

But My Child Speaks English: Native English Parents' Perception on Mother Tongue as Medium of Instruction

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ABSTRACT

The study delves into the perception of the parents of learners whose first language is English towards Mother Tongue-based Multilingual Education (MTBMLE). The questionnaire accumulates the perception of parents as important stakeholders in MTBMLE implementation to provide insight into family language policy in the Philippines. Native English speakers in this study refer to Filipino children who use English more comfortably than any other language at home in the Central Philippines region, with Sinugbuanong Binisaya as the local mother tongue. The study uses Personality Implicit Theory, Threshold Theory, and Sociocultural Theory to describe how these parents feel about their children's mother tongue acquisition. Findings revealed that parents whose children are native English speakers agreed to the benefits of the mother tongue in the language and sociocultural development of the learners. Thus, native English speakers may unconsciously learn the language of the environment (Sinugbuanong Binisaya) when they converse and interact with the people of the said language. Moreover, seeking the perception of parents of Native English learners provides an important guide for any other institutions across the globe that have not implemented the MTBMLE fully as a subject to consider its implementation. It opens the possibility of training parents on an informed family language policy which assists children in learning MTBMLE, as they greatly help their children's language acquisition in the Cebuano language and appreciate the local culture.

Keywords — Education, MTB-MLE, perception, mother tongue, multilingual education

INTRODUCTION

The world is currently shifting its language teaching and learning philosophy and approaches to a mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTBMLE) paradigm (Cruz, 2015). This program bridges the children's development in learning their second and other languages (Nolasco, 2009). Many ASEAN countries utilize the MTBMLE approach for its organic benefits in children's overall development (Cruz, 2015). As a result, the Philippines implemented the MTBMLE policy on all basic education institutions. However, private institutions with native English-speaking children might find this situation an issue, and parents would have to think deeply about the effects of MTBMLE on

their children's education. The family language policy needs to be discussed to meet the changes in early grades instruction due to the addition of MTBMLE. This study sought to determine the parents' perception of native English speakers on MTBMLE Instruction.

Language is the means for people to communicate and understand one another in a classroom setting, thus the devoid of which is a loss for all humanity (Benson, 2005). Nettle and Romaine (2000), in their book "Vanishing Voices," emphasized the direct correlation of language to preserving ethnic identity, cultures, and knowledge. In the educational aspect, learning to read in one's vernacular provides learners with a solid foundation for learning to read in any second language or L2 (Nolasco, 2009). Thus, fluency and literacy in the home language offer a cognitive and linguistic foundation for learning another language (Ball, 2010). As a result, the Department of Education implemented the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education program based on Republic Act No. 10533 with DepEd Order No. 60, s. 2008 to preserve indigenous languages and to stop the growing number of endangered languages (Gacheche, 2010; Wa-Mbaleka, 2014). Also, Mother Tongue implementation needs to reach long-term knowledge assimilation through a medium that children understand (Mondez, 2013) and to address the functional illiteracy of Filipinos, where language underdevelopment is one of the significant factors (Maluyo, 2018). All these studies and contentions adhere to UNESCO in their statement that children forced to learn in a language they do not understand face significant formal education challenges. Therefore an inclusive quality education in the student's first language in the Asia-Pacific is essential (UNESCO Bangkok, 2016).

Regarding MTBMLE perception, Chakma (2012) affirmed that successful bilingual education requires parents' support. The mother tongue or the home language is a valid bridge or transitional medium of instruction (Duguiang & Dekker, 2010). Gallego and Zubiri (2013) state that parents must be questioned about the use of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction in schools, given their mixed views on language acquisition. One perspective is that parents revere MTBMLE instruction as it would promote loyalty to the local language and make it easier for parents to communicate with teachers and cooperate on children's academic requirements (Chakma, 2021; Ball & Network, 2013). Parents need to know about MTBMLE because their actions affect the implementation of the policy itself (Eslit, 2017).

Moreover, part of the effects of the protocol of MTBMLE is bridging the culture and language at home and mainstreaming children fluidly into society (Bang, 2015). Learners immersed in the learning environment using the mother

tongue showed statistically significant improvements in adopting other languages (Walter & Decker, 2011). In contrast, Gallego and Zubiri (2013) and Rafael and Rosario (2011) cite that other parents prefer their children learn Filipino and English first because these enable their children to communicate with a wide range of people. Posel and Casale (2011) state that English was favored by parents and administrators regardless of the first language of the learners due to its promised economic and social benefits. Some teachers seconded these parents and showed ample preference towards English, not only because the language is the prescribed medium of instruction (MOI) but also because the teachers feel that more exposure to English would improve the student's skills in communication in the L2 and other languages. Reverting to language instruction in the mother tongue seems an "empty and worthless effort" (Gallego & Zubiri, 2013).

The contrasts in these opinions are noteworthy to research, especially since Philippine lawmakers are going back and forth on issuing the most effective language policy for children. Additionally, most studies focused on the perception of teachers and parents of local language speakers, forgetting the views of the parents of native English speakers who also get affected by the MTBMLE as MOI. To foster inclusivity in language education, all stakeholders must be accounted for. With this, we wish to fill this gap.

FRAMEWORK

The research compiles several theories to discuss the different perspectives related to MTBMLE. For parents' perceptions, Bruner and Taguiri's Implicit Personality Theory (1954) will explain how parents think and decide for their children, despite not being the persons affected by the policy. As for language acquisition, Cummin's Threshold Theory (2000) discusses how the first language or mother tongue is necessary to learn another language and thus is instrumental in MTBMLE implementation. Because the research focuses on native English-speaking learners in the Philippines, English becomes their first language. In contrast, the mother tongue (Cebuano) serves as a second first language or a second language. Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Learning Theory (1978) espouses the idea that language learning is coupled with the children's interaction with the environment, the school, the immediate community, and the parents who should assist their children's language use. These theories are explained in detail below.

First, the study is anchored on the Implicit Personality Theory by Bruner and Taguiri. According to Bruner and Taguiri (1954), parents observe the most obvious

traits and then create stereotypical assumptions about their child's behavior and personality. Moreover, implicit means automatic; thus, these assumptions are not something parents do intentionally or consciously. It is a subconscious reflection of how their minds begin processing information about their child. English language minority learners and native English language students appear in the classrooms, and teachers face the challenge of providing a quality education for them (Collier & Thomas, 2007). Also, parents whose learners speak English as their first language may implicitly perceive the disadvantages more than the advantages of MTBMLE for their children, considering how attaining a second language seems glorifying. Based on Cummin's Threshold Theory (2000), the lower the mastery level of the first language becomes, the harder it is to achieve bilingualism. However, parents implicitly perceive that this would not be the case when learners are already competent in English. Thus, looking at their perceptions will shed light on their assumptions about mother tongue instruction, and Bruner and Taguiri's theory can be used to describe the results.

If one language is learned with the negligence of the first language, this may harm the overall growth and success of the learner. Thus, for the native language to grow, it should be used at least through the elementary years. Houmanfar et al. (2005) and Castello (2015) conclude that the first language is a major component and participatory factor in acquiring and maintaining the second language. Collier and Thomas (2007) also assert that language development is evident in the learners' verbal, oral, and written skills such as vocabulary, morphology, phonology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics, discourse, and paralinguistics. Also, the greater the students' native language proficiency skills become, the more adept they are in their second language. Thus, it is necessary that parents are aware of these aspects and how these aspects affect the learners whose first language is English (Collier & Thomas, 2007). Parents need to note that "the more developed the first language is, the easier it will be to learn for the learners" (Baker, 2011, p. 169). Hence, excellent communication, which makes these learners better able to engage in socialization and to learn from their environment and formal classroom instruction, may affect the learners (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2009). According to Horwitz (1988), learners believe that learning a second language primarily involves engaging oneself with the similar field experience of the people using the code of communication; thus, it will give them more opportunities to communicate appropriately and enjoyably with the native speakers of the mother tongue. As a result, language development may affect the sociocultural development of these learners. According to Nelsen and Rosenbaum (1972), lingo plays a crucial role in social interaction. It is a tool

to make integration and social adaptation and holds social control. Thus, it is a means of communication to form and share cultural and social practices; that is why Lev Vygotsky (1978), in his Sociocultural Learning Theory, emphasized the community in which these learners communicate and interact with their peers, friends, family, and other people surrounding them. Also, according to Walter and Decker (2011), learners immersed in a learning environment in which the mother tongue is used have shown statistically significant improvements in adopting the language. Thus, all the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals. About Implicit Personality Theory by Bruner and Tagiuri (1954), parents may perceive the effects of the immersion of these learners to MTBMLE. Because MTBMLE is already an existing program, parents might need seminars and trainings to increase their awareness. This can be supplanted with the results of their perceptions in the study. The figure below encapsulates the framework of this study.

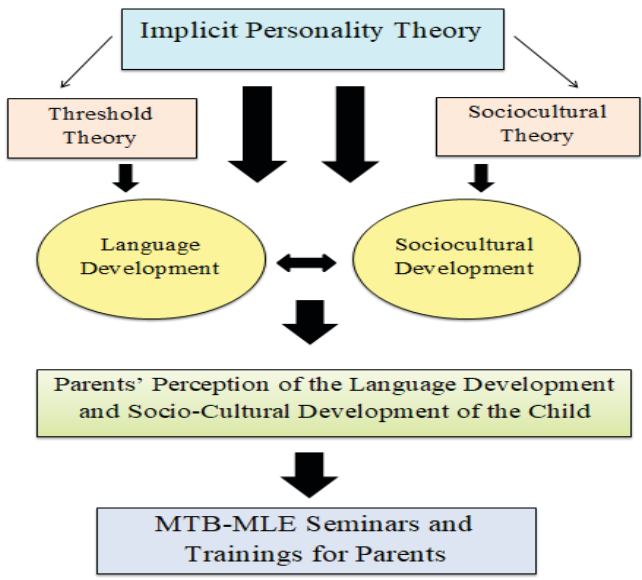


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study provides significant insights into the instruction of MTBMLE from the parents' perceptions of whose learners are native English speakers. The researchers believed that identifying the perception of parents on MTBMLE to the children's language and sociocultural development helps the schools provide an informed manner of implementing the mother tongue as a medium of instruction, especially for native English-speaking learners. Also, the perception helps address family language policy and programs to bridge the first language to the second language and guide the educational institutions and administrators to prepare them to use language research and data.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study utilized a correlational-descriptive research design that describes the perception of the native English-speaking learners' parents in their children's language development (speaking and reading) and social development (social and cultural skills). Thus, it seeks to determine the correlation between the child's language and social development while they acquire and learn the mother tongue in school.

Research Site

The study was conducted at a private basic education institution in Central Philippines. The institution mostly serves parents who have a robust involvement in the academic obligation of their children and are from middle to high house income levels. The learners and the parents are Filipino citizens that use English capably and regularly at home, in school, and in the community. The region uses Sinugbuanong Binisaya or Cebuano as the local language, and mother tongue taught in schools.

Participants

The source of the researchers' information is from the 30 parents of preschool to Grade 3 learners whose first language is English since the focal point of MTBMLE is in these grade levels. The sampling technique was purposive sampling to ensure they meet the selection criteria – English language use and family composition.

Instrumentation

The main data-gathering tool used in this study was the researcher-made parents' perception questionnaire on the mother tongue. It is composed of two (2) categories, language development, and social development, as seen in the conceptual framework, which consists of the possible perception of parents about MTBMLE. For language development, the researchers focused only on statements regarding the learners' acquired speaking and reading skills because language acquisition and development in the mother tongue used these macro skills dominantly. The social development section of the questionnaire consists of statements on social and cultural development related to the use of the mother tongue or language in general. The instrument is carefully prepared to recognize the point of view of the parents of native English speakers in mother tongue acquisition. A dry run in a group of parents validated the researcher-made questionnaire. The reliability index of the instrument was measured using Cronbach alpha with an index of 0.85, identified as valid and reliable.

Data Gathering and Analysis

After collecting, the researchers tallied and analyzed the data. Afterward, frequency analysis determined the incidence of each question the parents answered. A weighted mean was calculated to identify the average of which the perception of parents belongs to a certain degree of agreement. The standard deviation was computed to determine the degree of dispersion to estimate the variability. Then the means were compared to calculate the correlation between language and social development perceptions in the mother tongue by the parents. Theoretical discussions and implications follow, describing the quantitative results. The dispersion was discussed in length in the tables as the researchers found it interesting to note how the respondents are diverse in their perceptions.

Ethical Protocol

All participants voluntarily participated in the study after informing them of the research purpose and methods. The researchers obtained informed consent prior to collecting data and performing analyses. The department research committee approved the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the researchers sought to interpret the analyzed data from the previous section. Below are the tapped macro skills, statements, mean, standard deviation, standard error, and interpretation. The mean identifies the average of the parents' agreement with the statements related to MTBMLE. The standard deviation states, otherwise, that even though the results bear a high weighted mean for the two dimensions, the responses of the parents will still vary depending on how dispersed they are. Below are the tables that explain the results of the two developments, individual implications, and correlation of the two categories.

Table 1. The average and the dispersion of Parents' Perception of MTB-MLE regarding Language Development.

Focused Skills	Statements	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error	Verbal Interpretation
Speaking	1	2.80	3.74	0.68	Satisfactory
	2	2.93	2.50	0.46	Satisfactory
	3	2.73	1.91	0.35	Satisfactory
	4	2.80	2.38	0.43	Satisfactory
	5	2.60	3.50	0.64	Satisfactory
Reading	6	2.33	3.20	0.58	Fair
	7	2.40	4.35	0.79	Fair
	8	2.40	2.38	0.43	Fair
	9	3.33	2.97	0.54	Excellent
	10	2.27	3.10	0.57	Fair
Total Weighted Mean:		2.70	3.00	0.58	Satisfactory

3.26-4.00 = Excellent

2.51-3.25 = Satisfactory

1.76-2.50 = Fair

1.00-1.75 = Poor

Table 1 shows the weighted means and dispersion of the parents' perceptions of MTBMLE to their children's language development. The table reveals that parents often observed their children asking for translations of different Sinugbuanong Binisaya words to English when reading texts in the local

language (Statement 9). These learners might be inclined or interested to learn the local language, so they used their competence in English to bridge the two languages. Despite their difficulty reading in MTBMLE, they still strive to learn the Sinugbuanong Binisaya language, their second language in this context. This affirms Cummin's Threshold Theory which states that the greater the students' native language proficiency skills become, the more adept they become in their second language. The only difference is that English now becomes the threshold for learning the community's supposed mother tongue. The total average is 2.70, Satisfactory, signifying a satisfactory perception of MTBMLE in the children's linguistic development.

Parents sought the difficulty of their children in retelling stories using Sinugbuanong Binisaya as Statement 10 bore a 2.27 mean with a 3.10 SD, the least among the weighted averages of the statements in language development. It implies that the learners need help with reading because they must comprehend the words and understand the context of what they read despite the complexity of the words used. Hence, one needs more concentration to achieve reading comprehension when using books regardless of the language used (Gwon & Seok, 2011). The statement is also complex as it combines both skills; retelling also implies the need to speak.

In the tabulation, it is but vivid that most of the statements having most of weighted averages with a higher standard deviation are geared towards the speaking skills of the speakers in Sinugbuanong Binisaya. In contrast, the context (Statement 10) has the least weighted average geared towards the reading skills of the said speakers. The claim is authentic to the words of Sreena and Ilankumaran (2018) that when learners read and write, they must put extra time and effort into conveying their thoughts in words comprehensibly because these skills involve cognitive approaches and strategies.

Furthermore, reading and writing become more difficult since learners need many considerations; these include psychological and physical conditions, whereas speaking is basic. This result is likely due to the complexity of writing and reading than speaking because, in writing, there are rules to be followed and structures to be well organized, most especially spelling. However, in speaking, though there are structures and regulations, the complexity there is much lesser than jotting it down. It implied that parents must give priority to improving the reading and writing skills of their children when tutoring so that when their learners become adept in these skills, it would be a lot easier for these learners to adopt a very high concept that requires the dominant usage of writing and reading skills. Moreover, this is just a perception; hence, parents could still consider these

implications and see whether their learners need this kind of consideration.

The high standard deviation in the statements posits that the parent's perception in this section is dispersed. Therefore, even if the result showed that the parents agreed to the MTBMLE instruction (2.70 – Satisfactory), the parents still need to know more about MTB MLE instruction due to its dispersed standard deviation. This branches out to the idea that the parents may not have yet grasped the essence of the Instruction because of the varied responses; thus, they still need to know more about it.

Table 2. The average and the dispersion of Parents' Perception of MTB-MLE Regarding Sociocultural Development

Areas	Statements	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error	Verbal Interpretation
Social	1	2.83	5.56	1.01	Satisfactory
	2	2.83	4.99	0.91	Satisfactory
	3	3.10	4.11	0.75	Satisfactory
	4	2.17	2.21	0.40	Fair
	5	2.67	1.89	0.34	Satisfactory
Cultural	6	3.43	3.42	0.62	Excellent
	7	3.30	3.24	0.59	Satisfactory
	8	2.93	3.93	0.72	Excellent
	9	2.20	3.31	0.60	Excellent
	10	2.24	3.00	0.55	Satisfactory
Total Weighted Average		2.72	3.75	0.65	Satisfactory

3.36-4.00 = Excellent

2.51-3.25 = Satisfactory

1.76-2.50 = Fair

1.00-1.75 = Poor

Table 2 presents the weighted mean of the parents' perception of MTBMLE to their children's sociocultural development. The table reveals that parents think that when their children are at home, they respond to and interact with elders and neighbors through the medium of Sinugbuanong Binisaya, which contains a weighted average of 3.43 (Statement 6). Thus, they strive to speak the language of the community. In short, they try to keep up with the environment. The data implies that though the said speakers are native English speakers, they still speak the language of the people around them, which can be a good start to learning the

language. According to Sociocultural Theory by Lev Vygotsky, learners construct the new language through socially mediated communication, thus, gradually adopting the code entirely. The total average is 2.72, Satisfactory, signifying a satisfactory perception of MTBMLE in the children’s sociocultural development.

Moreover, according to Walter and Dekker (2011), learners immersed in the learning environment using the mother tongue showed statistically significant improvements in adopting the language. Thus, the parents agreed to the sociocultural development of the child in the MTBMLE instruction. However, the discrepancy between the statements is prominent through the higher standard deviation. The table goes to show that the responses are varied. Perhaps, the parents need clarification about the frequency of the child’s interaction using the Sinugbuanong Binisaya with the adults.

In contrast, the standard deviation can deduce that when the said speakers are in a school where English is the medium of instruction, the child uses the language of the people around him, English, in conversing or interacting. The input is a manifestation that the said speakers’ codeswitching depends on the vernacular of the environment. Furthermore, this coincides with Lev Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Learning Theory which emphasizes the community in which these learners communicate and interact with their peers, friends, family, and other people surrounding them. It is seen that when the learners are with a hoard of Sinugbuanong Binisaya-speaking neighbors and elders, they tend to speak the language. Thus, the same goes for learners with their teachers and classmates who communicate in English. Vygotsky’s Theory assumes the role of the community in shaping the learners’ mastery of the language.

Table 3. The average and the dispersion of Parents’ Perception of MTB-MLE in Two Dimensions

Dimensions	Mean	Standard Deviation	Verbal Interpretation
1. Language Development	2.70	3.00	Satisfactory
2. Sociocultural Development	2.72	3.75	Satisfactory
Total Weighted Average	2.71	3.38	Satisfactory

- 3.26-4.00 = Excellent
- 2.51-3.25 = Satisfactory
- 1.76-2.50 = Fair
- 1.00-1.75 = Poor

Table 3 separately shows the means of the two dimensions analyzed in the parents' perceptions of MTBMLE. The results reveal that parents agreed on the child's language and sociocultural developments regarding the MTBMLE Instruction. Most importantly, the results show that the native English-speaking children might learn the language easily when they interacted and conversed with people whose language was Sinugbuanong Binisaya. Contrary to that, the said speakers had difficulty in reading. However, even if the parents agreed to the two developments of the child, the parents still need to engage in a deeper understanding of the concept of MTBMLE due to the high deviation in both developments, with an overall average standard deviation of 3.38. Parents need to know about MTBMLE because their actions affect the implementation of the policy itself (Eslit, 2017). It should be noted that MTBMLE is part of the learners' academic subjects in Kinder to Grade 3.

With that, it is to reiterate the need for the administrators and school staff to provide orientation for the parents. The parents must know where their child is going or leading, especially since MTBMLE Instruction is new to them, and there have been mixed results on its effectiveness. According to the National Parents and Teachers Association (2016), the orientation of parents is essential because they address the educational issues important to parents. Moreover, public administrators must always consider this aspect. The result also springs to the idea that the parents may still need clarification about the effectiveness of the Instruction of the two mentioned developments because the instruction was implemented years ago. However, there needs to be more strong and substantial evidence that may persuade the parents to believe in the effectivity of the said instruction.

Table 4. The Correlation of the Two Dimensions

Dimensions	Pearson Correlation	P- Value	Interpretation
1. Language Development	0.49	0.001	Moderately Strong Correlation
2. Sociocultural Development			

1.00 = perfect correlation

0.80-1.00 = very strong correlation

0.60-0.80= strong correlation

0.40-0.60= moderately strong correlation

Table 4 displays the correlation between the parent's perceptions of their children's language and sociocultural developments. It revealed that the language and sociocultural development of the speakers contained a positive correlation: a moderately strong correlation of 0.49 with a significant p-value of 0.001. An insight that can be inferred is that language plays a vital role in the sociocultural interaction of the learners as perceived by the parents. In return, sociocultural interaction affects children's language development. The assertion agreed with Nettle and Romaine (2000) when they stressed the correlation of language to the preservation of identity, culture, and knowledge. This further means that parents are aware of the connection between language and environment and are concerned that when students learn the mother tongue, the children's community must complement their language acquisition.

CONCLUSION

The perception of the parents to MTBMLE is positive, which connotes that the parents perceived a significant change and moderate correlation in and between the language development and sociocultural development of the children in MTBMLE instruction. Parents do not see any issue with their children's native English-speaking skills to their need to learn the mother tongue of the community. Rather, they see it as additional competence students will acquire in school. Their concerns are more academic, as shown in their fair to satisfactory perceptions of the student's reading skills and the use of translation as a cultural language strategy. However, because of the high dispersion in the results, the study concludes that the parents still need to be firm with their perceptions of MTBMLE. Thus, this study offers institutions a focal point for revisiting their MTBMLE curriculum, revising a few policies, and rethinking the family language policy to implement MTBMLE instruction considering native English-speaking learners. Seminars and trainings in MTBMLE intended for parents can benefit them to provide the best academic preparation and environment for children regardless of the target language. Parents are relevant stakeholders in the child's language acquisition and sociocultural development; they are a resource that should be tapped effectively by elementary educators. Moreover, seeking the perception of parents of Native English learners provides an important guide for any other institutions across the globe that have not implemented the MTBMLE fully as a subject to consider its implementation. The researchers recommend a quantitative effectiveness study on MTMLE instruction to deepen parents' understanding of the relevance of the mother tongue to the second language and vice versa.

TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH

In return, based on the findings of the study, the researchers propose that the parents participate in a training program on how to teach and assist children in learning MTBMLE as they would greatly help their children's language acquisition of the mother tongue language. Leaflets on the MTBMLE implementation may also be proposed to increase the awareness of this language program among parents, especially native English-speaking learners, who are mostly unaware of its relevance. Private schools must consider the uniqueness of their learners and their families to the contextualization of MTBMLE for their young English-speaking children.

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