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ABSTRACT

Philippine linguistic diversity is recognized in the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) policy. MTB-MLE is one of the salient features of the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013. The mother tongue is the primary mode of instruction (MOI) from kindergarten to the third grade of elementary education. From first to third grade, Mother Tongue, Filipino (the national language), and English are taught as separate subjects. Filipino and English, the country's official languages, are gradually introduced as MOI from fourth to sixth grade. Beginning reading is first taught in the mother tongue. Through a solid foundation in the mother tongue, stronger literacy abilities are developed, which are expected to transfer across languages. However, recent studies have shown that only one-third of schools are implementing MTB-MLE, due to factors like resistance in using the mother tongue for academic purposes and opposition thrown against it because of misconceptions favoring the dominant official languages. Against this backdrop, the present study aimed to answer the following questions: (1) What are the teachers' language ideologies on the use of the local language alongside Filipino and English as the language of instruction in early reading classes?; (2) What are the teachers' early reading instruction practices in the local language, Filipino, and English?; and (3) Are the teachers' language ideologies reflected in their use of language/s in early reading instruction?

This qualitative study involved 13 public school early grades teachers in a linguistically diverse province in Northern Philippines where the local languages Bolinao, Iloko, and Pangasinan are used in MTB-MLE. Semi-structured interviews were first conducted, recorded, and transcribed. The transcriptions were manually coded first, then uploaded to Atlas.ti, a qualitative data analysis software, to further review and finalize the codes. The research themes were extracted from these codes. Data triangulation was conducted through classroom observations of early reading classes, review of relevant documents, and focus group discussions.

The extracted themes from the findings revealed four teachers' hegemonic, language ideologies: (1) English as a highly valued language; (2) Filipino as preferred language; (3) challenges in MTB-MLE implementation; and (4) use of translations. The teacher participants believed that English and Filipino held a dominant role in early reading instruction due to their perceived benefits (e.g., social, academic, and economic). Teachers' adherence to the concept of standardized languages posed challenges to the diversity and variations found in languages, which they perceived as confusing and complex. Teachers' resistance towards MTB-MLE, especially

concerning the use of the mother tongue, could be attributed to their belief that the inclusion of the mother tongue in early reading instruction was a hindrance to learning the official languages. Language hierarchy also marginalized the local languages. Utilizing translations as a component of translanguaging served as a bridge between the languages used in early reading instruction; however, this mostly benefitted a dominant language. On the other hand, one theme showed teachers' counter-hegemonic language ideology: language preservation and fostering identity. The use of the mother tongue was believed to foster and safeguard the community language and history. In teachers' early reading instruction practices in the local language, Filipino, and English, five themes emerged: (1) big six of reading with a focus on phonics instruction; (2) learners' experiences; (3) medium of instruction and/or learning area; (4) translanguaging; and (5) learning environment and resources. The use of phonics-based instruction was utilized as the starting point in beginning reading. The utilization of learners' experiences in early reading instruction promoted engagement and comprehension. Different language patterns involving the three languages used in early reading instruction were strategically and purposefully used by the teachers. Translanguaging was also used in teaching learners to read in multiple languages. The availability and unavailability of print-rich classrooms and the use of technology defined and contributed to the learning environment and resources. The findings also showed how teachers' language ideologies were reflected in their use of language/s in early reading instruction. All the teachers' language ideologies were clearly manifested in the teachers' use of language/s in early reading instruction.

If MTB-MLE is to be implemented successfully in the wake of questions on its significance and legitimacy, teachers' language ideologies which shape how early reading is taught in a multilingual setting should not only be revisited but also thoroughly examined. If local languages continue to be marginalized in early reading instruction, building and strengthening the learners' reading skills in other languages would be affected, and language discrimination will persist, instead of the policy fostering cultural identity and heritage among learners.

Keywords: language ideologies, early reading instruction, translanguaging, teaching practices, language policy