true that the opposing side of the implementation presents valid arguments. The current research will also try to delve deeper into that and see if there are teachers in the secondary level who oppose the policy implementation. Furthermore, it will solicit ideas and recommendations from the educators who have firsthand teaching experience of students under MTB-MLE in order to better implement the policy. This study will also address the paucity of literature regarding the MTB-MLE policy in the Philippine context and will guide the current language policy as to the areas that are in dire need of attention.

Research Questions

The current study attempted to provide answers to the succeeding questions:

1. What is the attitude of high school teachers with regards to the implementation of MTBMLE in the primary grades?
2. What are the problems/challenges that students and teachers are facing in the secondary level that are one way or another linked to the MTB-MLE implementation?

1.3 Theoretical Framework

This section discusses the theoretical perspectives that will be used in analyzing the attitudes of high school teachers in Zamboanga del Sur regarding the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE). This study is guided by two different frameworks: the Socio-Educational Model of Gardner (1985) and the Language Policy Theory of Spolsky (2011).

The Socio-Educational Model

Robert Gardner in 1985 constructed this model under the idea that learning a particular language is built upon the identify of learners themselves, which enables them in adapting and operating in new environments. In the model, four different but interrelated variables were presented, these include social milieu (which pertains to the culture as well as the environment of an individual), individual difference (like level of intelligence, aptitude, motivations, and unique environments), L2 acquisition context (may it be formal or informal), and outcomes (both linguistic and non-linguistic skills).

In social psychology, a learner's individual characteristics are considered of high value and significance in language learning, as the model suggests. Gardner (1985) posited in viewing motivation, a tripartite complex or perspective must be used, and that certain characteristics of learners must be present to facilitate language learning including the learners desire towards learning, the effort they exert to learn, and a display of positive attitude towards learning.

The model also postulates that attitudes deemed to be educationally and socially relevant can influence motivation. These attitudinal constructs can be best understood by looking at how learners display their attitude toward the learning situation and/or environment, particularly the classroom set-up or the school environment, textbooks and other course materials, assessment strategies employed by the teacher, and the assessment and evaluation of both the language teacher and the course. Additionally, this construct acknowledges the difference between a skilled teacher and a less skilled teacher in terms of the target language where the former has a good grasp and the latter with less proficiency (Tonio & Ella, 2019). The willingness, interest, and openness towards learning the target language in the community for socialization and cultural learning are reflected in the attitudinal construct of integrativeness (Berowa, 2012; Berowa, 2016b; Berowa, Devanadera, & David, 2018; and Lovato, 2011 as cited in Tonio & Ella, 2019). This give clear emphasis on the learner's ability to understand the language as well as the culture of a community that the learner is unfamiliar with (Lovato, 2011 as cited in Tonio & Ella, 2019).

Furthermore, motivation and attitude and their interdependent relationship were also stipulated in the model. These two variables go hand in hand and has a direct or indirect influence toward successful language learning in both formal and informal settings (Gardner, 1985).

Language Policy Theory

Bernard Spolsky (2011) proposed a theory of language arguing that a language policy theory's goal must be built upon accounting the choices made by individual speakers basing on patterns which are rule-governed and at the same time recognized by their respective speech communities. Circumscribed in the theory are three assumptions, one of which views language policy as a social phenomenon created in different domains like homes, schools, and the community. The second assumption assumes the presence of beliefs, practices, and management as three separate but interrelated components. The third assumption takes into account both internal and external factors affecting language choice. As per Spolsky's (2011) suggestion, these assumptions may come from different directions, either from within or outside the domain and may be language-related or not.

Building on this theory, Burton (2019) suggests that the three components of language policy must be given closer attention (Burton, 2019). Beliefs, sometimes interchangeably referred to as ideology, explain the values held by speech community members toward language and language use. Spolsky (2004) described it as — “what people think should be done” (p. 14). Although a certain speech community possesses many beliefs, a dominant and common ideology favoring an approach to language is still present.

The language selections or actions that people make are referred to as practices. Practices are often described in terms of phonology (sound and sound patterns), morphology (word), syntax (or the grammatical choices enacted inside the community), as well as the sociolinguistic aspect which include societal rules about when and where language varieties should be used. The interaction between language and social environment which is also known as the ‘ecology of language’ shape the practices of a certain speech community (Haugen, 1972; Spolsky, 2004).

Efforts made either deliberately or not to influence language practices is referred to as management. It is also oftentimes called language planning, which gives emphasis on the interventions carried out to shape the way policies are enacted. This component of language policy is most associated with individuals or documents possessing legal authority. A written legislation supporting or obstructing a language policy is one of the many examples (Burton, 2019)

In conclusion, the socio-educational model clearly established the interdependent relationship between motivation and attitude and that both variables affect one another. Through this lens, the current study hopes to capture the attitudes of high school and senior high school teachers towards MTB-MLE by looking into the motivations that drive them to feel the way they do towards the policy, specifically, the study would illustrate and reveal the challenges that they face that are attributed to the implementation of the policy. On a different note, using Spolsky's language policy theory, the study will try to elucidate how the three component of language policy namely beliefs, practices, and management come into play and how each component shapes every policy that is enacted or put into law. These theories will help in explaining the cause-and-effect phenomena that is happening in the education sector by delving into the experiences of educators who are handling students taught using the mother tongue during their primary years in education. Additionally, the recommendations that will be gathered through this study correlates to the management component of Spolsky's language policy theory. If such recommendations will be taken into account and put into work, then it would act as an intervention that will shape the way the policy is enacted.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study is of significance to both the teachers who are handling subjects in MTB-MLE as it will help them get a glimpse of the teaching strategies they have implemented, whether they are beneficial and successful or not. It will also help them gauge and develop effective ways on how to inculcate lessons that will ensure that students learn what they ought to learn so they become competent individuals as they reach higher levels of their academic journey. The results of this study will also be beneficial to curriculum planners and educational policymakers as it will give them a clearer picture of the areas that needs attention, it will also help them assess and reassess the measures they put into place to ensure the efficacy and see if the MTB-MLE policy achieved its goals. Lastly, this study will help future researchers in the field as it will serve them as a reference to the body of knowledge under the umbrella of applied linguistics, especially in the areas concerning education.

Methodology

2.1 Research Design

To fully grasp and gather quantifiable and reliable data, a qualitative design was employed in the present study. Shank (2002 as cited in Ospina, 2004) defines qualitative research as “a form of systematic empirical inquiry into meaning” (p. 5). By systematic he insinuates “planned, ordered and public”, adhering regulations agreed upon by delegates of the qualitative research community. Empirical, means that this variety of inquiry is substantiated in the world of experience. Through inquiry, researchers try to understand how others make sense of their experience. Additionally, Denzin and Lincoln (2000 as cited in Ospina, 2004) claim that qualitative research involves an interpretive and naturalistic approach: “This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3). Using this research design, the researchers strategically gathered rich, relevant, and related data that will show the teachers’ attitudes toward the MTB-MLE policy as well as the challenges they face that are attributed to it, and the recommendations they have to improve its implementation.

2.2 Research Setting

The present study took place in various public high schools in the Zamboanga del Sur province namely Bag-ong Valencia Agricultural National High School (2), Bibibilik National High School (2), Bululawan National High School (1), Dulop National High School Bag-ong Valencia Extension (2), Dumalinao National High School (1), Dumingag National High School (5), Francisco P. Consolacion National High School (5), Lison Valley National High School (1), Micolong National High School (1), Napolan National High School (4), Nilo National High School (2), Pagadian City Science High School (5), Rebokon Agricultural and Vocational High School (8), San Pedro National High School (12), Sta. Lucia National High School (1), and Zamboanga del Sur National High School (18). The Department of Education Zamboanga del Sur Division, in compliance with the mandate of DepEd National Office, implemented the MTB-MLE policy pursuant to DO 16, s. 2012 – Guidelines on the Implementation of the Mother Tongue-Based- Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE).

The research locale was chosen because of the wide diversity of ethnic groups found in the area as well as the languages that each group has and use. In fact, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority (previously known as the National Statistics Office) 2000 census, it has been found out that Cebuano was the predominant ethnic group of the province. Of the overall household populace, 40.20 percent categorized themselves as Cebuanos, which was succeeded closely by Bisaya/Binisaya forming 32.27 percent, then Subanen which is at 9.00 percent. Hiligaynon/Ilonggo, Maguindanaon, Tausug, and other distinctive ethnic groups form the remaining 18.53% (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2002). Additionally, with the directive issued by the Department of Education pertaining to the implementation of the MTB-MLE policy, DepEd Region 9 Director Walter Albos urged all elementary school administrators to use Cebuano, the major vernacular spoken in Western Mindanao as the language of instruction in teaching kindergarten and Grades 1 to 3 in the schools within the region (Dumlao, 2012). Lastly, the research locale was chosen for ease of access to research participants since both researchers are bonafide residents of the area and also because one researcher has a significantly wide network of contacts and connections to educators teaching in the province.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The respondents were selected using criterion sampling. Criterion sampling enables researching on conditions or with resolute participants in line with the specified criteria to stipulate rich related data (Patton, 1990). In this respect, the criteria included (1) being a secondary school teacher, (2) teaches at a public high school, (3) teaching within the Zamboanga del Sur province. The study involved 70 public high school teachers in Zamboanga del Sur. Since this study aims at bridging the gap and providing a clearer picture as to how teachers in the country perceive the MTB-MLE policy in general, it is imperative to find out the attitudes of high school teachers who is at the receiving end of the program mainly because previous studies like the ones conducted by Valerio (2015), Alieto (2018), Medilo (2018), Berowa and Agbayani (2019), and Tonio and Ella (2019) conducted under the same light only focused on finding out the attitudes of pre-service and elementary/primary teachers. In addition, the participants will also provide in-depth and real-time update as to the challenges they are facing related to the MTB-MLE policy implementation.

2.4 Instrument of the Study

The survey questionnaire was adapted and modified from Tonio and Ella (2019) to fit the context of the present study, which they also adapted and modified from Ejieh (2004) to fit the Philippine context. Using Cronbach’s Alpha, Tonio and Ella’s (2019) modified version garnered a reliability rating of 0.80 and settled for a 4-point Likert Scale that contrasted from strongly agree to strongly disagree as a replacement for of yes/no response. The

survey questionnaire has four divisions. The first part, asked respondents to provide apropos personal data such as their name, gender, age, and years of service. Meanwhile, the 13 statements were enlisted on the second part of the questionnaire and are made up of two levels; Level 1 includes items one to 12 which sought the opinions of the teachers on some concerns and problems associated to teaching and learning in mother tongue such as the benefits it offers to students, teachers and parents, as well as the restrictions and limitations of instruction. On the other hand, Level 2 is made up of item 13 which delve into the teachers' readiness to go through training in mother tongue instruction. Additionally, the researchers decided to opt out the 14th statement of Tonio and Ella's (2019) questionnaire as it does not apply to the participants of the current study. Part 3 is composed of two open-ended questions wherein for the first one the teachers were asked to list at least three challenges/possible challenges they encountered in handling/teaching students using the policy, while the second question tasked them to list three possible recommendations in order to better implement the MTB-MLE policy in the country.

2.5 Procedure

In adherence with research ethics procedures, the researchers first pursued the approval of the paper adviser/professor for ELE125 – Language Programs and Policies in Multilingual Societies through letter of communication before the survey was administered.

Since this study employed criterion sampling, the researchers made use of their various networks by contacting their high school teachers and by asking help from them in sharing the survey to their work colleagues. In addition, one of the researchers has contacts from various public high schools in the province after conducting several roadshows and information drive about an exchange scholarship program he's a part of, making the search for qualified participants easier and more convenient.

During the conduct of the study, the survey questionnaire was encoded in a Google Form Sheet along with a letter asking permission from the participants to answer the survey. In addition, the Google Form also contained information about the research i.e, its background and what it aims to accomplish. The researchers then sent the Google Form link to the participants via email and through Facebook Messenger. The participants are given an ample amount of time to complete the survey, the researchers automatically received the answers through a Spreadsheet provided by Google Forms.

After the data gathering procedure, the researchers then proceeded to analyzing the data, which will be discussed in the following section.

2.6 Methods of Analysis

The data obtained were tabulated, computed, and analyzed using descriptive statistics, particularly through the use of the mean used in the study of Tonio and Ella (2019) to identify the attitudes of the participants if they strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree on the implementation of the MTB-MLE policy. The mean results will be interpreted using this range of interpretation: a mean score of 0.01-0.99 equates to a descriptive equivalent of "strongly agree", a mean score of 1.0-1.99 equates to a descriptive equivalent of "agree", while a mean score of 2.0-2.99 equates to a descriptive equivalent of "disagree", and a mean score of 2.99-3.99 equates to a descriptive equivalent of "strongly disagree". In addition, in order to analyze the challenges, the teachers faced by the teachers that are related to the MTB-MLE policy, the researchers used frequency count and thematic analysis to figure out and see recurring and dominant themes which will then be categorized and arranged and presented together with its sub-themes.

Results and Discussion

The attitudes of teachers, being one of the key stakeholders in any educational policy, is very important as it determines their behavior and classroom practices implemented within the walls of the academe. Thus, looking at their attitudes would help shape any policy in terms of implementation efficacy and evaluation. In order to determine the attitudes of the respondents toward MTB-MLE in the current study, the weighted mean scores were determined as presented in following table.

Table 1 *Attitude of high school and senior high school teachers towards Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE)*

| Statement | SA | A | D | SD | Mean | DE |
|--|----|----|----|----|------|----|
| 1. A policy on the use of mother tongue in the Philippine primary schools (Grade 1-3) is good in principle. | 16 | 36 | 16 | 2 | 2.06 | D |
| 2. It is possible to teach all primary school subjects from Grade 1-3 in the mother tongue or language of the local community. | 14 | 31 | 20 | 5 | 2.23 | D |
| 3. It is possible to teach my own subjects completely in mother tongue. | 9 | 22 | 29 | 10 | 2.57 | D |
| 4. Teaching in mother tongue will enable teachers to express themselves clearly in class. | 12 | 43 | 9 | 6 | 2.13 | D |
| 5. Teaching in mother tongue will enable pupils/students to understand easily. | 13 | 40 | 14 | 3 | 2.10 | D |
| 6. It will make lessons interesting to pupils/students. | 11 | 39 | 14 | 6 | 2.21 | D |
| 7. It will enable students to perform well in English language in the future. | 9 | 23 | 28 | 10 | 2.56 | D |
| 8. It will enable parents to participate in the education of their children. | 12 | 44 | 12 | 2 | 2.06 | D |
| 9. All technical terms and expressions in my subject area(s) can be easily translated into mother tongue. | 7 | 18 | 30 | 15 | 2.76 | D |
| 10. Textbooks for teaching my own subjects can easily be produced in mother tongue. | 6 | 21 | 31 | 12 | 2.70 | D |
| 11. My education and training, which have been in English, will not interfere with my teaching students in mother tongue. | 9 | 36 | 16 | 9 | 2.36 | D |
| 12. Use of mother tongue in teaching will degrade the teaching profession in the Philippines. | 7 | 18 | 34 | 11 | 2.70 | D |
| 13. I am willing to undergo any special training that will enable me to teach in mother tongue. | 19 | 36 | 8 | 7 | 2.04 | D |

Legend: SA – strongly agree; A – agree; D – Disagree; SD – Strongly Disagree
DE – descriptive equivalent

As presented, all the statements indicate that teachers in the secondary and senior high school levels have unfavorable attitude towards the implementation and use of the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) policy as each statement garnered a weighted mean ranging from 2.04 being the lowest value up to 2.76 as the highest value, respectively, which equates to a descriptive equivalent of “DISAGREE”.

Based on the findings, it is safe to claim that high school and senior high school teachers disagree on the notion that the use of mother tongue as the language of instruction in Grades 1-3 is in good principle as they believe that it will not make the lessons interesting to students, and that it will not enable them to understand their lessons easily. This contradicts Gallego and Zubiri’s (2013) idea that academic competence can be accomplished by means of utilizing the native tongue, and that of Naom and Sarah (2014) who opines that the exclusive use of language that is common and familiar to the learners, develops linguistic skills helping them to easily navigate academic activities and facilitate learning. In addition, the above-mentioned finding is very much antonymous to Sario, Guiab, and Palting’s (2014 as cited in Medilo, 2018) study which found that using mother tongue in the classroom improved students’ participation, interaction, and made them more active, it also gave them a sense of belongingness and enhanced their receptiveness.

The more competitive, advanced, and rigorous academic environment of the secondary level, the wide use of English as one of the main languages of the academe, and the increasing local and global demand for fluent speakers of the language which signify upward mobility could be the possible reason behind this finding. Additionally, the finding posits that majority of the teachers do not use the mother tongue to explain complex ideas in the classroom, instead they use the common L2 which can either be Filipino or English, depending on the necessity of the language.

The teachers’ response on items 3 and 9 which contained the statements ‘It is possible to teach my own subjects completely in mother tongue’ and ‘All technical terms and expressions in my subject area(s) can be easily

translated into mother tongue’ garnered a mean score of 2.57 and 2.76 which has a descriptive equivalent of DISAGREE is a clear manifestation of their negative attitude on the use of mother tongue especially in subjects that require teachers to use, and on the part of the students, to learn a second language (L2) like in Science, Mathematics, and English where the English language is used primarily as the LOI, and Filipino where Filipino is used, respectively. This correlates to the findings of Dio and Jamora (2014 as cited in Medilo, 2018) that teachers encountered problems of transmuting technical terms in mathematics, which stems from their incapability of translating technical terms to the dialect, which in due course leads to misunderstandings and weak outcomes in English-mediated standardized tests. Happens when using technical jargons especially in mathematics and science subjects since there are occasions where no corresponding word equivalents in the mother tongue that exist for a specific term in the subject. These instances may generate, which may ultimately create an impediment for the students during standardized examinations that use English as the medium. Such beliefs can be traced back by the lack of teacher training for those who handle MTB-MLE subjects. Although it’s true that some words in English do not have an equivalent or a counterpart in the mother tongue, teachers should be equipped with strategies that they can employ if in case they encounter problems like this. In addition, throughout the policy implementation, it has been found out that there has been a lack of learning materials that are designed specifically for the subjects under MTB-MLE, hence, the issue on translation and difficulty experienced by students in standardized tests where English is used as the medium came to the fore.

The respondents also see the difficulty experienced by teachers who teach using mother tongue as the LOI as they believe that it is not possible to teach all primary school subjects in Grades 1-3 in the mother tongue or the language of the local community and that there is a distinct lack of learning materials that accommodate the needs of the execution of the policy. This is in unison with the idea stressed by Hall (2010 as cited in Lartec et al., 2014) that teaching will, in no account, be effectual without pertinent and precise usage of learning materials. In the same study, Lartec, et al. (2014 as cited in Tonio & Ella, 2019) it was found out that teachers teaching mother tongue combated complications due to the absence of books written in mother tongue, scarcity of vocabulary, and lack of teacher-training. Likewise, the above results support Valerio’s (2015) findings which disclosed teachers’ uncertainty with the instructional materials they have due to lack of localized translation. Also, of the difficulty undergone by in-service teachers in teaching the learners who are culturally unaccustomed with the same mother tongue that can be trailed to the level of proficiency of the teachers of the distinctive dialects (Valerio, 2015). Such findings were also common in the studies conducted by Berowa and Agbayani (2019) and Tonio and Ella (2019) which found out that teachers face a myriad of challenges brought about by the lack of teaching and instructional materials.

On the same note, the respondents believe that using mother tongue in the primary years will not enable students to excel and perform better in using the English language in the future. This is not a very surprising finding, in fact, Mahboob and Cruz (2013 as cited in Medilo, 2018) in their study presented the language scene in the Philippines wherein people deem English as the premium language with Filipino and other local languages relegated to the background. This supports Khejeri’s (2014 as cited in Alieto, 2018) claim that there has been a greater importance accorded to English over the mother tongue. As Paulson Stone (2012 as cited in Berowa and Agbayani, 2019) claim, Filipino teachers believe that they are linguistically equipped in using Filipino and English as the LOI, however, they feel uncomfortable in using them inside the classroom as it confines the involvement of the learners when foreign languages are used. Such findings can also be observed in Jha’s (2013 as cited in Medilo, 2018) study wherein participants expressed concerns that using mother tongue will impair the quality of English that they use and have.

Additionally, it is worth mentioning that the teachers do not believe that using mother tongue will degrade the quality of education in the country. Although majority of the responses acquired in the questionnaire veered toward a negative attitude regarding mother tongue education, this finding is quite surprising because it implies that there is a great chance that something can still be done to improve teachers’ attitude and reception of the policy. This finding can be used as a starting point in finding ways in developing strategies that will lead to better policy implementation.

Interestingly, the respondents believe that using mother tongue will not enable teachers in expressing themselves clearly when they teach their lessons which goes against Ejie’s (2004) claim that using mother tongue as the medium led to better communication as well as understanding.

The discoveries of the present study corroborate with the findings of international studies. Ejie (2004 as cited in Alieto, 2018) surveyed student teachers in Nigeria, wherein the respondents exhibited a negative attitude towards teaching mother tongue in basic education. In addition, 80 out of the 95 respondents, are unwilling to teach using mother tongue after they graduate from college. Khejeri (2014 as cited in Alieto, 2018) noted the negative attitude of the teachers concerning mother tongue as they view English to be of greater importance. This negativity has been translated to the employment of the mother tongue policy in Hamis, district of Kenya. The teachers’ negative

language attitude is well-thought-out as the reason for the halfhearted reception towards the mother tongue policy (Khejeri, 2014).

Table 2 *Challenges faced by high school and senior high school teachers that are related to the MTB-MLE implementation*

| Problem | f | % | Rank |
|---|-----------|------------|-------------|
| Reading and comprehension difficulties among students | 21 | 24.42 | 1 |
| Degradation of English language literacy and proficiency | 17 | 19.77 | 2 |
| Translation issues/difficulties | 12 | 13.95 | 3 |
| Language/communication barrier between the teacher and the students | 11 | 12.79 | 4 |
| Lack of teacher training, support, and instructional materials | 8 | 9.30 | 5 |
| Poor vocabulary and other grammar issues | 8 | 9.30 | 5 |
| Teaching difficulty in Math | 4 | 4.65 | 7 |
| Difficulty in learning L2 | 3 | 3.49 | 8 |
| Filipino/Tagalog language literacy and proficiency | 2 | 2.33 | 9 |
| TOTAL | 86 | 100 | |

Legend: *f* – frequency

The data obtained in this study also illustrated the challenges that high school and senior high school teachers faced and are facing in teaching students that are products of the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education policy in the primary levels. As can be seen on the findings above, the primary challenge that educators in the secondary level face is the reading comprehension difficulties among students along with issues in the degradation of students’ English literacy and proficiency, and translation issues and/or difficulties, among others.

Rasinski (2017) defines reading comprehension as “understanding [of] what one reads, can reasonably be seen as the goal of reading” (p. 519). In a nutshell, reading comprehension plays an important role in facilitating and ensuring that students learn what they ought to learn inside the classroom. The following excerpts provide bases for the claim as to how the present study came up with why reading comprehension difficulties is at the top of the list of challenges that educators in the secondary level have identified:

1. *Students in high school have more difficulty in reading comprehension.*
2. *Students’ comprehension of learning materials written in English might be affected.*
3. *[The] use of different dialects with different meanings will cause confusion on the part of the students.*
4. *Difficulty in understanding terms.*
5. *They will have a hard time to comprehend English and Filipino.*

On a different note, many countries around the world implemented strong English language policies since it is believed to help alleviate social, economic, and political problems, inter alia (Hillman, 2015; Kirkpatrick, 2014 as cited in Namanya, 2017), and the Philippines is not an exemption. In fact, the Bilingual Education Policies mandated the use of Filipino and English as the LOI to be used in schools, this educational policy became the backbone of every educational institution in the country from 1974 to 1987 (Burton, 2013). However, the policy was replaced by the newly implemented MTB-MLE policy, along with the implementation of the K12 Program. With more and more countries shifting to the use of mother tongue as the language of instruction in the primary years, there have been fears of degradation in terms of literacy and proficiency of the English language among students. In fact, the adverse effects of MTB-MLE on people’s English literacy have been observed in a couple of studies wherein the ground for such claim was laid out. Li and Majhanovich (2010 as cited in Namanya, 2017) postulates that MTB-MLE decreases individuals’ amount of exposure to the English language, thus adversely affecting their proficiency in English. On the same note, in countries like the Philippines and Indonesia where there exists quite a number of local languages, the number of materials utilizing the mother tongue is significantly low, which may pose a threat in the development of students’ macroskills (Alberto, Gabinete, & Ranola, 2010; Wa-Mbaleka 2014b, 2015 as cited in Namanya, 2017).

Furthermore, teachers have to resort to English since many concepts lack equivalents in the diverse mother tongues in the Philippines (Medilo, 2016). Teachers also are deprived from trainings in providing instruction in the mother tongue which may alter the eminence of instruction provided to students (Medilo, 2016; Wa-Mbaleka, 2014a, 2014b, 2015 as cited in Namanya, 2017). In these cases, MTB-MLE may hinder individuals’ attainment of skills and information. In an experimental study conducted by Namanya in 2017, it has been found out that MTB-MLE may indeed adversely affect children’s English literacy which may affect their chances of fighting in the world of works. The findings of the aforementioned studies are synonymous to the present study. The following excerpts provide bases for this claim:

1. *Less English proficiency.*
2. *Low English literacy.*
3. *Some students will not be fluent in English in written and in oral form.*
4. *Difficulty in explaining/defining/constructing ideas using English as the medium.*
5. *[Difficulty] with transition to English instruction.*

Lastly, Kelly (2005 as cited in Tonio & Ella, 2019) defined translation as “the skill of understanding the source text and rendering it in the target language by using the register, the background knowledge, and other language resources according to the intended purpose” (p.26-27), it recommends that translation process necessitates the translator’s high level of proficiency both in subject language (English) and target language (mother tongue). In the case of the present study, one of the major challenges faced by the respondents are translation issues, this claim is backed up by the excerpts obtained from the respondents:

1. *Difficulty in translation of terms.*
2. *Some terms [that are] used in English are difficult to translate in mother tongue.*
3. *Difficulty in translating mother tongue to English in both speaking and writing.*
4. *Lisud sabton ang ubang terminologies sa mga bata / Some terminologies are hard for the students to understand.*
5. *Some terms do not have corresponding equivalent translation.*

The aforementioned findings of the current study support the drawbacks mentioned and well-outlined by previous studies on MTB-MLE (Tonio & Ella, 2019; Berowa & Agbayani, 2019, and Cruz, 2015) showing the following challenges: 1) difficulty in translation, 2) degradation of the English language, 3) lack of learning materials/resources, and 4) majority of the instructional objectives in the mother tongue subject are not being satisfactorily met, especially in the areas of grammar awareness, vocabulary development, and reading comprehension. With these challenges at hand, the current study sought the respondents’ suggestion and/or recommendations to better implement the policy from the ground-up.

Table 3 *Suggestions to better implement the MTB-MLE policy*

| Suggestions | f | % | Rank |
|--|-----------|------------|-------------|
| More support for MTB-MLE teachers through seminars and increase in funds for instructional materials | 12 | 22.64 | 1 |
| Abolish the MTB-MLE policy | 8 | 15.09 | 2 |
| Use mother tongue as the language of instruction in specific subjects only | 3 | 5.66 | 4.5 |
| Choose a common MT for specific regions and create a mother tongue team to supervise the MTB-MLE implementation in the primary levels | 3 | 5.66 | 4.5 |
| No code switching on subjects using English as medium of instruction i.e., English, Mathematics, and Science. | 3 | 5.66 | 4.5 |
| Continue the MTB-MLE implementation | 3 | 5.66 | 4.5 |
| Filipino should be taught using Filipino and/or Tagalog | 2 | 3.77 | 10 |
| Use standardized materials in teaching using the mother tongue | 2 | 3.77 | 10 |
| Conduct additional studies to find out the effectivity of MTB-MLE policy | 2 | 3.77 | 10 |
| Abolish the MTB-MLE policy and switch to the old curriculum | 2 | 3.77 | 10 |
| Review the policy and assess its relevance and usefulness in the current setting. | 2 | 3.77 | 10 |
| Continue the implementation. However, there should be a strong reinforcement in the teaching of English and Filipino from the 4th Grade onwards. | 2 | 3.77 | 10 |
| Mix English with mother tongue in teaching | 2 | 3.77 | 10 |
| Revise some areas of the curriculum | 1 | 1.89 | 17 |
| There should be an increase in parental support and involvement | 1 | 1.89 | 17 |
| Switch to teaching English in the primary levels | 1 | 1.89 | 17 |
| Conduct diagnostic tests before using MTB-MLE in a specific subject | 1 | 1.89 | 17 |
| Filipino and English should be the medium of instruction, mother tongue should only be used to clarify and explain important points | 1 | 1.89 | 17 |
| Abolish MTB-MLE but integrate the use of mother tongue in subjects/areas whenever it is needed | 1 | 1.89 | 17 |
| Revise the current MTB-MLE policy and implement it to the 1st grade only | 1 | 1.89 | 17 |
| | 53 | 100 | |

Legend: *f* – frequency

Since teachers stand as frontliners in any educational policy (Berowa & Agbayani, 2019) and that they work in the grassroots which means that any policy implemented would either fail or succeed if not for their cooperation, it is very much important to hear what they have to say with regards to the implementation of the MTB-MLE policy and solicit possible recommendations as they themselves have personal accounts and experiences on the areas that are overlooked, and also because of the fact that it is them who are at the receiving end of the program. Out of all the recommendations shown above, three major themes were classified which include more support for MTB-MLE teachers, abolish the MTB-MLE policy, and revise and/or modify the policy to suit the varying needs of different educational locations in the country.

More support for MTB-MLE teachers

The triumph or failure of the MTB-MLE program profoundly depends on the support and prioritization of the national government and the political will of the Department of Education in providing the needs of the key stakeholders which include but are not limited to teachers and students (Medilo, 2018). Therefore, there is a need to look into the current resources that MTB-MLE teachers have in order for them to work and perform their duties effectively and successfully. The government, through the mandate of the Department of Education should align, allocate, and increase funds that will be used to purchase books and other learning materials that correlates to the objectives of the MTB-MLE policy guidelines. To show support to teachers, the respondents wrote that the government should *“increase funds”, “craft MTB-MLE appropriate books and learning materials”, and “strengthen and equip teachers through trainings and workshops on how to effectively implement the objectives of the policy”*. Wa-Mbaleka (2014a as cited in Berowa & Agbayani, 2019) proposed that sufficient budget must be allocated to tackle the challenges about MTB-MLE since the policy met challenges that hampered it in attaining its desired objectives.

Abolish the MTB-MLE policy

Among all the studies mentioned in this research, this finding remains as one of the most surprising one. Although in the study conducted by Valerio (2015), Alieto (2018), Tonio and Ella (2019), and Berowa and Agbayani (2019) among others, participants have expressed subtle issues with the implementation of the MTB-MLE policy along with some of their recommendations on how to implement the policy better, however, there have been no mention from the respondents of the aforementioned studies on the abolishment and stoppage of the implementation of the policy. In order to verify the veracity of this claim, the following are the responses written by the respondents:

Respondent 12: MTB MLE is a program to bridge the students to speak [the] English language. If the students know it already, then we will not torment them anymore on learning again on MTB-MLE.

Respondent 16: I cannot give any recommendation for better implementation of the MTB-MLE. For me, it is not really a good help to the teachers and learners using this learning. Using mother tongue might [be] helpful in explaining things to the learners not in using it as a language in the textbook. The terms used are not commonly used in when the learners finished the level that are using mother tongue, it is another battle to them in understanding the simple concept into English language.

Respondent 21: I don't have anything to recommend but to abolish the MTB- MLE Policy.

Respondent 60: Stop the integration of this policy. I will never recommend this is not helping in the competence of the pupils in education globalization.

Respondent 62: None. I just couldn't find it helpful or strategic. Yes, it may make lessons interesting to students for they have better understanding in using mother tongue in education, but it gives us a lot of challenges especially when you are teaching Science, for we must translate our lessons in order for them to understand and comprehend. In High school, all Science textbooks are written in English language and not in Mother tongue. I hope you get my point.

Based on the excerpt presented above, it can be deduced that although there are many who favors the MTB-MLE policy, there are quite a number of educators who want to abolish and remove the policy in the educational curriculum of the country. This finding relates to Ejieh's (2004 as cited in Alieto, 2018) study wherein 80 out of 95 students were not willing to teach in mother tongue after graduation, hence their negative attitude towards the program transpired in the study.

Revise or modify the policy

Aside from increased support from the government, another recommendation that came out from the data gathered from the respondents is the call for revision and modification in some of the areas of the policy implementation. Such claim is evident in the sub-themes found on the table wherein some recommendations to modify or revise the policy include choosing a common mother tongue for specific regions as well as creating a team that will supervise the MTB-MLE implementation in the primary levels – this will help in ensuring that issues related to the policy are addressed on a timely manner with appropriate and context-based solutions. Additionally, in order to improve the implementation, the respondents suggest using standardized materials in teaching mother tongue. This will ensure that the quality of knowledge that students will get are sufficient and are at par with the standards that will help them become equipped learners.

Other recommendations that center on the modification of the program include the use of mother tongue as the LOI in specific subjects only, this is quite synonymous to the other one which states there should be no code switching on subjects using English as the LOI, this will mean that in some subjects specifically those in L2, teachers may or may not use mother tongue and that its usage will only be subject to the teachers' discretion as they deem necessary e.g., for clarifying and explaining complicated ideas, terminologies, etc. In addition, another recommendation calls for the continued implementation of the policy, but the Department of Education should ensure that there is a strong reinforcement in the teaching of English and Filipino from the 4th grade onwards. This means an additional work to the teachers and will require more strategic plans and a clear course of action for DepEd to ensure that the goals and objectives of the MTB-MLE policy are met while ensuring that the students' linguistic abilities in English and Filipino are not jeopardized.

Another sub-theme pertaining to the recommendation of revising and/or modifying the policy include the use of Filipino and English as the medium of instruction and that mother tongue should only be used to clarify and explain important points. This recommendation, however, is quite similar to the 1974 and 1987 Bilingual Education Policies wherein English and Filipino were used as the LOI in schools (Burton, 2013).

On a different note, a recommendation calls for an in-depth review of the policy to assess its relevance and usefulness in the current educational setting emerged as one of the themes found in the study. This could possibly mean that educators see areas that have weak spots and that such areas are overlooked by policymakers, or possibly this is a call that questions as to where the MTB-MLE policy stands, how it's doing, and what can it do in the long run.

Generally, the findings indicate that teachers have an unfavorable or negative attitude towards MTB-MLE. Reasonably, they won't have such attitudes without a driving force that made them feel that way about the policy. The negative attitude of teachers in the secondary level only means one thing, something is lacking or there must have been issues that are left unaddressed at the bottom of the implementation. The challenges they face are mere manifestations of the issues that came to the fore prior and during the implementation of the policy. Issues on reading comprehension difficulties, degradation of students' English proficiency and literacy, and language communication barrier are some of the most alarming challenges that educators in the secondary level are dealing with and are trying to find viable and doable solutions. The assumption that these challenges are results of the MTB-MLE policy may be vague, but it must be remembered that in the area of education, almost everything is interconnected – this means that whatever educational policy is enacted in the primary level of education can have a domino or a ripple effect in the secondary level, whatever educational quality students receive in their lower years will significantly affect their performance as they reach higher levels.

The result of the current study offers essential information and acts as a situationer report as it gives a clearer picture of what is happening on the ground and what the MTB-MLE policy has accomplished and contributed so far based on the perspective of teachers working in the secondary level. In order for the policy to succeed, policymakers should listen to those working at the grassroots level as they have firsthand experiences of what the real situation is. In the area of language policy, the present study offers a wide array of recommendations such as more support to teachers and modifications on the policy implementation, and if these recommendations are taken constructively and into consideration, it will help the policy improve and cater to the varying needs of an archipelago with complex and varied linguistic contexts.

Conclusion

MTB-MLE has always been a widely debated topic, it garnered accolades from supporters whilst receiving criticisms from its opposers, both the pros and cons side of the coin presents reasonable, arguable, and solid points. The current study captures the attitudes of the high school and senior high school teachers in various public high schools in Zamboanga del Sur, along with the challenges they face that are linked to the implementation of the said policy and their recommendations to improve it. It should be understood that the educational system is like a

machinery where teachers play as the mechanical parts, without them, the entire system would collapse and shut down. Thus, without teacher support, any educational policy is doomed to fail. The present study clearly shows that the teachers have an unfavorable attitude towards the MTB-MLE policy, and to add to the myriad of things to think about, they are faced with several challenges that impede the way they deliver their services.

Pedagogical Implication

From a pedagogical standpoint, this study revealed that the use of mother tongue as the language of instruction in the elementary levels, specifically from kindergarten to Grade 3, have a negative implication in the secondary level. It is not only manifested by the teachers' unfavorable attitude towards the policy, but more evidently, empirical data shows the negative impacts of the policy based on the academic challenges that both the students and the teachers face years since the policy's inception. Additionally, the overwhelming number of educators in the secondary level calling for the abolishment of the policy speaks volume, this message alone resonates a lot and serves as a call for consideration. Although the policy offers a myriad of benefits as proven by previous studies, by and large, something is amiss especially at the bottom of the implementation which explains why those at the receiving end are clamoring for change and/or support within the system.

On a similar note, the issues and challenges raised by the teachers such as the students' comprehension difficulties, low and/or degraded English literacy and skills, as well as communication barrier or difficulty of expression among students when they reach high school, are of urgent concern and should be addressed methodically and strategically. Such challenges impede the realization of the policy's goals and objectives if they are left unaddressed. The Department of Education should take into consideration the recommendations raised by the teachers in this study such as the continued and improved support for teachers through increased funding and relevant training as well as the creation of standardized and quality-made learning resources, possibly a revision and or modification of the MTB-MLE curriculum after careful study and deliberations, or to abolish the program if they deem necessary and appropriate. In the same vein, teachers in both the elementary and secondary levels should work hand-in-hand to ensure that students are receiving the necessary knowledge and skills that they need to be academically equipped and prepared. Moreover, DepEd should take full consideration as to how they issue top-down directives that most of the time overlook the situation of the teachers working in the grassroots. If they fail to listen or neglect the outcry of the teachers in the frontlines of the implementation, then it's only a matter of time when MTB-MLE, the once hoped to be an educational boon will become a bane.

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