

## **Multilingualism, Multilingual Education, and the English Language: Voices of Public School Teachers**

**Arceli M. Amarles**

*Philippine Normal University, Manila, Philippines*

amarles.am@pnu.edu.ph

### **Abstract**

In contexts where decision making is highly centralized, policies on language and/in education are mostly formulated by officials of the Department or Ministry of Education. Hardly is the voice of ordinary public school teachers who are at the forefront of implementing any educational or language policy heard because they are only seen as implementers of any policy. But should their voices remain muted? Following the bottom-up approach and drawing from narratives of public school teachers, this paper argues that for an efficient formulation and implementation of language and/in education policy, teachers' voices must be heard. Through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with public school teachers in seven regional centres in the Philippines, it aims to find out what these teachers have to say about the following themes: (1) multilingualism in the country; (2) the mother-tongue-based multilingual education (MTBMLE), an integral component of the Philippine government's K + 12 enhanced basic education system; and (3) the role that the English language plays in education in the light of the multilingual nature of the country and the implementation of MTB-MLE.

**Keywords:** *multilingualism, education, mother tongue, second language*

The Philippines is a linguistically and culturally diverse nation, with 187 languages listed for it (Ethnologue, 2016). Dutcher (1982) described the Philippine language situation as consisting "from 70-150 mutually unintelligible vernacular languages" (cited in Dekker & Young, 2005, p. 182). In a number of language-in-education policies enacted in the country, this multilingual and multicultural nature of the nation has not been taken into account. A case in point is the 1974 Bilingual Education Policy (embodied in DECS Order No. 25), which was subsequently revised in 1987 as DECS Order No. 52. The policy mandates the use of Filipino and English as the country's official languages, while "allowing for the use of the vernaculars initially as 'transitional languages' for initial instruction and early literacy up to Grade 3" (Dekker & Young, 2005, p. 185). The vernaculars were elevated to the role of 'auxiliary languages' in the revised 1987 policy (Dekker & Young, 2005, p. 185). With the signing into law of Republic Act No. 10533 ("An Act Enhancing the Philippine Basic Education System by Strengthening its Curriculum and Increasing the Number of Years for Basic Education, Appropriating Funds therefore and for other Purposes") (or the K to 12 Law) by President Aquino on May 15, 2013, the Bilingual Education Policy was effectively replaced by the Mother-tongue-based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE). Among other standards and principles, Section 5 of R.A. 10533 requires that curriculum in basic education adhere to the principles and framework of the MTB-MLE.

At the forefront in the implementation of the MTB-MLE are Grades 1-3 public school teachers. Being the front liners, what do they bring to the teaching-learning process in terms of views, broadly defined here as beliefs, knowledge and attitudes? To what extent do these views influence their classroom practice? How are these views similar to and different from research findings and policy documents? Thanasoulas (2002) posits that teachers' beliefs influence the way they teach. Furthermore, "what they usually get back from their students is what they themselves have brought to the teaching-learning process" (Thanasoulas, 2002, p. 4), underscoring the importance of reflection as a method to critically evaluate their professional practice and improve it.

This paper aims to explore the voices of public elementary school teachers about multilingualism, multilingual education, and the English language. In particular, it aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the views of public elementary school teachers of multilingualism in the country?
2. What are the views of public elementary school teachers of mother tongue-based multilingual education?
3. What are the views of public elementary school teachers of the English language?

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

The study adopted a qualitative research design since it zeroed in on the experiences which are related to professional practices of a specific group of people, namely, public school teachers. In analysing their experiences, it was possible to "construct the world around them, what they are doing or what is happening to them in terms that are meaningful and that offer rich insight" (Barbour, 2007, p. xii).

### **Data Collection: Focus Group Discussion**

Data for the present study were gathered through Focus Group Discussion (FGD), which is broadly defined here as "any group discussion...in which the researcher is actively encouraging of, and attentive to, the group interaction" (Kitzinger & Barbour, 1999, cited in Barbour, 2007, p. 2). There was therefore a very conscious attempt on the part of the researcher to allow participants to discuss among themselves, rather than interact only with the researcher.

The FGDs covered seven regional centres throughout the Philippines, namely, City of San Fernando (Pampanga), Naga City, Cebu City, Davao City, Baguio City, Iloilo City and Makati City, all of which are multilingual and multicultural. Three focus groups were formed for each regional centre, making a total of 21 focus groups. The FGDs were participated in by 98 Grades 1 to 3 teachers of selected public schools, broken down as follows: City of San Fernando (Pampanga) (15), Naga City (12), Cebu City (13), Davao City (14), Baguio City (14), Iloilo City (14), and Makati City (16). All but ten (10) participants were female teachers. In terms of self-reported language proficiency, most of them said that they are proficient in their L1 and in Filipino and that they are either proficient or not very proficient in the English language. The choice of Grades 1-3 public elementary school teachers derived from the fact that they are the "front liners" in the implementation of the Mother Tongue-based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE), as mandated by R.A. 10533 (the K to 12 Law).

Each FGD per regional centre included four to six teachers, in keeping with Barbour's (2007) suggestion to limit a focus group to a minimum of three participants and a maximum of eight participants because anything fewer than three participants may be too few for a group discussion and anything bigger than eight participants may not be very manageable.

Each running for 30-45 minutes, the FGDs revolved around eight main topics: (1) major languages of the place, (2) attitude towards Filipino, (3) attitude towards the L1 of the place (regional language), (4) attitude towards English, (5) use of the different languages in school, (6) attitude towards MTB-MLE, (7) importance of English, and (8) access to English (public vs. private schools). In terms of language/s used during the FGDs, the participants were free to use English, Tagalog, or the code-switched variety of Philippine English. All FGDs were videotaped and were then broadly transcribed. A one-page questionnaire was answered by the participants before each FGD in order to gather their demographic profile.

### **Coding of Data**

Transcripts of the 21 FGDs were coded using thematic content analysis as the main technique. Here, transcripts were analysed following an incident-to-incident coding strategy, instead of a word-by-word or line-by-line coding strategy, in order to generate the main themes, sub-themes and categories, which are necessary in order to make sense of the participants' utterances. In keeping with grounded theory, coding frames were then constructed by adopting both "a priori" and "in-vivo" codes (Barbour, 2007, p.120; Charmaz, 2006, pp. 55-57). "A priori" and "in-vivo" codes are distinguished from each other in that the former are those whose sense is apparent from the data themselves, whereas the latter have meanings which are special to the participants (Barbour, 2007, p. 120).

## **Findings**

A careful analysis of the FGD transcripts reveals participants' views on the following: multilingualism in the Philippines, Mother Tongue-based Multilingual Education Policy, and the value of English. Each of these views is explained in the sections that follow.

### **Multilingualism in the Philippines**

Language Situation of the Speech Community and the Participants' Language World  
In describing the language situation of the speech community in question, the FGD participants are aware of the multilingual character of their area, as exemplified by Extract 1 from Cebu FGD. In doing so, the participants characterize themselves as minimally trilingual, in which their linguistic repertoire, at the very least, consists of three languages, namely, the L1 (the mother tongue), Filipino (the national language), and English (the L2 or L3).

*Extract 1:*

T1: Everyday we use the 3 languages no? At home,... we use English and ... Cebuano, not ah no Filipino. Ah in... during the trip... ah we use the some of the passengers in the V-hire are using English. Most of them are students and some of them are using Filipino and... mostly Bisaya, or Cebuano or mother tongue. In school, so kids will ah really understand the lessons especially Math... ah... I tried to... I tried to switch that one in... mother tongue, or Cebuano so they can really understand the, what is

this, the lesson... before we ah I am going to... to what is this to use the the languages that we that that that terminologies in Math no? They can really... what is this... really understand the... the... the lesson... especially in what is this... this... what is this example in Properties in in Multiplication or Addition i have to I have to mix ah what is this to mix that one in our dialect. (Cebu/G-1/T1)

In Extract 2, a participant in the Makati FGD makes an observation about the lack of confidence among teachers in the use of the English language.

*Extract 2:*

T1: Because Metro Manila is a cosmopolitan city where combination of different languages, and I think in school, for Grade 1 we use the mother tongue as the medium of instruction in a separate subject. English perhaps being used among the teachers during meetings. Actually, during meetings kasi parang [because it seems] we converse using the language that we all both know. And there was even a time na parang [that maybe] we were mandated to speak English during the meeting, and then the room suddenly...parang [it seems] less talk, less mistakes. That's it. I think tayo pa rin [we still] because it's not our mother tongue. It's not our first language, kaya [that's why] there's fear in using the language. (Makati/G-1/T1)

Part of the participants' knowledge of the world has to do with the domains in which the different languages at their disposal are used. For example, as shown in Extract 3, a public school teacher in Davao City describes the language Davaoenos use in informal conversations, in school, and at home.

*Extract 3:*

T1: The languages that are being used in Davao are number 1 is the Bisaya or Sinugbu. We also speak Tagalog and English. We use these when we have a conversation with our friends and other people most especially Bisaya. In school, I am a Grade 3 teacher. We are not affected with the MTB. Not yet sir. In school, we use English, Tagalog, and sometimes we also use Bisaya. At home, our family speak Bisaya. (Davao/G-3/T1)

In Extract 4 three languages in Naga – Bikol (the L1), Filipino and English – are allocated to different activities and subjects.

*Extract 4:*

T2: In my class, in English and in Filipino. "Good morning ma'am, Dyos marhay na aga po, dagus po kamo." Because according to them, the children know these words. We cannot change it. They already know it. And commonly, when we are going to greet 0/24/13 3:36 PM someone, di ba yan ang tinuturo natin [isn't that what we're teaching]. We're teaching them that when there is a visitor, we greet them, good morning, good afternoon.

T3: According to ma'am Joy, you have to instruct the pupils, everyone to greet the visitors in the mother tongue.

T2: That's correct.

T3: Good morning, no, dapat "Marhay na adlaw"

T1: Maybe because we are implementing K-12, but then, the children should not be avoided to speak in English also as they are very fluent on it. Hindi tayo dapat [we shouldn't.]

T2: They already know it. (Naga/G-2/T1, T2, T3)

### **Attitude towards Filipino**

Overall, the attitude of the focus groups towards the Tagalog-based Filipino, the national language, is positive. Extract 5 exemplifies this attitude towards Filipino.

*Extract 5:*

T3: Personally sir, I love Filipino because we are Filipinos. We are living in the Philippines. Because we are living in the Philippines, Filipino is our major language. So when we are talking to other people, we always use Filipino kasi po madali syang maiintindihan [because it's easy to understand]. Sa school naman po, ganun din po [in school it's the same]. Mas naiintindihan po ng mga bata ang Filipino kasi po ang iba galing ng isang province [Filipino is easier to understand because others come from the provinces]. Yung iba po mga Muslim [The others are Muslim]. Yon po, madali po syang maiintindihan [That's it, it's easy to understand it] (Pampanga/G-3/T3)

It is evident in Extract 5 that Filipino is valued because it is the language of wider communication (language for inter-ethnic communication) and is a symbol of national unity.

### **Attitude towards L1**

Similarly, the overall attitude of the FGD participants towards their L1 is favorable, as exemplified by Extract 6.

*Extract 6:*

T3: Cebuano is very important as we are in it is our medium of instruction using in Cebu and we can communicate very well. We understood each other using the Cebuano even with the other part of the Visayas. In fact, ah even though there are some people living in the Visayas they have different intonation or accent in in Cebuano but still we are using Cebuano because it is only the way that we can understand to each other and it is our mother tongue that we use in our home since we when we ah since our birth we are using Cebuano so it is also important because if you are Cebuano and you don't know how to speak Cebu Cebuano so it is also like ah ah

symbols it is ah ah symbolizes that we are in ah in Cebu and we are using Cebuano language

T1: Okay, using Sinibuanong binisaya or Cebuano it would be very easy for the children to understand their lesson because they can oh because of the words used uhm we used Sinibuanong binisaya and they can with that words they can understand they can interact they can express freely their ideas and opinions without hesitation. There will be no barriers in speaking.(Cebu/G-2/T1 and T3)

In Extract 6 there is awareness of the symbolic value of the participants' L1 (Cebuano) and its use as a regional language. As a language, it fosters understanding among Cebuano speakers living in Cebu and other parts of the country. In Extract 7 the FGD participant expresses pride in her L1, in this case, Bisaya, the mother tongue in Davao City.

*Extract 7:*

T4: I think they are proud because they are born here and they're used to it. Maybe when they go to other places, when they go to Luzon, when somebody asks them they cannot communicate with it. But most Davaoenos are really proud of their Bisaya. (Davao/G-2/T4)

### **Attitude towards English**

In the case of English, all FGD participants have a positive attitude to it, as shown by Extract 8.

*Extract 8:*

T3: Syempre English is very important kasi [because] it is our international language. Kaya dapat matutunan din natin, at for me pagnakaka-English ka matalino. [That's why we should learn it, and for me if you speak English you're intelligent] (Makati/G-2/T3)

In Extract 8 the FGD participant recognizes English as an international language. Interestingly, she equates ability in English with intellectual ability. Extract 9 underscores the participant's view about English being a universal language which allows Filipinos to communicate with people from other countries.

*Extract 9:*

T3: For me sir it's a blessing. All we know that English is a universal language in the world. And it has many advantages also. For example, when we migrate to another country, America. They use English as their language. As a Filipino, we must also learn to speak in English. (Pampanga/G-3/T3)

In Extract 10 the FGD participant equates ability in English with global competitiveness.

*Extract 10:*

T1: Katulad sa [like in] school sir, it is the vision of the school to be globally competitive. How could you be globally competitive if you cannot express yourself in the international language. (Pampanga/G-1/T1)

In Extract 11 there is the desire on to integrate or identify with educated speakers of Philippine English, which may very well be fulfilling the integrative function of English in the Philippines. However, this function is used in a different sense from the traditional meaning which gives emphasis to the desire to sound like or identify oneself with native speakers of English. In the case of Extract 11, the desire is to emulate an educated user of English.

*Extract 11:*

ALL: It would add confidence.

F: So confidence, what does that mean? When you know English or you competent in English...

T4: You are more confident to communicate to other people.

T2: Hindi katulad ngayon [not like now] sir, when you stood up kanina sa amin [a while ago in front of us] and we heard you speak in English...

F: It was not my intention.

T4: But we want to speak just like you. (Pampanga/G-1/T4)

The same integrative function may be seen in Extract 12 below. Here, T4 says that “everybody can be like him or her,” the pronoun referring to a person who speaks good English.

*Extract 12:*

F: And that looking up to people who speak good English is it because the perception that if somebody speaks good English is smart, is intelligent? Ganun ba yon? [Is that it?]

T4: Not really but maybe. Everybody can be like him or her. If you want to be fluent in English. (Naga/G-2/T4)

In Extract 13 T2 talks about English as a universal language but also highlights the utilitarian value of English. She then describes the challenges a public school teacher faces in teaching English to students.

*Extract 13:*

T2: Since English is our universal language, it is very important when you go to other countries, usually, they speak in English. It is also important because here in our country, especially in cities, di ba [isn't it that] there are call centers, you should be fluent in English. But in public school, we teach English, but the problem is, sinasanay natin sila na magsalita ng English kaya lang pagdating sa bahay, ang English hindi nila napa-practice. [we train them to use English, but when they get home, it's not practised.] But in private school, they are practicing English language. Yon lang sa public ang problem. [It's public schools which are the problem] Kasi ang mga parents nila hindi nagsi-speak in English, so sa school lang sila natututo. [Because their parents don't speak English, so it's in school where they learn it.] (Makati/G-3/T1 and T2)

In Extract 14 it is clear that T1 has no problem with the Philippine variety of English. In fact, she embraces it, arguing that it does not make sense to produce the accent of American or British English speakers and emphasizing that content is more important. Here, the notion of mutual intelligibility comes to mind, which underlines the point that any distinctive feature of Philippine English phonology or any deviation from the phonology of the exnormative standard (i.e., American English) does not pose any problem so long as it does not impede communication.

*Extract 14:*

T1: ...It isn't between the two ha in the same content, but the other one can deliver himself very well in English, I think, you choose the better one, right? And then the question is what kind of English do we have to speak? I think sa akin, Philippine English is good na man. Sabi kasi nila Philippine English is substandard. The one that they are talking about the standard English that they are talking about British English I think and American English I think. If you can't like the twang nila [their twang] and all, na hindi naman talaga pwedeng gayahin [which cannot really be imitated], cause basically that's not your mother tongue, so bakit [why]? For as long as you have expressed your message across, Philippine English is good. Of course it's better if you sound good with the language. But I think content is much better. (Makati/G-1/T1)

### **Mother Tongue-based Multilingual Education Policy**

Overall, the Mother Tongue-based Multilingual Education Policy which is embodied in the K to 12 Law (R.A. 10533) is favored by most of the 98 FGD participants. One reason for the favorable attitude of the focus groups towards MTBMLE is that it promotes understanding in class. This is illustrated by Extract 15.

*Extract 15:*

T1: Ang kagandahan lang po ng multi-lingual kasi ay kahit sino ay nakakaintindi. Kapagkanakakapag-adjust kung sino yung kasama, sino yung kausap. Kung

Tagalog, eh di Tagalog din ang gagamitin. So mas maganda. Mas madaling naiintindihan lalo na sa mga bata na hindi na man lahat ng English ay naiintindihan, so ita-translate na naman sa Filipino, then ita-translate na naman sa Bisaya. Mas madali, mas maganda for me ha. [The beauty of multilingual education is that anyone can understand. If one adjusts with the person she's with, with the person she's talking to. If she's Tagalog, then Tagalog is also used. So, it's better. Children can understand it easily especially among them who understand much English. Things are translated to Filipino and then we translate it to Bisaya. It's easier, it's better for me.] (Davao/G-2/T1)

In addition, Extract 15 underscores the importance and efficacy of translation as a teaching strategy in a multilingual class. Another reason for the favorable attitude is the opportunity to translate English terms to the L1, which allows for increased understanding of scientific and mathematical concepts. Extract 16 exemplifies this point.

*Extract 16:*

T2: Yes, because they understand more. We translate the Math English as medium of instruction, to Kapampangan. So they understand. Because in our lesson, there are few minutes, konti lang yung oras [time is short], so dapat, paglabas ng bata sa school, naintindihan na nya yung lesson [so once the child leaves school, he/she understands the lesson]. (Pampanga/G-3/T2)

Besides increased understanding, MTB-MLE also fosters openness and active participation in class activities, as T3 in Extract 17 narrates.

*Extract 17:*

T3: In my experience, because my pupils are they started with Grade 1 using mother tongue, and from what I understand, yung theme ng Grade 1 is all about themselves. So when they reach Grade 2, so they have a lot of stories to tell, so kahit yung discussion [even if the discussion] started with very simple question, they would answer na [already], they can answer it specifically. Tapos [then] from that answers nakaka-share pa sila ng ibang experiences [they can share other experiences]. So ang connection ng teacher and ng pupils kumbaga mas open [the connection between teacher and pupils is more open] because they can speak in Bicol. They are allowed in Bicol, to speak in Bicol. (Naga/G-1/T3)

The above view is shared by T5 in Extract 18. Here, the Makati teacher compares students using the mother tongue and those using English in the Mathematics class. She notes a marked difference between the two groups of students, saying that the former have developed a strong self-confidence which enables them to express their ideas more.

*Extract 18:*

T5: The way I see it po, good sya [it's good]. Nasa Grade 1 kami ng 1 year, so nag-handle po ako ng first year ng K-12, yong na observe ko po, mas nag-e-express ng thoughts, ng ideas ang mga bata po ngayon [We were in Grade 1 for 1 year, so I taught first year of K- 12, and what I observed is that children can express their thoughts and ideas now] using that language, using mother tongue, as compared to my students before wherein they are obliged to speak English during Math subject. So yong nakita ko po, based sa last year observation ko, mas nakita ko yong confidence nila to express their ideas [So based on what I observed last year, I saw their self-confidence to express their idea]. (Makati/G-3/T5)

The benefits and advantages of MTB-MLE notwithstanding, the program has several disadvantages, according to the public school teachers. One of them is the apparent abrupt shift from an English-medium kindergarten education to a mother tongue-based multilingual education in Grades 1-3. Extract 19 shares this sentiment.

*Extract 19:*

T1: Okay for me the disadvantage is that when we speak when we started that program mfrom last year we have a hard time because most of our pupils are from kindergarten pupils and they are taught in English so when we started teaching that our mother tongue they can't understand so we have to translate because they kept on asking "what's that teacher?" "what's that term?" And they're used already of that that in teaching that subject ah in that subject they're already like for example in math they know already addition and subtraction and we have to translate and it has a hard time for us teachers to teach that terms in Visayan at first but as of now it's okay because we can ah teach well because we are used in talking in Bisaya we can impart to them we have to find more uhm ideas we can share more to them and because they can understand and they understand our lesson because we can express well the lesson to them. (Cebu/G-3/T1)

The choice of a major language for MTB-MLE proves to be another issue. This is shown by T3 in Extract 20 in which the teacher describes the challenge of teaching in a variety of Cebuano (i.e., Sinugbuanong Binisaya) which is not very intelligible to Davao speakers of Bisaya.

*Extract 20:*

T3: In my case Sir I also experience the same thing especially in Math because we are using different terminologies. Like for example when you say addition you say "pun-an", "dungangan", subtraction you say "kuhaan". And it's also difficult for our children to understand that terms because we are not usually using that in everyday activity. So I am in favour in using the mother tongue but not the Sinugbuanong Binisaya terms because it's very difficult to teach or to let your children grasp all

those terms that they are using. So just like what she said we translate it to Filipino or English.

T2: It's like teaching them a foreign language. (Davao/G-1/T2 and T3)

The issue with choice of language or a variety of it is echoed by the teachers of Naga City who have to grapple with the Albay variety of Bikol, the variety used in learning materials issued by the Department of Education. This is shown in Extract 21:

*Extract 21:*

T1: Maybe if we will use Bicol Naga, maybe it will not be difficult for us. But then because of the materials given to us, there are some words that we could not understand talaga [really] because the materials are written in Bicol Albay, Legazpi. So we have to contextualize that the children can understand us.

T4: For us teachers, it is also hard to contextualize those words kasi very limited nag po yung vocabulary naming. So even us, we cannot understand what really that means of that words. So we have to think to translate it to Bicol Naga. For us to teach the word for the pupils. (Naga/G-2/T1 and T4)

The next problem with the implementation of MTB-MLE is the lack or inadequacy of teaching materials such as textbooks, teacher's guides, etc. T2 talks about this in Extract 22.

*Extract 22:*

T2: It's just that, we are just having problems with the materials. I think by first week of implementation of K-12, I don't have problem because I do have materials for the first week. But for the second week, third week, that is something that I'm going to have problem with. (Naga/G-2/T2)

In addition to teaching materials, the other problem has to do with the lack of preparation for the program. While most teachers said that they had attended a one -week seminar-workshop prior to the full implementation of the program in 2011, T4 (see Extract 23 below) confesses that she has not attended any seminar to prepare her and that she lacks materials.

*Extract 23:*

T4: Kami po pala, nilagay po kami sa grade 1, wala po kaming seminar, walang binigay na material, walang guide. Kami lang po yung nag-provide para sa sarili namin. Nagpaphotocopy lahat. Tapos nangangapa pa rin po sa pagtuturo kasi walang seminar. [By the way, we were placed in grade 1, I didn't attend a seminar, they didn't give us any material, no guide. We were the ones who provided for our own needs. We made copies of the material. And we were at a loss as to how to teach because we didn't have a seminar]. (Pampanga/G-3/T4)

There is also the concern about too much repetition of some topics in class, thus delaying the progression of teaching concepts. Extract 24 illustrates this point, suggesting some resistance to the MTB-MLE.

*Extract 24:*

T4: ...gusto kong ibalik ang English doon pa lang lower grade ng bata, kasi doon nagpapractice ang bata sa pagsalita at pagsulat ng English. Ang mga bata, pag palagi mong ginagamit ang English, natututo na sila. Pag nagturo ka kasi sa Bicol, ita-translate mo na naman sa Tagalog, ita-translate mo na naman sa English, mahaba yung proceso. Pero kung ipa-practice mo na mismo doon sa bata, madali nya na yang makukuha... [I want English brought back in the lower grades because there a child's speaking and writing in English is practised. Children learn when they use English very often. When you teach in Bicol, you need to translate to Tagalog and then translate again to English, the process is long. But if the child practises while s/he is young, she'll develop the skill easily...] (Naga/G-3/T4)

Extract 25 is teachers' feedback on parents' negative reaction to the MTB-MLE program.

*Extract 25:*

T1: And then yung [the] mga parents, nagrereklogo sila why Kapampangan lahat ang tinuturo namin [they're complaining why we're all teaching Kapampangan]. What about yung daughter daw nila [their] don't know how to speak in mother tongue. Bakit hindi na lang daw Filipino or English [Why not focus on Filipino or English]?

F: But you know that gradually English and Filipino will be introduced, di ba [right]? Grades 4,5, 6 gradually English and Filipino will be introduced. Grades 1, 2 and 3 lang yung [only] mother tongue. Do you have a sense on that? Do you tell that to the parents?

F: So parents are complaining?

T3: Yes, they trained their children at home in Filipino. Then once they're in school, you teach mother tongue Kapampangan. So they will have hard time talaga [really].

T1: Tapos yung iba sa section ko, dahil hindi naintindihan, umiiyak yung mga pupils, kaya yung apat kinuha at binalik sa private na lang. Para daw hindi mahirapan yung mga bata nila. [Then in my section, pupils are crying because they don't understand; that's why the four children were pulled out and transferred to a private school. So that their children won't be hard up.] (Pampanga/G-1/T1 and T3)

**Importance of English**

The third theme emerging from the FGD is the value or importance of English in the participants' daily lives. In Extract 26 T4 exemplifies this point by suggesting that English fulfils

an instrumental function, i.e., of providing utilitarian value to the language, which then makes it a tool for upward social mobility.

*Extract 26:*

T4: It is easier for you sir to get job if you're fluent in English. Like in my case, when I stopped teaching in the private school, I applied in the call center, since I am fluent in English, then it's easy for me to get the job. Because when you are applying in the call center, they will give you pictures then you will make stories out of those. (Pampanga/G-1/T4)

In another excerpt from the data, Excerpt 27, T5 describes how a Filipino who does not have a good command of the English language can face serious challenges in getting a job.

*Extract 27:*

T5: Maybe the reason behind there are some Filipinos who are not yet in work, because they cannot express themselves in English. Yon ang nagdo-down sa kanila [that's what puts them down]... They are good in written but they are not good in speaking. (Makati/G-2/T5)

Relating English to basic education, is there a difference between private and public schools in terms of making English accessible? Some participants have said that there is a difference, as exemplified by Extract 28.

*Extract 28:*

T4: One of the schools here in Davao City is speaking the language, even the yaya [nanny] are speaking the language. The wealthy people went to that school because the yaya [nanny], the parents are forced to speak the language. And I also observed that my pupils, transferees from private schools are better English speakers than my pupils in Grade 2 from Grade 1 in a public school. (Davao/G-1/T4)

## **Discussion**

Looking closely at the FGDs with the public school teachers in five regional centres, it is possible to formulate some tentative generalizations revolving around the three main themes that have emerged from the FGDs:

The FGD participants are aware that the Philippines is a multilingual country, with the typical Filipino characterized as minimally trilingual, which means that at least three languages constitute their verbal repertoire. In addition, they are aware that each language at their disposal is used in a specific domain and for a different purpose. Furthermore, in school, each of these languages is allocated to a specific subject and activity. Given the generally favorable attitude of the FGD participants to the L1, Filipino (the national language), and L2 (English), the picture created is one of peaceful coexistence among these languages and probably other Philippine languages.

On the importance of English, the public school teachers are well aware of the integrative and instrumental functions of the language. The integrative function, however, is not defined in terms of one's desire to sound like an American, but in terms of one's desire to be like or identify him/herself with an educated Philippine English, or what one might call an exemplar of good and acceptable English in the Philippines. The instrumental function of English in the Philippine is seen in its range and depth of functions in Philippine society. Specifically, it is an instrument for landing a job and has therefore become a tool for upward social mobility. The flipside to that is that if one's English is bad because of the bad linguistic models s/he had in school (private or public) or at home, s/he will be denied the opportunity to work for the company s/he is applying to.

Overall, the attitude of the public school teachers towards the MTB-MLE is favorable. Acceptance of the program is due to perceived positive effects on student performance, such as increased understanding and active participation in class activities. If there is some form of resistance, it is not to the policy or program itself but primarily to the language (or a variety of it) chosen for the region, which is reflected in the textbooks and learning materials prescribed in the area.

A more important issue has to do with the unavailability or inadequacy of textbooks and learning materials. Resources are a crucial factor in the successful implementation of any program, and certainly the MTB-MLE is no exception. In fact, the issue about language is just one of several factors which contribute to the success of the program. The Philippine Department of Education may well be reminded of a key conclusion of an evaluation of the Bilingual Education Policy (Gonzalez & Sibayan, 1988), namely, that there is more to quality education than language-related issues and that the Philippine educational system has bigger problems than language. Teaching competence through quality pre-service and in-service training programs, teaching learning resources (such as textbooks and teacher's guides), attractive teachers' salary, and school facilities, are some of the contributory factors for quality education in the country.

On the issue of whether English can fit into a mother-tongue-based multilingual education, Cummins' (2009) suggestions are instructive. He acknowledges the efficacy of translation as a learning strategy in an English classroom in a multilingual context. In addition, he encourages "newcomer students to write in their LI and, working with peer, community, or instructional resource people to translate LI writing into English," because this "scaffolds students' output in English and enables them to use higher order and critical thinking skills much sooner than if English is the only legitimate language of intellectual expression in the classroom" (Cummins, 2009, p. 319). Furthermore, he posits that allowing the use of L1 in the English classroom legitimates the L1 as "a cognitive tool within the classroom" which "challenges the subordinate status of many minority groups and affirms students' identities" (Cummins, 2009, p. 320). This should allay the fear of some teachers (such as a few of the FGD participants) and parents about the perceived negative effect of the L1 on the L2 as a result of multilingual education.

On the issue which relates to the appropriate age a child should start learning English, the popular belief being that the earlier a child learns English, the better it will be for him/her, Kirkpatrick (2013) may well provide a very good explanation. Arguing for his lingua franca approach, Kirkpatrick, first of all, believes that there is no need for a child to approximate a native speaker accent in English. It is simply an ambitious and unattainable endeavour. Rather, Kirkpatrick advises multilingual speakers to acquire an English which is intelligible and comprehensible to other multilingual speakers. A further implication of this is that the teaching and learning of English can be delayed "at least until the later stages of primary school, if not

secondary school itself. The primary school can focus on developing fluency and literacy in local languages" (Kirkpatrick, 2013, p. 13). Second, he suggests that the English language curriculum include a course on intercultural competence, which may be defined as explaining one's own culture and understanding other cultures (Honna, 2013). A third suggestion is for teachers themselves to be "multilinguals who have successfully used English as a lingua franca and who are inter-culturally aware" (Kirkpatrick, 2013, p. 13).

In terms of directions for future research, it is suggested that FGDs be conducted with public school teachers in other centers representing other regional languages of the Philippines. In addition, FGDs with other stakeholders of Philippine education such as parents, community leaders, curriculum designers, and program managers, should be conducted to gather their thoughts and views regarding language and language-in-education issues. Equally important is finding out what is happening inside the classroom in order to determine a match (or mismatch) between what the teachers profess they do and what they actually do in class. This should be done through classroom observation of selected teachers.

Finally, with regard to what the Department of Education (DepEd) should do to improve the implementation of MTB-MLE in the country, the agency should continue to provide in-service training to teachers to better prepare them for the daunting task of carrying out their mandate, as stipulated in the K + 12 law. DepEd should also see to it that enough textbooks and other teaching materials are provided on time. If these practical concerns are addressed on a long-term basis, it may result in a successful implementation of the MTB-MLE.

### **Acknowledgement and Dedication**

This study would not have been possible without the help of Professor Kingsley Bolton (Nanyang Technological University, Singapore) who was greatly instrumental in conceptualizing it. Many thanks, too, to a great mentor and a dear friend, the late Dr. Danilo T. Dayag, for paving the way for this research endeavor. This article is dedicated to this man who left fingerprints of grace in the lives of many people. Dr. Dayag's selflessness will always be remembered.

### **Funding**

ARCZONE Professional Development, Inc. for arranging and bankrolling expenses for the FGDs in the seven regional centers, namely, Cebu City, City of San Fernando (Pampanga), Davao City, Naga City, Baguio City, Iloilo City and Makati City.

### **References**

- Barbour, R. (2007). *Doing focus groups*. London, UK: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. London, UK: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Cummins, J. (2009). Multilingualism in the English-language classroom: Pedagogical considerations. *TESOL Quarterly*, 43(2), 317-321.
- Dekker, D., & Young, C. (2005). Bridging the gap: The development of appropriate educational strategies for minority language communities in the Philippines. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 6(2), 182-199.
- Gonzalez, A., & Sibayan, B. (1988). *Evaluating bilingual education in the Philippines*. Manila: Linguistic Society of the Philippines.

- Honna, N. (2013). English as a multicultural language and its pedagogical implications. Keynote lecture delivered at the 11th Asia TEFL International Conference on Englishes across Asian Contexts: Opportunities and Challenges. Ateneo de Manila University, Philippines, October 26, 2013.
- Kirkpatrick, A. (2013). The lingua franca approach to the teaching of English: A possible pathway to genuine multilingualism in local languages and English. In H. McIlwraith (Ed.), *Multilingual education in Africa: Lessons from the Juba Language-in-Education Conference* (pp. 11-15). London: British Council.
- Lewis, M. P., Gary, F. S., & Fennig, C. D. (Eds.). (2016). *Ethnologue: Languages of the world.* (19<sup>th</sup> ed.). Dallas, Texas: SIL International. [Online version: <http://www.ethnologue.com.>]
- Republic of the Philippines. (2013). An Act Enhancing the Philippine Basic Education System by Strengthening its Curriculum and Increasing the Number of Years for Basic Education, Appropriating Funds therefor and for other Purposes (Republic Act No. 10533).
- Thanasoulas, D. (2002). What do teachers bring to the teaching-learning process? Teflnet. Retrieved October 24, 2013. [www.ePals.com](http://www.ePals.com)
- Young, C. (2002). First language first: Literacy Education for the Future in a Multilingual Philippine Society. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 5(4), 221-232