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## Listening from the Hearts of the Muslim Learners: Untold Testimonies on the Implementation of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education

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### ABSTRACT

The implementation of the Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education in the Philippine has been marred with a lot of challenges. The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of using mother tongue in addressing the needs of Muslim learners in the Municipality of Arakan, particularly on the successful implementation of MTB-MLE program. This study sought to analyze the gathered questions and responses of the participants. Results showed that their insight on the implementation is that they faced difficulties in comprehension. Also, the printed materials were written in local dialect, they had the difficulty in reading and writing the local dialect, and some terms were difficult to understand. Self-review, reading of the materials, and asking peers for help were some of their coping strategies. They suggested that teachers and classmates should speak in Filipino for comprehension.

## INTRODUCTION

### Rationale

In the educational process, the role of language is very important as a medium of instruction. This is because the effectiveness of this process is dependent on the existence of effective communication between teachers and students. This effective communication takes place when the appropriate language is used. Under such situation, a question may arise as to which language is more important for classroom instruction through which the child could be motivated to participate in the activities. Children learn more using their mother tongue as language of instruction in school.

However, when a language used in Grades one three is not the mother tongue of the learner, it may contradict the official language policy of the 1987 Educational Act. The language policy regarding education has been changed due to the external influence to attain high quality education. School year 2012-2013 was the start of enhancement of the education system which was originally ten years of basic education and then turned into a 12-year program in the name of K-12 Educational Plan sponsored by the Department of Education. Mother Tongue Based Multi Lingual Education (MTB- MLE) was included in the K- 12 policy. This new education and training policy draft had been set up with the provision for the choice of national languages of instruction in the primary education system. The current education system, especially in the choice of educational medium, follows the logic of decentralized policy (Perez, 2019; Adriano et al., 2021).

In every group they have their own locality and it signifies where they belong. But there are certain localities where there are various ethnic tribes which are composed mainly by Muslim and Christian people who harmoniously live together. One of the reasons of such co-existence is that

the Philippines is a culturally diverse country where one culture could encroach not just on its place but also to another place without much restriction. Furthermore, a clear example of such co-existence of different groups of people is the presence of Muslim and Christian learners who are mixed in a classroom in schools in the Municipality of Arakan.

Correspondingly, this study was conducted to listen to the narratives of Muslim learners enrolled in a Christian dominated public schools. This paved the way for the identification of their challenges as well as their coping strategies just to continue with their studies. Due to the limited researches conducted on the effectiveness of mother tongue that address the needs of Muslim learners, this study hopes to provide information on the perception of the Muslim learners on the medium of instruction that the teacher used which is not their first language, and it also puts concern on the academic performance of Muslim learners.

Henceforth, this study is timely and relevant to give voice to the Muslim learners who have struggles with their studies. Hence, this study was conducted and conceptualized.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of using mother tongue in addressing the needs of Muslim learners in the Municipality of Arakan, particularly on the successful implementation of MTB-MLE program. This study sought to analyze the gathered questions and responses of the participants.

What are the insights of Muslim learners about the medium of instruction that teachers use?

1. What are the challenges faced by Muslim learners in the MTB-MLE program?
2. How do Muslim learners cope with this kind of

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system?

3. What are the recommendations or suggestions of the key informants?

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This study employed qualitative-phenomenology. Qualitative involves in the collection of non-numerical data such as the texts, videos, and or audios which aims to have the grasp of the concepts, opinion, and experiences of the informants. It is used to gather in-depth insights into a problem and by generating new ideas for research (Lewis, 2015). Moreover, it is utilized to understand the experiences of people and their worldviews. This approach is flexible and focus on retaining rich meaning during data interpretation (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Meanwhile, phenomenology can be defined as an approach in research that describes the essentialities of the phenomenon by exploring it based on the perspectives who have experienced it. Its goal is to describe the meaning in what and how perspectives (Groenewald, 2004; Glesne, 2016). On the other hand, this study was qualitative-phenomenology since it dealt with the lived experiences of Muslim learners in the Municipality of Arakan relative to the implementation of the MTB-MLE.

### Research Participants

The participants of this study were learners from the public elementary school in the Municipality of Arakan. They were chosen using the purposive sampling specifically the criterion-based sampling. Key Informant Interview (KII) was done individually and a round table interview for the Focus Group Discussion (FGD).

### Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to the conduct of the study, the researcher first identified the Muslim learners who studied in public school dominated by Christian-Ilonggo speakers. After which, a letter was sent to the District Supervisor and the School Principal. Meanwhile, the interview guide was prepared and checked by peers who are expert in qualitative research.

The Consent-to-participate-form was first given. They affixed their signature as a manifestation of their participation. The interview was done with the presence of their parents. More importantly, the researcher interviewed them on their most convenient time and place. A token of gratitude was given to them after the interview.

Correspondingly, the audio-recording of the interview was transcribed in a verbatim manner and was translated into English. The researcher brought the results to the analyst. Themes were identified based on the contexts of their responses. Furthermore, the researcher returned to the informants to ask them to confirm the results of the study. Presentation of the results was done and implications were drawn.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Insights of Muslim Learners on MTB-MLE

The first research question focused on the insights of the Muslim learners about the Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education. It can be gleaned from table 1 that the Muslim learners generally experienced difficulty in comprehending the local dialect that was utilized by their teachers. In fact, the pupils sought for their teacher's assistance in interpreting the dialect into Filipino so that they will understand it.

The findings are confirmed by the responses of the members of the Focus Group Discussion (FGD):

*"kay muslim man ko dili Ilonggo"* (I am Muslim and not an Ilonggo, FGDQ11A4)

In addition, one of the participants of the FGD said:

*"dyako ged pakatuntay pdtalunen nilan"* (I cannot really understand, FGDQ1.1A2).

Meanwhile, the learners lamented on their difficulties in terms of participating actively during classroom activities and discussion resulting to a low grade or low academic performance. This statement was confirmed by one of the participants during the FGD:

*"gamay lang akong makuha na grado kay Ilonggo ilabang ginasulti, dili muslim"* (I got lower grades since they speak in Ilonggo and not in Muslim dialect, FGDQ1.2A4).

The learners found the MTB-MLE instruction arduous to understand that is why, they need to ask the help of their teacher to interpret or translate the lesson in the local dialect to Filipino so that they will understand it. It implies that MTB-MLE is not helpful among the non-native speakers of the local dialect because it is not their mother tongue. Hence, they lack the interest to learn since it is beyond their comprehension. As a result, their academic performance is suffering and the level of learning is low.

Cummins (2001) claimed that fifty percent of the world's out-of-school children live in communities where the language of schooling is rarely, if ever, used at home. To reject a child's language in the school is to reject the child. Language is a significant part of a child's identity. This underscores the biggest challenge of achieving Education for All (EFA): a legacy of non-productive practices that lead to low levels of learning and high levels of dropout and repetition (World Bank, 2005).

### Challenges Encountered by Muslim Learners

The second research question was anchored on the challenges encountered by the Muslim learners in the MTB-MLE program. Table 2 presents the data on the challenges encountered by Muslim learners. Typically, the Muslim learners claimed that they are having difficulties in comprehending the printed materials used by the teacher which are written in local dialect. On the other hand, a variant or 20 % of the participants are having difficulty in reading and writing the local dialect; thus, they are also experiencing a difficulty in understanding the meaning of some terms, especially those words that are having a deep meaning.

**Table 1:** Insights of Muslim learners on MTB-MLE

Themes	Frequency of Response	Core Ideas
Difficulty in comprehension	General	The learners asked the help of the teacher to interpret the use of the language in Filipino for him/her to understand. The learners found it difficult to express themselves in the local dialect being used in the classroom especially during the MTB-MLE class

Legend: 50% General, 25-40% Typical, 20% Variant

In the observation of the researcher during their class discussion, it was found out that they were struggling in writing and reading, and they were manifesting actuations of being pressured during the completion of the writing notebook. The findings are confirmed by the responses of the members of the FGD:

*“nalisuran ko sa pagsulat kag pagbasa”* (I find it difficult to read and write, FGDQ2A2).

Because of the difficulty in reading, there is a possibility that their classmates will tease them and it can be the reason that their self-esteem and confidence will be lessened. Aside from their struggles, there is another problem that they are facing. We thought that only MTB-MLE subject used the local dialect as a medium of instruction but also in their other subjects such as Mathematics, MAPEH, and Araling Panlipunan.

It was confirmed by one of the participants of the FGD: *“Malisuran ko sa Math kag MAPEH. Malisuran ko sa Ilonggo.”* (I encountered difficulties in Mathematics and MAPEH. I also have difficulties in local dialect, FGDQ1.2A5).

In addition, one of the participants said:

*“Nalisdan ko sa Araling Panlipunan og MAPEH”* (I encountered difficulties in Araling Panlipunan and MAPEH, FGDQ2A1)

For the confirmation of what they had mentioned, the researcher clarified it to their adviser and as confirmed by the teacher there are some sources in the subject areas mentioned which really utilized the local dialect.

The learners were experiencing challenges in the implementation of MTB-MLE. It is because the books and other aids in teaching are written on the language beyond the Muslim learners' level of comprehension. They found it arduous to express themselves in written and oral discourses using the local dialect especially on the printed materials utilized in the classroom. The learners could not understand the words especially those

that have a deep meaning. In addition, the learners who encountered difficulties become hesitant to participate in the class because they were not able to comprehend the words that were used by the teachers. It is also difficult for them to read and write using the local dialect.

It implied that they encountered challenges in reading and writing. They can read and write, but sad to say, they do not understand what they are reading or writing. Furthermore, the Muslim learners will attempt to cheat or copy the answers of their Visayan classmates. There's also a tendency for them to fail and cannot proceed to the next grade level. For them to surpass these kinds of challenges, they need to study and review their lessons.

It is axiomatic that the best medium for teaching a child is his mother tongue. When children are offered opportunities to learn in their mother tongue, they are more likely to enroll and succeed in school (Kosonen, 2005) and their parents are more likely to communicate with teachers and participate in their children's learning (Benson, 2002). In contradictory, Nolasco (2010) stated, MTB-MLE encourages lecture participation by children in the learning process because they understand what is being discussed and what is being ask of them. They can immediately use the mother tongue to construct and explain their world, articulate their thoughts and add new concepts to what they already know.

### Coping Strategies of Muslim Learners towards MTB-MLE

The third research question focused on the coping strategies of the learners towards MTB-MLE. It can be gleaned from Table 3 that they are generally asking for help from their peers or classmates who are fluent speakers of the local dialect. Apparently, they are requesting their classmates to interpret those unfamiliar words for them to understand it. Moreover, 20% of the Muslim learners

**Table 2:** Challenges Encountered by Muslim Learners

Themes	Frequency of Response	Core Ideas
Printed Materials are written in local dialect	Typical	The books and other aids in teaching are written on the language beyond the Muslim learners' level of comprehension.
Difficulty in reading and writing the local dialect	Variant	The learner found it arduous to express themselves in written and oral discourses using the local dialect especially on the printed materials utilized in the classroom.
Some terms are difficult to understand	Variant	The learner cannot understand words especially those words that have a deep meaning.

Legend: 50% General, 25-40% Typical, 20% Variant



are simply doing self-review by reading their lessons at home and during their free time using the books that are written in the local dialect.

As the result of the FGD, the things that the learners did in order to cope up with their lesson include asking for help from any available members of their family, such as their mother and father, or their sisters.

*“kay ginatudluan man ko sa akong mama ug papa para dili ko mabagsak”* (My parents taught me in order for me to pass, FGDQ3.1.2A3).

Another participant said:

*“Gapatudlo lang kay ate kay nakaagi naman siya ug eskwela sa bisaya pag grade 3”* (I asked my sister to teach me because she already studied local dialect during her grade 3 level, FGDQ3.1.1A3).

Aside from asking, they also used their books at school and if there’s a chance, they borrowed books from their adviser and bring it to their house for them to study and practice the local dialect.

*“Magdala mi og libro, didto namo ginabasa”* (We bring books at home and read it, FGDQ3.1.2A3)

Coping strategies are effective methods to help learners deal with difficult situations because of that, they come up with their own strategies to improve learning towards MTB-MLE. The learner helped himself/herself by reading the lessons at home and during free time, and they utilized the books to practice reading the local dialect. Generally, their classmates who are local speakers of the dialect were asked to interpret the meaning of words in

which they could not understand. These tools could be ways to lessen, if not eliminate the burdens and struggles in acquiring knowledge.

It is truly a big adjustment to the Muslim learners. Instead of focusing for the new knowledge, they need to adjust themselves to understand the medium of instruction before they are able to understand the context or the concept of the lesson. It is a double burden to the Muslim learners because they need to exert more time and effort to be knowledgeable enough in the local dialect used by their teacher. Therefore, the teacher should spend his/her time to assist and be more focused to the adjustment of the Muslim learners.

Additionally, when curriculum content is presented in an unfamiliar language, an enormous amount of time must be spent in teaching children so that they can understand, speak, read, and write L2 or a foreign language, something that is extremely difficult and waste valuable years in the early grades that could be spent learning to read and learning academic concepts in L1. Moreover, children, who cannot understand the language used in the classroom, are unable to demonstrate what they know, ask questions, and participate. In contrast, providing children with an opportunity to learn in a language they understand—starting on the first day of school—confers significant advantages for the education system, teachers, parents, and students (Smits et al., 2008; Bender et al., 2005; Ball, 2010 and Walter and Dekker, 2011).

**Table 3:** Coping Strategies of Muslim Learners towards MTB-MLE

Themes	Frequency of Response	Core Ideas
Self-review	Variant	The learner helped himself/herself by reading the lessons at home and during free time.
Reading of the Materials	Variant	The learner utilized the books to practice reading the local dialect
Asking peers for help	General	Classmates who are local speakers of the dialect were ask to interpret the meaning words in which they could not understand

Legend: 50% General, 25-40% Typical, 20% Variant

### Recommendations and Suggestions of the Informants

The fourth research question is centered on the recommendations and suggestions of the informants. Table 4 shows that the Muslim learners generally recommend that their Bisayan classmates should speak in Filipino (Tagalog) in expressing their thoughts and ideas and typically, they also suggest that their teacher should speak in Filipino so that they can better comprehend their lesson.

During the FGD, the finding was confirmed by the responses of the members. One of the participants said: *“Mas gusto nako tung Tagalog kay mas makasabot ko, kaysa bisaya”* (I rather chose the Tagalog because I understand it well, than the bisaya, FGDQ4A2).

In the statement above, it clearly emphasized that Muslim learner wanted to use the national language as a medium

of instruction. Furthermore, another participant said:

*“Tagalog para dili ko malisudan og sige pangutana sa akong classmate na bisaya”* (Tagalog so that it won’t be hard for me and I don’t need to asked my bisaya classmate, FGDQ4A3).

Behind the implementation of MTB-MLE, the pupils shared their perceptions regarding this program. Accordingly, they wanted that the teacher should have to articulate himself/herself in the class using the national language (Filipino). Furthermore, they wanted that their Visayan classmates must also speak in Filipino (Tagalog) in the class because it’s easier for them to communicate with them, as they express their ideas and thoughts using the language that they are comfortable speaking with.

It implies that the Muslim learners preferred to use the Filipino language to express their thought easily and quickly. And they have the confidence to communicate

with the teacher and the diverse learners in terms class discussion or activities. Moreover, they could be capable as a learner before proceeding to a new level. Indeed, using the national language as the medium of instruction inside the classroom has been a good thing especially with diverse learners. It lessens the disturbances of the Muslim learners in asking for help to Visayan learners to interpret those words that they did not know. As a result, the Visayan learners will not be disturbed while they are in the middle of the class and they are having quizzes and exams.

On the other hand, Filipino as the national language of the Philippines was finally settled in the 1987 Constitution. Article XIV section 6 states that “the National language of the Philippines is Filipino. As it evolves, it shall be further developed and enriched on the basis of existing Filipino and other languages in the Philippines. The constitution also provided that subject to provision of law and as the congress may deem appropriate, the Government shall take steps to initiate and sustain the use of Filipino as a medium of official communication and as language of instruction in the educational system.

**Table 4:** Recommendations and Suggestions of the Informants

Themes	Frequency of Response	Core Ideas
The teachers should speak in Filipino	Typical	The learners wanted that the teacher should have to articulate himself/herself in the class using the national language.
Learners should speak in Filipino	General	The learners also wanted that their Bisayan classmates must also have to use the national language in the class

*Legend: 50% General, 25-40% Typical, 20% Variant*

### Implications for Pedagogy

MTB-MLE program is ineffective and not useful to the non- native speaker. It does not address the needs of the Muslim learners but rather, it caused hindrances. Instead of focusing for the new knowledge, they need to adjust themselves to the medium of instruction used. The medium of instruction that the teacher used in the classroom is not effective in helping the learners to acquire the necessary information and learning in the classroom. The problems and challenges indicated should be considered so that it will not hinder the meaningful learning and it will address the needs of every Muslim learner in this program.

### Implications for further Research

This study, being a qualitative phenomenological in nature, raises a number of opportunities for future research, both in terms of theory development and concept validation. More research will in fact be necessary to refine and further elaborate the research’s findings.

First, the researcher had identified the insights, challenges, coping strategies and recommendations and suggestions among the Muslim Elementary pupils in Kidapawan City but these are not yet enough to solve the underlying problems. Second, this study offers the opportunity to widen the scope of the study, add more participants and gain better results For example, the number of participants in the study could be improved in terms of their number, and the future researchers could also select other schools with more heterogeneous (in terms of tribe, group, or religion) population. The study could also be conducted using quantitative type of study with a little portion of qualitative discussions.

Since the MTB-MLE program is still subject for improvement as what this study have shown, the future researchers may find out more rooms for the improvement of the program like areas which are not included in this

study but are deemed necessary. The future researchers could also redirect this study to become comparative in nature. They may use comparative analysis in pointing out the flaws of the said program and also to provide solutions to those problems.

### CONCLUSION

The learners’ learning process is being hindered by language barrier. As stated, they still need to seek the help of their teachers to translate the medium on Filipino language in order for them to have a good grasp on the subject matter. Students also cannot participate in the discussions as they have difficulties in comprehending the topics being discussed due to their unfamiliarity in the language used for instruction; thus, they are not able to articulate their thoughts since they are not fluent of such language. These were proven by the responses of the participants of the study.

Another challenge being encountered by the Muslim learners is the language being used in the learning materials that they utilized. Apparently, there are terms that have very deep meanings which can only be understood by the native speakers of the Visayan language. Aside from their problem on the participation during the discussions, they also have difficulties in reading and writing as they do not fully understand what they are doing. Evidently, they have developed their skills in reading and writing; however, they lack comprehension, so those mentioned skills became pointless. These were observed by the researchers during the time of the conduct of their study as they made actual observation inside the classroom.

In terms of coping strategies being practiced by the Muslim learners, the time for acquiring more knowledge at home is spent on learning the dialect being used in the school instead. This could be a problem due to the reason that these non-native speakers of the dialect being used in the school are left behind. For short, those who are

fluent and native speakers of the language do have edge over the non-native speakers. This could be labeled as lag for the Muslim learners as their potentials are hindered by language barriers.

In this study also, the participants recommended that the teachers shall articulate their lessons using a language which everyone could understand. The learners want their teachers to use our national language, as it could be understood by everyone; hence, all of them can participate in the discussions. If all the students can understand the main dialect being used in the school, the teachers can easily simplify those words which have deep and complex meaning.

### Delimitation and Limitations

This study was limited only to selected Muslim learners from the Municipality of Arakan. Gathering of information is anchored on the insights of the Muslim learners about the medium of instruction used by their teachers, the challenges that their learners are experiencing with the MTB-MLE program and their coping strategies toward its implementation.

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