

Elementary Teachers' Perception on the Implementation of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education in Zamboanga City

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Abstract

This study examined the perceptions of seasoned public elementary school teachers regarding the implementation of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) in Zamboanga City. Anchored on Krashen's Second Language Acquisition Theory, Skinner's Operant Conditioning Theory, and Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory, the study explored teachers' perceptions, experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and recommendations for improving MTB-MLE implementation. A phenomenological qualitative research design was employed. Data were collected through semi-structured, one-on-one interviews using an expert-validated interview guide with seasoned public elementary school teachers from Canelar Integrated School who had at least 20 years of teaching experience and were using Chabacano as the medium of instruction. The data were analyzed through thematic analysis. The findings revealed that teachers perceived MTB-MLE as beneficial for Chabacano-speaking learners because it enhanced comprehension, classroom participation, and language preservation. However, they also identified challenges in multilingual classrooms, particularly language barriers among non-Chabacano-speaking learners and the shortage of teaching materials and instructional resources. Teachers addressed these challenges through translation, remedial instruction, parental involvement, resourcefulness in developing instructional materials, and continuous language practice. The study concludes that while MTB-MLE supports meaningful learning among native Chabacano speakers, its implementation requires stronger instructional support and greater responsiveness to learners' linguistic diversity. It recommends recognizing learners' actual mother tongues, strengthening instructional resources, enhancing teacher training, improving remediation and translation support, and offering Chabacano as a separate subject. The study aligns with Sustainable Development Goals 4 (Quality Education), 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). Its findings contribute to educational, institutional, policy, and community sustainability by supporting improvements in instructional practices, teacher development, educational governance, and language preservation in multilingual learning environments.

Keywords: Chabacano, Elementary Teachers, Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE), Multilingual Education, Phenomenology, Teacher Perceptions, Translation, Zamboanga City

1. Introduction

The implementation of the K to 12 Basic Education Program marked a major reform in the Philippine educational system by extending basic education to twelve years and aligning it with international standards. Republic Act 10533 institutionalized this reform to enhance learners' competencies, improve employability, strengthen higher education preparation, and promote lifelong learning. Among its key features is the implementation of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE), which uses learners' first language as the primary medium of instruction from Kindergarten to Grade 3. MTB-MLE seeks to strengthen literacy, facilitate the acquisition of additional languages, and improve learning outcomes. Despite its intended benefits, concerns remain regarding its implementation, particularly in multilingual communities such as Zamboanga City, where diverse linguistic backgrounds may affect classroom instruction. This study therefore examines the perceptions of seasoned public elementary school teachers regarding the implementation of MTB-MLE in Zamboanga City to provide evidence for possible educational improvements and policy recommendations.

1.1 Background of the Implementation of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) in Philippine Basic Education

The Philippine educational system underwent significant reform through the implementation of the K to 12 Basic Education Program under Republic Act 10533. The reform expanded basic education from ten to twelve years to address longstanding concerns regarding educational quality, global competitiveness, and workforce preparedness. Previous scholars have likewise described the K-12 reform as a major educational transformation designed to improve curriculum responsiveness, learner competencies, and readiness for higher education, employment, and lifelong learning (Abulencia, 2015; Adarlo & Jackson, 2017; San Juan, 2016; Barrot, 2021). The K to 12 curriculum aims to provide learners with sufficient time to

master essential competencies while preparing them for higher education, employment, entrepreneurship, and lifelong learning. It also promotes learner-centered instruction, inclusivity, and curriculum flexibility through specialized learning tracks. A major component of the K to 12 curriculum is the implementation of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE), which uses the learners' first language as the medium of instruction from Kindergarten to Grade 3. MTB-MLE enables learners to build knowledge through a familiar language while gradually developing proficiency in additional languages. According to Dekker (2010), MTB-MLE provides learners with a strong linguistic foundation that supports listening, speaking, reading, and writing in succeeding languages. Likewise, UNESCO (2003) emphasized the importance of mother tongue instruction during early childhood education as an indicator of quality education. These principles were institutionalized in the Philippines through Republic Act 10533, which formally integrated MTB-MLE into the country's educational system. Despite these educational reforms, learning outcomes continue to present challenges. The Philippines ranked among the lowest-performing countries in reading comprehension in the 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), while the United Nations Children's Fund reported that only a small proportion of Grade 5 learners achieved the minimum reading proficiency level. These concerns underscore the need to examine how MTB-MLE is being implemented in actual classroom settings, particularly from the perspective of teachers responsible for delivering instruction.

1.2 Themes and Insights from Related Literature on Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE)

Related literature indicates that the use of learners' first language has long been recognized as an effective approach to improving educational outcomes. Early Philippine studies, including the Iloilo Experiment, the Rizal Experiment, and the Second Iloilo Language Experiment, demonstrated the positive effects of first-language instruction on learners' academic performance. Similarly, the use of Hiligaynon as the language of instruction produced better learning outcomes than English, although broader implementation was constrained by limited resources and policy ambiguities. Subsequent language policies gradually strengthened multilingual education. The 1974 Bilingual Education Policy introduced Filipino and English as languages of instruction while allowing local languages as transitional languages. The revised 1987 policy maintained Filipino and English as primary instructional languages but recognized local languages as auxiliary languages. These developments eventually supported the institutionalization of MTB-MLE through DepEd Order 74 and its nationwide implementation beginning in School Year 2012–2013. Empirical evidence likewise supports the effectiveness of MTB-MLE. Several Philippine studies further demonstrated teachers' generally positive perceptions of MTB-MLE despite implementation challenges. Studies by Abrea et al. (2020), Adriano et al. (2021), Aliñab et al. (2018), Arispe et al. (2019), Anudin (2017), and Eslit (2017) consistently reported that while teachers recognized the benefits of mother tongue instruction in improving comprehension and learner participation, they also encountered shortages of instructional materials, language diversity, and implementation difficulties. These findings are consistent with the experiences explored in the present study. The Lubuagan First Language Component demonstrated that learners taught using their mother tongue significantly outperformed those receiving conventional instruction in Mathematics, Reading, Filipino, and English (Walter and Dekker, 2011). These findings suggest that instruction through learners' first language enhances comprehension, academic achievement, and overall educational outcomes.

1.3 Local, National, and Global Context of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) in Zamboanga City

Globally, the promotion of mother tongue instruction has been supported by UNESCO, which has consistently advocated the integration of learners' first language into early education to improve educational quality (UNESCO, 2003). These international recommendations influenced educational reforms in many countries, including the Philippines, where MTB-MLE became an integral component of the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013. Nationally, MTB-MLE forms part of the broader K to 12 educational reform intended to improve educational quality, strengthen foundational literacy, and prepare Filipino learners for global competitiveness. However, despite these reforms, national assessments continue to indicate challenges in learners' reading proficiency, highlighting the need to evaluate the effectiveness of instructional approaches such as MTB-MLE. Within the local context of Zamboanga City, the implementation of MTB-MLE presents unique challenges due to the city's multilingual environment. While Chabacano serves as the primary medium of instruction under the Lingua Franca Model, many learners come from diverse linguistic backgrounds, including Bisaya, Tausug, Tagalog, and English-speaking households. Similar multilingual implementation issues have also been reported in other Southeast Asian countries, where linguistic diversity influences classroom instruction, language policy, and the implementation of mother tongue-based education. These regional experiences highlight the importance of context-sensitive instructional strategies and language policies in multilingual learning environments (Perez, 2017; Premsrirat, 2010). This linguistic diversity necessitates an examination of teachers' perceptions and experiences to better understand the strengths, challenges, and possible improvements in implementing MTB-MLE in the local educational setting.

1.4 Theoretical and Conceptual Basis of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) Implementation

The implementation of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) is anchored on established theories of language acquisition and cognitive development that emphasize the value of learners' first language in facilitating

meaningful learning. The program is primarily based on Stephen Krashen's Second Language Acquisition Theory, particularly the Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis, which distinguishes between subconscious language acquisition through meaningful communication and conscious language learning through formal instruction. According to Krashen, language acquisition is more effective when learners interact naturally using a familiar language, making the mother tongue an appropriate foundation for developing proficiency in additional languages. Cummins' theories of bilingual education further explain that proficiency developed in a learner's first language provides a strong foundation for acquiring additional languages and supports cognitive development. His Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis suggests that skills acquired in the mother tongue can transfer to second-language learning, reinforcing the educational rationale for Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (Cummins, 1976; Cummins, 1979). The implementation of MTB-MLE is likewise supported by B.F. Skinner's Operant Conditioning Theory, which explains that language learning develops through reinforcement, repetition, imitation, and habitual practice. Skinner argued that learners acquire language by associating words with meaning through positive and negative reinforcement, while accurate language use is strengthened through continuous practice and feedback. Similarly, Bandura's Social Learning Theory emphasizes that children acquire language through observation, imitation, modeling, and interaction with significant others in their environment, highlighting the importance of social experiences in language development (Bandura, 1977). Together, these theories support the systematic development of language proficiency during the early years of schooling. In addition, Jean Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory (Piaget, 1962) explains that children's cognitive abilities develop progressively from concrete experiences toward abstract reasoning. During the early stages of development, learners construct knowledge through concrete experiences, symbolic play, language interaction, and intuitive thinking before gradually acquiring logical and abstract reasoning. Using the learners' first language as the medium of instruction complements these developmental stages by enabling children to understand concepts within their cognitive capacity while gradually expanding their linguistic and intellectual abilities. Collectively, these theories provide the conceptual foundation for MTB-MLE by recognizing that meaningful learning, language acquisition, and cognitive development are enhanced when instruction begins in a language that learners naturally understand. Likewise, Vygotsky emphasized that learning occurs through social interaction and scaffolded experiences, highlighting the importance of language as a cultural tool in cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978; Vygotsky, 1986).

1.5 Research Gaps and Rationale for Examining Elementary Teachers' Perceptions of MTB-MLE Implementation in Zamboanga City

Existing literature consistently supports the educational benefits of mother tongue instruction and documents its positive influence on learners' academic achievement and language development (Walter and Dekker, 2011). Previous studies likewise contributed to the institutionalization of MTB-MLE through national language policies and its eventual implementation under Republic Act 10533 and DepEd Order 74. Although numerous studies have examined MTB-MLE implementation and educational reforms in the Philippines, most focused on policy analysis, curriculum implementation, learner achievement, or teachers' general perceptions (Almerino et al., 2020; Barrot, 2019; Orale & Sarmiento, 2016). Limited qualitative evidence specifically describes the lived experiences of seasoned elementary teachers implementing MTB-MLE within the multilingual context of Zamboanga City. Despite these documented benefits, challenges remain in the practical implementation of MTB-MLE. National learning assessments continue to indicate low levels of reading proficiency among Filipino learners, suggesting that further examination of classroom implementation is necessary. Moreover, multilingual communities such as Zamboanga City present unique instructional challenges because learners come from different linguistic backgrounds while the Lingua Franca Model primarily utilizes Chabacano as the medium of instruction. Based on these concerns, the present study seeks to examine the perceptions of seasoned public elementary school teachers regarding the implementation of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) in Zamboanga City. Specifically, the study aims to determine teachers' perceptions of the Lingua Franca Model from Kindergarten to Grade 3, describe their experiences in teaching non-Chabacano-speaking learners, identify the challenges they encounter, examine the coping mechanisms they employ, and determine possible strategies for improving the implementation of MTB-MLE in the local context. The findings are intended to provide evidence that may contribute to conclusions, recommendations, and educational interventions for improving the quality of MTB-MLE implementation.

1.6 Alignment of the Study on Elementary Teachers' Perceptions of MTB-MLE Implementation with Relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

This study aligns primarily with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 – Quality Education, which seeks to ensure inclusive, equitable, and quality education while promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. The implementation of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) supports this goal by providing learners with instruction in their first language during the early grades, thereby strengthening foundational literacy, improving comprehension, and facilitating the acquisition of additional languages (UNESCO, 2003). The study further contributes to SDG 4 by examining teachers' perceptions of MTB-MLE implementation, identifying instructional challenges, and generating recommendations that may improve educational practices and learner outcomes. The study also supports SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities by recognizing the diverse linguistic backgrounds of learners in Zamboanga City. The multilingual context presents challenges for non-Chabacano-speaking pupils, making it necessary to understand how teachers address language differences to promote equitable access to quality education. Examining these experiences may contribute to more inclusive instructional

practices for learners from different language communities. In addition, the study relates to SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals through its recognition of the collaborative roles of educational stakeholders, including the Department of Education, curriculum developers, school administrators, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders, in strengthening the implementation of MTB-MLE. Effective cooperation among these sectors is essential for improving instructional resources, teacher development, and educational policies.

1.7 Importance of the Study on Elementary Teachers' Perceptions of MTB-MLE Implementation to Multidisciplinary Sustainability

The study contributes primarily to educational sustainability by providing evidence on the implementation of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education from the perspective of experienced public elementary school teachers. Understanding teachers' perceptions, classroom experiences, instructional challenges, coping mechanisms, and suggested improvements may support the continuous enhancement of teaching practices, curriculum implementation, and learner achievement within multilingual educational settings. The findings also contribute to institutional and policy sustainability by providing information that may assist the Department of Education, curriculum makers, school administrators, and local education officials in reviewing policies, improving instructional support, strengthening teacher training, and enhancing the overall implementation of MTB-MLE. Such evidence-based improvements may contribute to more effective educational governance and program implementation. Furthermore, the study supports community and socio-cultural sustainability by recognizing the importance of preserving the mother tongue while addressing the educational needs of learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds. It also emphasizes the complementary roles of teachers, parents, schools, and other stakeholders in creating supportive learning environments that promote inclusive education and language development. Through these contributions, the study seeks to improve the quality of basic education while supporting the long-term development of multilingual communities in Zamboanga City.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

The study employed a phenomenological qualitative research design to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of elementary teachers regarding the implementation of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) in Zamboanga City. This approach enabled the researcher to obtain participants' views through broad questions, analyze their responses, and identify themes that described the essence of their experiences.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted at Canelar Integrated School, located in Canelar Moret, Zamboanga City, under the Zamboanga Central District, Division Quadrant 1.2. The school has more than 60 teachers under the supervision of a school principal and served as the setting for gathering the participants' experiences on MTB-MLE implementation.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The respondents were seasoned public elementary school teachers of Canelar Integrated School who used Chabacano as the medium of instruction in teaching. To qualify for participation, teachers must have been employed in the public school system for at least 20 years and currently teaching using the mother tongue as the language of instruction.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The study utilized Total Enumeration Sampling Technique because only a limited number of teachers satisfied the established inclusion criteria. Consequently, all qualified seasoned teachers with at least 20 years of teaching experience who were using Chabacano as the medium of instruction were included as participants in the study.

2.5 Research Instrument

The study used semi-structured, one-on-one interviews as the primary research instrument. An interview guide validated by experts served as the basis for data collection while allowing flexibility for follow-up and probing questions. Interviews were audio-recorded to capture participants' responses accurately and to facilitate detailed analysis. The phenomenological approach focused on describing the shared lived experiences of the participants through significant statements, clusters of meaning, textual descriptions, structural descriptions, and thematic analysis (Ary, et al., 2017). The approach also emphasized understanding the nature of the phenomenon through firsthand accounts of participants.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

Data collection commenced after obtaining approval from the school principal of Canelar Integrated School. Consent letters were then provided to all participants before conducting face-to-face, one-on-one interviews at their most convenient time. Each interview lasted approximately 10 to 15 minutes using predetermined but flexible interview questions. All interviews were digitally recorded with participants' prior knowledge, and follow-up interviews were conducted whenever clarification was necessary.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data were analyzed using the qualitative coding procedures outlined by Creswell (2005). Interview transcripts were reviewed repeatedly to familiarize the researcher with the data, after which significant segments were coded, organized into categories, and synthesized into broader themes. The analysis also followed the thematic procedures described by Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen Irvine, & Walker (2017), wherein related codes were grouped into categories before developing major themes that represented the participants' shared experiences. To enhance credibility, member checking was conducted by allowing participants to review and verify the accuracy of their interview transcripts before final analysis (Creswell, 2005).

2.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were observed throughout the study to protect the rights, privacy, and welfare of the participants. Informed consent was obtained before participation, confidentiality was maintained through the use of pseudonyms and participant codes, and the purpose, procedures, and limitations of the study were clearly explained both verbally and in writing. Participation was entirely voluntary, and only information relevant to the objectives of the study was included to ensure respect for the participants and the integrity of the research process.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Perceptions of Elementary Teachers on the Implementation of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE)

3.1.1 Benefits of MTB-MLE for Chabacano-Speaking Learners

The findings revealed that most participants viewed MTB-MLE positively for learners whose mother tongue is Chabacano. Teachers observed that these pupils understood lessons more easily, participated confidently in classroom activities, expressed their ideas freely, and benefited from the preservation of the Chabacano language. They emphasized that using the learners' first language enhanced comprehension and facilitated learning during the primary grades. These findings indicate that teachers recognize the value of mother tongue instruction in strengthening comprehension and communication among native Chabacano-speaking learners. Their perceptions support the view that first-language instruction promotes literacy, language development, and cultural preservation, consistent with the literature cited in the study, particularly the benefits of bilingual learning and first-language acquisition (BIS HCMC, 2016). These findings support earlier studies that reported improved learner comprehension and participation when instruction begins in the mother tongue (Abrea et al., 2020; Adriano et al., 2021).

3.1.2 Difficulties Experienced by Non-Chabacano-Speaking Learners

The participants likewise reported that MTB-MLE posed significant challenges for learners whose first language was not Chabacano. Teachers explained that many pupils, as well as some teachers, were not fluent in Chabacano, making classroom instruction difficult. As a result, teachers frequently translated lessons into Filipino, English, Bisaya, or other familiar languages to help learners understand the concepts being taught. The language barrier also affected learners' participation and comprehension during classroom instruction. The findings suggest that although MTB-MLE benefits native Chabacano speakers, its implementation becomes challenging in linguistically diverse classrooms where many learners use different first languages. The need for continuous translation reflects the difficulties encountered by both teachers and learners in achieving effective communication and meaningful learning under the Lingua-Franca Model. Similar language-related implementation challenges were also reported by Aliñab et al. (2018), Arispe et al. (2019), and Anudin (2017), who found that multilingual classrooms often require teachers to adapt instruction and employ alternative strategies to address learners' varying language proficiencies.

3.1.3 Struggles Encountered During MTB-MLE Implementation

The findings further revealed that teachers experienced persistent challenges during the implementation of MTB-MLE, particularly the shortage of teaching materials and learning resources. Participants emphasized that available modules and workbooks were insufficient and required further improvement. Many teachers depended on self-made instructional materials and collaborative efforts to address these shortages while implementing the program. The results indicate that inadequate instructional resources remain a major concern in implementing MTB-MLE effectively. The lack of sufficient textbooks, workbooks, and teaching materials increases teachers' workload and limits the quality of classroom instruction, highlighting the continuing need for adequate instructional support during program implementation. These findings likewise agree with previous Philippine studies that documented shortages of instructional materials and teacher preparation during MTB-MLE implementation (Eslit, 2017; Mondez, 2013).

3.2 Teachers' Experiences in Teaching Non-Chabacano-Speaking Learners

3.2.1 The Need for Translation

The findings revealed that translation was the primary strategy employed by teachers in teaching non-Chabacano-speaking learners. Participants consistently reported translating lessons from Chabacano into Filipino, English, Bisaya, Tausug, or other familiar languages to help learners understand classroom discussions and instructions. Teachers observed that continuous translation and bridging activities gradually improved learners' comprehension of Chabacano over time. These findings demonstrate that translation plays a vital role in facilitating learning in multilingual classrooms. Teachers relied on learners' familiar languages to bridge comprehension gaps until they became more accustomed to Chabacano. The results support the importance of translation as a practical instructional strategy in addressing language barriers during MTB-MLE implementation.

3.2.2 The Need for Remediation

The findings showed that teachers regularly conducted remedial instruction for learners who experienced difficulty understanding lessons delivered through Chabacano. Participants extended instructional time after regular classes, organized enhancement activities, and provided additional interventions to ensure that slow learners and non-Chabacano-speaking pupils acquired the expected competencies. The results indicate that remediation became an essential instructional practice to address differences in learners' language proficiency and academic performance. Through additional learning opportunities, teachers sought to help struggling pupils gradually attain the required learning outcomes despite the challenges posed by language differences.

3.2.3 Importance of Parent Support

The findings further revealed that participants considered parental involvement essential in helping learners overcome language barriers. Teachers emphasized that learning should continue at home through parents' guidance, reinforcement of classroom lessons, and consistent follow-up of their children's academic progress. They believed that learners whose parents actively participated in their education adapted more easily to the use of Chabacano in the classroom. These findings suggest that effective implementation of MTB-MLE requires collaboration between teachers and parents. Participants viewed parental support as an important factor in reinforcing classroom instruction and improving learners' ability to cope with language-related challenges, thereby contributing to better educational outcomes.

3.3 Challenges Encountered by Elementary Teachers in the Implementation of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE)

3.3.1 Lack of Teaching Materials and Resources

The findings revealed that the most common challenge experienced by the participants was the lack of teaching materials and instructional resources. Teachers consistently reported shortages of textbooks, worksheets, teacher's guides, and other learning materials necessary for implementing MTB-MLE. During the early implementation of the program, many participants depended on self-made instructional materials and sought assistance from colleagues and community members because appropriate resources were unavailable. These findings indicate that inadequate instructional resources remain a major obstacle to the effective implementation of MTB-MLE. The shortage of appropriate learning materials limited teachers' ability to deliver lessons efficiently and increased their dependence on improvised instructional resources. This challenge reflects the need for sufficient educational support to ensure effective classroom instruction.

3.3.2 Language Barriers Affecting Learner Performance

The findings further showed that language barriers significantly affected learners' academic performance and classroom participation. Teachers observed that non-Chabacano-speaking pupils often obtained low scores in examinations and classroom activities because they struggled to understand lessons delivered in Chabacano. Participants also reported instances of bullying resulting from incorrect pronunciation and difficulties in using the language, further affecting learners' confidence and participation. The results suggest that language differences remain a significant concern in multilingual classrooms implementing MTB-MLE. The inability of some learners to understand the language of instruction negatively influenced comprehension, academic performance, and social interaction inside the classroom. These findings underscore the continuing challenge of implementing a single lingua franca in linguistically diverse learning environments.

3.4 Coping Mechanisms Employed by Teachers in the Implementation of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE)

3.4.1 Resourcefulness in Addressing Instructional Challenges

The findings revealed that the dominant coping mechanism adopted by teachers was resourcefulness. Participants responded to the lack of instructional materials by developing their own learning resources, downloading and translating teaching materials, creating self-correcting activities, and modifying available resources to suit the needs of their learners. These initiatives enabled them to continue implementing MTB-MLE despite limited institutional support. These findings indicate that teachers demonstrated adaptability and creativity in overcoming the challenges associated with MTB-MLE implementation. Their willingness to produce localized instructional materials and identify practical solutions reflects their

commitment to maintaining effective teaching despite resource constraints. Such practices highlight the important role of teacher initiative in sustaining instruction under challenging conditions.

3.4.2 Constant Practice for Language Mastery

The findings further showed that teachers considered constant practice an effective strategy for improving learners' mastery of Chabacano. Participants emphasized repeated reading, continuous drills, and regular language practice as essential classroom activities that helped learners become more familiar with vocabulary and language use. Frequent exposure enabled pupils to gradually develop confidence and improve their understanding of the language. The results suggest that continuous practice strengthens language acquisition and supports learners in overcoming language barriers. Through repeated exposure and reinforcement, teachers promoted gradual improvement in learners' comprehension and language proficiency, making constant practice an essential component of effective MTB-MLE implementation.

3.5 Recommendations for Improving the Implementation of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE)

3.5.1 Offering Chabacano as a Separate Subject

The findings revealed that the most frequently suggested improvement was to offer Chabacano as a separate subject rather than using it as the medium of instruction across all learning areas. Most participants believed that while the language should be preserved and promoted, its use in every subject created learning difficulties for pupils who were not native Chabacano speakers, particularly in content-heavy subjects such as Mathematics. These findings suggest that teachers support the continued inclusion of Chabacano in the curriculum but recommend limiting its use to a dedicated subject. Participants believed that this approach would preserve the local language while reducing language-related learning barriers experienced by non-Chabacano-speaking learners, thereby promoting more effective instruction across other subject areas.

3.5.2 Strengthening Government Support Through Adequate Teaching Materials

The findings further showed that participants emphasized the need for stronger government support by providing sufficient, accurate, and quality instructional materials. Teachers consistently identified the shortage of textbooks, reading materials, and learner resources as a major concern. They also pointed out that some available materials contained errors and required revision before they could be effectively used in classroom instruction. The results indicate that adequate and well-developed instructional resources are essential for the successful implementation of MTB-MLE. Participants believed that providing sufficient learning materials would improve classroom instruction, enhance learners' reading skills, and reduce teachers' reliance on improvised resources, thereby supporting the achievement of the program's objectives.

3.5.3 Providing Continuous Trainings and Seminars for Teachers

The findings also revealed that participants recommended conducting more trainings and seminars for teachers implementing MTB-MLE. They emphasized the importance of continuous professional development to strengthen teachers' language proficiency, instructional competence, and ability to prepare appropriate Chabacano instructional resources. These findings suggest that sustained professional development is necessary to enhance teachers' effectiveness in implementing MTB-MLE. Continuous trainings and seminars can improve teachers' instructional skills, increase their confidence in using Chabacano as a language of instruction, and better equip them to address the linguistic and instructional challenges encountered in multilingual classrooms.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The study concludes that elementary teachers perceived the implementation of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) in Zamboanga City as having both advantages and challenges. While the use of Chabacano as the medium of instruction enhanced comprehension, participation, and language preservation among native Chabacano speakers, it created learning difficulties for non-Chabacano-speaking learners due to language barriers. Teachers addressed these challenges through translation, remedial instruction, parental involvement, resourcefulness, and continuous language practice despite the shortage of teaching materials. To improve the implementation of MTB-MLE, teachers emphasized the need to offer Chabacano as a separate subject, provide sufficient and quality instructional resources, and strengthen teachers' professional development through continuous training and seminars.

The study recommends strengthening the implementation of MTB-MLE by recognizing learners' actual mother tongues in classroom instruction, improving learner grouping based on language background, ensuring the availability of quality-assured instructional materials, producing translation resources, providing additional personnel for remediation, strengthening parent involvement, allocating adequate government support for textbooks and learning resources, addressing language barriers through teacher training, and sustaining professional development through regular seminars and capacity-building programs. It also recommends offering Chabacano as a separate subject to preserve the local language while improving instructional effectiveness across other learning areas.

The study was limited to seasoned public elementary teachers with at least 20 years of teaching experience who were implementing MTB-MLE at Canelar Integrated School in Zamboanga City. Consequently, the findings reflect only the experiences and perceptions of this specific group and setting and are not intended to represent all teachers implementing MTB-MLE in other schools or contexts.

Compliance with ethical standards

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical principles to protect the rights, privacy, and welfare of the participants. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained before data collection. The purpose, procedures, and limitations of the study were clearly explained to the participants both verbally and in writing. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained through the use of pseudonyms and participant codes, and only information relevant to the objectives of the study was collected and reported to uphold the integrity of the research process.

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