

MOTHER TONGUE INSTRUCTION IN LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE LEARNERS: PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN FOCUS

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ABSTRACT

Mother tongue instruction generally refers to the use of the learners' mother tongue as the medium of instruction. It is considered to be an important component of quality education, particularly in the early years. The Philippines is a linguistically diverse country, and this linguistic diversity has had a significant impact on the teaching and learning process. This study explored the lived experiences, coping mechanisms and educational management insights learned by primary school teachers in teaching linguistically diverse learners. A qualitative phenomenological approach was used, and data was collected from eight primary school teachers from Buhangin A District, Division of Davao City. Primary school teachers in teaching linguistic diverse classrooms revealed experiencing difficulty in choosing a language as a medium of instruction, translating lessons to mother tongue, use of multilingual teaching, and insufficient localized learning materials. Coping mechanisms used by the primary school teachers included improvising instructional materials, giving remedial instruction, training and development, and providing learning materials in a local language. The study generated new knowledge and ideas on the challenges encountered by primary school teachers in teaching in a linguistically diverse learner. The educational management insights learned by the primary school teachers through their experiences included creating a culturally responsive learning environment, need for differentiated instruction, and value of collaboration and community partnerships. These themes can be used to create effective training for teachers in teaching in a linguistically diverse learner. This study may be published in any reputable research journal.

Keywords: Teachers' lived experiences, coping mechanisms, lesson learned, linguistically diverse learner, Davao City, Philippines

1. INTRODUCTION

It is well known that a strong mother tongue foundation equips children with the skills they need to learn additional languages, allowing them to transfer their understanding of the structure of language to several new languages. The intuitive understanding of grammar that develops when children learn their first language can easily be passed on to other languages. With multilingualism becoming an increasingly sought-after attribute within the workplace, this advantage cannot be overstated; globalization and increased co-operation between nations mean that, in many organizations, it has become a requirement to have language skills in addition to being a specialist within a particular field.

The role of language as a medium of instruction in promoting an effective teaching and learning is an issue that has occupied many scholars all over the world for many years (Deyi, et al., 2007). This role of language as a medium of instruction has been a concern mostly in countries where immigrant children are in the minority such as United States and Canada (Deyi, et al., 2007). It is in these countries where research has been widely conducted and a number of legislations have been passed and amended throughout the years. Despite such developments, debates on the use of language persist.

Despite the continuous prevalence of monolingualism as a global norm in official or dominant languages (Wolff & Ekkehard, 2000; Arnold, Bartlett, Gowani, & Merali, 2006) has remained firm in its advocacy to promote the use of the mother tongue-based instruction in the primary years which led to the birth of the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education Policy (MTB MLE) (Rumenapp, 2014). This movement stemmed from a growing body of empirical research and theory on language acquisition and multilingualism attesting to the powerful effect of using the mother tongue in bringing out the potentials of children in the learning process (UNESCO, 2007).

In Nigeria today, especially in the south western Nigeria, Yoruba language has attracted much research attention across the fields of linguistics, literature, culture as well as Yoruba language Education. Thus, Yoruba has features prominently in education from the primary to the tertiary levels and has been a compulsory subject as well as a medium of instruction in some schools and colleges. There are huge number of researches that cited that language proficiency affects learners' achievement for children. It is not surprising to find a vast volume of literature on the language learning relationship because language is believed to be the gateway for learning and the vehicle that

facilitates acquisition of new knowledge through direct and indirect interaction with teachers and peers, as well as through the reflective processes of introspection (Francis & Rivera, 2007; Fernando, 2020).

Researchers like Akinola (2009), Ojo (2009), Oladokun & Adekunle (2010), and Alimi (2012) acknowledge the use of mother tongue in teaching pupils in both pre-primary and primary schools. Also, Adeyinka (1998) states that 'if the Nigerian child is to develop curiosity, manipulative ability, spontaneity, flexibility, intuitive, manual dexterity should acquire these skills and attributes through the mother tongue as a medium of education or instruction which is the natural way of learning.

The Constitution of Kenya (2010) clearly highlights the position of languages in chapter 2 article 7. In article 7 (1) it states that the national language of the Republic is Kiswahili while in article 7 (2) it states that the official languages of the Republic are Kiswahili and English. Furthermore, in article 7 (3) the constitution states that "the State shall promote and protect the diversity of language of the people of Kenya and promote the development and use of indigenous languages, Kenyan sign language, Braille and other communication formats and technologies accessible to persons with disability" (Kenya Law Report, 2010).

Besides, schools have been known to come up with internal language policies that aim at helping the students to be proficient both in spoken and written English and improve their performance in English (Ministry of Education, 2012). These policies are implemented by teachers who believe that if students speak in English, their written English will improve and thus their performance in English. Apparently, teachers and some parents believe that early exposure of learners to English will enhance the learning process since English is the medium of instruction in Kenyan schools; thus speaking in English is encouraged while use of mother tongue is discouraged (Kimani, 2012).

The Philippines as a multilingual country has a different setting when it comes to the institutionalization of a national policy requiring mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) in the primary school years (Burton, 2013). With regards to such implementation, many studies have long supported the use of mother tongue as the language of instruction. However, these researches have primarily been conducted in the community rather than national settings.

It was in January 2013, Congress officially supported this effort by passing the Enhanced Basic Education Act. In addition to shifting toward a K to 12 educational structure, this legislation becomes a prerequisite in instruction, teaching materials, and assessments of the learners, considering further their regional and native languages as an accessory to learning from kindergarten through grade three with a mother language transition program from grades four through six. Gradual implementation started with grade one students in 2012, followed by grades two and three in 2013 and 2014 respectively.

In the local scenario particularly in Marilog A District, Division of Davao City, primary school teachers encountered difficulty in teaching in the school who uses linguistically diverse learners. Varied strategies and mechanisms were applied to address the challenges encountered. It is in this premise that this study was conceptualized to find out the experiences of primary school teachers from other school within the district on the mechanisms used in teaching in a linguistically diverse school and be able to identify applicable strategies in our respective classrooms.

The goal of the study is to explore the realities of the experiences of primary school teachers in teaching a linguistically diverse learner. This study will be beneficial for administrators, as data gathered will serve as research-based information that will be utilized in motivating primary school teachers in teaching in a linguistically diverse learner.

2. METHODS

This study used a qualitative approach to research, specifically a phenomenological research design and data was collected from 8 primary school teachers from Buhangin A District, Division of Davao City. In this study the experiences of primary school teachers in teaching linguistically diverse learners were gathered through an In-Depth Interview (IDI) as well as their coping mechanisms. According to Creswell, (2012), phenomenology was an approach to qualitative research that focused on the commonality of lived experiences within a particular group. The fundamental goal of the approach was to arrive at a description of the nature of the particular phenomenon.

Interviews were conducted with the 8 primary school teachers who have first-hand knowledge of the event, situation or experience. Other forms of data such as documents, observations and art were also used. The data were read and reread and was culled for phrases and themes that were grouped into clusters of meanings. The researcher collected data, typically via long interviews. Next, the data analysis involved triangulation that extracted significant statements from the transcribed interviews. The significant statements were transformed into clusters of meanings according to how each statement fell under specific psychological and phenomenological concepts. Moreover, these transformations were tied up together to make a general description of the experience both the textural description of

what was experienced and the structural description of how it was experienced. The researcher incorporated his or her personal meaning of the experiences here. Finally, the report was written such that readers understand better the essential, invariant structure of the essence of the experience.

3. RESULTS

Findings of the study on the experiences of primary school teachers in teaching a linguistically diverse learner revealed that it was difficult to choose a language as a medium of instruction, translate lesson to mother tongue, use of multilingual teaching, and insufficient localized learning materials.

In terms of the coping mechanisms of the primary school teachers in teaching a linguistically diverse learner it was revealed that they cope through improvising instructional materials, giving remedial instruction, training and development, and providing learning materials in a local language.

As to the educational management insights gained from the participants, the primary school teachers proposed creating a culturally responsive learning environment, need for differentiated instruction, and value of collaboration and community partnerships as important insights in their experiences in teaching in a linguistically diverse learner.

4. DISCUSSIONS

Based on the experiences of primary school teachers in teaching linguistically diverse learners, results of the interview revealed the following themes: First, difficulty in choosing a language as the medium of instruction, as it has been noted that in a linguistic diversity tends to result in additional challenges in teaching the learners. The multiplicity of languages in a community poses the challenge of choosing a language as medium of instruction from among many alternatives, which can result in mismatch between the medium of instruction and students' home languages. Second, translate lesson to mother tongue, wherein primary school teachers experienced translating their lessons as translation is very beneficial to learning when it comes to learning through the use of the students' mother tongue because it serves as a bridge to connect students to the lesson.

Third, use multilingual teaching. Multilingual teaching is when teachers use varied languages in the whole duration of teaching for the reason of accommodating students who do not speak a particular language and including them in the discussion. The teacher's flexibility in using other languages means that there are fewer problems in translation. Fourth, insufficient localized learning materials. One of the many barriers encountered in the sustainability and successful Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education Program implementation is the lack of supply of culturally sensitive and quality learning materials. These materials are very crucial since they require to meet the intended learners' interests and needs and to their growing abilities.

On the coping mechanisms of primary school teachers in teaching a linguistically diverse learner, one of the themes that was shown was improvising instructional materials. Improvised instructional materials written in mother tongue Instructional materials are the basic channel of communication in the classroom for the purpose of bringing about effective teaching and learning. Instructional resources in teaching and learning make students learn more and retain better what they have been taught and that these instructional resources also promote and sustain students' interest. The second theme identified was giving remedial instruction, as a remedial class is a learner's opportunity to ask the teacher about his/her difficulties in understanding the lesson especially when the problem has something to do with the mother tongue the teacher is using during the class discussion. In this case, it will also help the pupils learn most, from utilizing their mother tongue.

The third theme identified was training and development. Teacher's training are sets of standards for setting the qualification and competencies. Within the MTB-MLE curriculum standards should reflect the fact that teachers are prepared to successfully educate the learners. This requires the teachers to understand and can implement strategies for the using of the Mother Tongue as the primary road of the learners to build their initial literacy skills as well as using it to bridge to oral and written literacy in the targeted second language. Fourth, providing learning materials in a local language. Local language teaching and learning materials comprise community generated reading materials, teaching and learning materials made from locally available resources, as well as professionally authored, illustrated, designed, and created teaching and learning aids. These materials provide a way for children and their families to engage in the reading development process more easily and successfully, access important information, provide a variety of platforms for learning and knowledge sharing, and spaces for community engagement and advocacy.

On the educational management insights gained from primary school teachers in teaching linguistically diverse learners, the first theme identified was creating a culturally responsive learning environment, as it helps ensure that all students feel valued, respected, and included in the learning process. When teachers create a classroom culture that

embraces and celebrates diversity, students are more likely to be engaged, motivated, and successful in their academic pursuits.

The second theme identified was the need for differentiated instruction. In a linguistically diverse classroom, differentiated instruction might mean adapting instruction to meet the language needs of students who are learning English as a second language or who speak a different dialect of the same languages.

The third theme was the value of collaboration and community partnerships. Collaboration and community partnerships refer to the practice of working with families, community organizations, and other stakeholders to support student learning and well-being. Teachers can collaborate with families and community organizations by involving them in the classroom and school decision-making process.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, it is important that some important moves must be taken into consideration and be made available for the primary school teachers considering the bulk of their work on their assigned function and in teaching linguistically diverse learners.

The study of the experiences of primary school teachers in teaching linguistically diverse learners suggests several possible future directions for school heads. Firstly, there is a need for investment in training and professional development programs that focus on the needs of linguistically diverse learners. Additionally, school heads should prioritize the development of localized and culturally responsive instructional materials that cater to the unique needs of their student population. Collaboration and partnerships with community organizations can also be instrumental in creating a supportive learning environment. Lastly, school heads should encourage and support teachers in adopting differentiated instruction techniques that can better accommodate the diverse needs of their students.

As for the primary school teachers themselves, future directions for teachers may include ongoing professional development opportunities that focus on culturally responsive pedagogy and differentiated instruction. Teachers may also benefit from collaboration and partnerships with community members and organizations to support the development and use of localized learning materials in multiple languages. Additionally, teachers may need to advocate for policies and resources that address the needs of linguistically diverse learners, such as increased funding for bilingual education programs and additional support for English language learners.

The learners, along with their parents should look into their possible contributions they could work on to further make their experience with linguistically diverse classrooms better for them as learners, parents, and teachers. Possible future directions for learners include developing a sense of cultural sensitivity and empathy towards their fellow students. Learners can also take an active role in their own learning by expressing their needs and preferences in terms of language instruction and seeking additional support or resources when needed.

For future researchers, similar studies may be conducted in other regions or divisions. The researchers may consider other aspects of the experiences of the primary school teachers in teaching in a linguistically diverse learner.

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