HILIGAYNON AS MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION: PERSPECTIVES, CHALLENGES, INITIATIVES, AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF PRIMARY GRADE TEACHERS

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Abstract

This study explored the perspectives, challenges, initiatives, and recommendations of primary grade teachers on using Hiligaynon as a medium of instruction. The researchers adopted a qualitative-descriptive design using the narrative inquiry approach with three purposively chosen primary grade teachers as study participants. The researchers gathered the data by conducting personal and semi-structured interviews. The interview transcripts were used to analyze the data in response to the questions raised in the study. Hiligaynon is viewed as weak, difficult, and irrelevant. The primary grade teachers made a rigorous attempt to adopt Hiligaynon as a medium of instruction; however, the lack of training and inadequacy of resources written in Hiligaynon were the leading challenges faced by the primary grade teachers. Hence, in view of the challenges faced, the primary grade teachers initiated the following: finding appropriate methods and resources, bridging the learners' first language to the second language, and adapting. On this ground, the primary grade teachers suggested that Hiligaynon may only be utilized in MTB-MLE subjects rather than in all subject areas. The Department of Education officials and school heads may jointly plan for further training and seminars to realize these aspirations.

Keywords*: Hiligaynon, perspectives, initiatives, recommendations, primary grade teachers, qualitative-descriptive, narrative-inquiry.*

Introduction

Background of the Study

The linguistic and cultural diversity in the Philippines brings much complexity to the issue of language policy in education. With more than 7,000 islands and 181 distinct languages (Lewis et al., 2013), the Philippines offers a challenging environment for implementing a language policy that can serve the whole country (Burton, 2013).

One of the highlights of the K-12 program in the country is the introduction of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE), specifically in Kindergarten, Grades 1, 2, and 3, respectively. As stated in DepEd Order 74 s. 2009 and DepEd Order 16 s. 2012, the K-12 Curriculum of the Department of Education (DepEd) mandates that mother tongue or Hiligaynon in the case of Hiligaynon-speaking provinces is the medium of instruction from kindergarten to at least grade 3, which started in the school year 2011-2012. This implementation supports the goal of "Every Child-A-Reader and A-Writer by Grade 1" (Department of Education, 2016). Burton (2013) cites that this shift in language policy is part of a growing trend worldwide to support mother-tongue instruction in the early years of a child's education. This is apparent in a rising number of educational programs that utilize a mother tongue approach in Southeast Asia. Examples can be found in Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Timor L'Este, and Vietnam (Kosonen &Young, 2009; Taylor-Leech, 2013; UNESCO, 2015). While non-dominant languages in education are allowed in these countries, the Philippines is the single country to institute a national policy requiring their inclusion in the early grades. MTB-MLE implementation in the Philippines is being looked at as an example for the rest of the region.

Learners begin their education in the language they understand best - their mother tongue, and need to develop a strong foundation in their mother language before effectively learning additional languages. This is where the Department of Education (DepEd) gets inspiration in its inclusion of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) as a feature of the Enhanced Basic Education Program. It mandates using the language that students are familiar with (their first language) as a medium of instruction to grasp basic concepts more easily (Department of Education, 2016).

Moreover, it is also to maintain our culture since one's identity lies (Regmi, 2008). One of the cultures that DepEd wanted to maintain as it symbolizes human culture is language. Regmi (2008) states that it is "a part of a culture," a system of symbolic verbal and sometimes written representation that connects individuals according to a shared norm or culture. Mother tongue instruction may have two connotations: teaching the mother tongue itself and imparting formal education in the first language of students (Beka, 2016).

As the new curriculum mandates the use of Hiligaynon as a medium of instruction, the researchers wanted to gather information to determine the primary grade teachers' perspectives, challenges, initiatives, and recommendations on using Hiligaynon as a medium of instruction. In this light, this study was conducted to know the challenges that the teachers in the primary grades encountered, how they coped with these challenges, and their recommendations concerning the use of Hiligaynon in teaching.

The study aimed to explore and describe the perspectives, challenges, initiatives, and recommendations of the primary grade teachers on using Hiligaynon as a medium of instruction during the first semester of Academic Year 2020-2021.

Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:
1. How do primary grade teachers perceive Hiligaynon as a medium of instruction?
2. What are the perceived challenges in using Hiligaynon as a medium of instruction?
3. What initiatives are administered by the primary grade teachers to deal with the perceived challenges?
4. What are the recommendations of the primary grade teachers concerning the use of Hiligaynon as a medium of instruction?

Framework of the Study

The First Language (L1) or Mother Tongue Model illustrates how using the mother tongue can be the key to accessing literacy and supporting the initial stages of the pupil's literacy development. The study is premised on the concept that using their mother tongue in the classroom setting will enable pupils to understand more what is being discussed and what is being asked of them throughout the learning process.

Relevant to this, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory emphasizes the role of language in intellectual development, wherein thought development is determined by language like the linguistic tools of thought and by the sociocultural experience of the child. In that sense, this theory of Vygotsky is logical and appropriate once the child masters their mother tongue. The implementation of MTB-MLE started last 2012. The mother tongue, or Hiligaynon in the case of Hiligaynon speaking province, was used as a medium of instruction from kindergarten to at least grade 3. In that case, the primary concern of this investigation is to determine the perspectives, initiatives, and recommendations of the primary grade teachers on the use of Hiligaynon as a medium of instruction.

Accordingly, the results were gathered and analyzed through interviews with the primary grade teachers. The responses of the primary grade teachers formed a more profound understanding in line with their experiences with using Hiligaynon as a medium of instruction.

The schematic diagram depicts the central themes from the interview with the three primary grade teachers. The first theme reveals how they regard Hiligaynon as a medium of instruction that includes using Hiligaynon and their level of acceptability. The second theme portrays the challenges that the primary grade teachers encountered using Hiligaynon as a medium of instruction. The third theme represents the initiatives they administered to those challenges, including the instructional strategies and teaching styles. The fourth theme delineates the recommendations that the primary grade teachers proposed concerning the effective use of Hiligaynon as a medium of instruction.
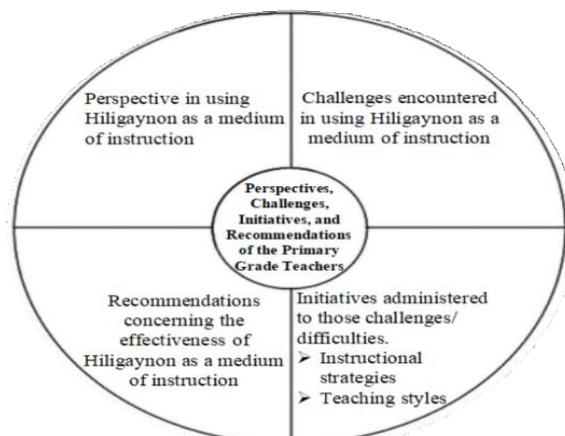

Figure 1. *Schematic diagram illustrating the framework of the study*

Materials and Methods

Research Design

The study employed the qualitative-case study method of research to explore the experiences of primary grade teachers on using Hiligaynon as a medium of instruction. Through the use of diverse data sources and a number of perspectives, a qualitative case study is a research methodology that aids in the analysis of a phenomenon within a specific context and reveals the phenomenon's many dimensions (Baxter & Jack, 2008). A real-time phenomenon is investigated in a case study within its naturally occurring setting, understanding that context will make a difference (Kaarbo & Beasley, 1999).

Participants of the Study

The participants were the three primary grade teachers who were assigned in grades one, two, and three, respectively. In consideration of the study's purpose, the researchers adopted the purposive sampling method to ensure the homogeneity or similarity of the samples in terms of the specified inclusion criteria: (a) primary grade teacher who used Hiligaynon as a medium of instruction from the year it was implemented, and (b) have undergone various training and seminars regarding the use of Hiligaynon as a medium of instruction.

Research Instruments

The study utilized the responses that led to developing the primary outcome of the data collection process. Before the instrumentation, the study used a personal and a semi-structured interview. In this context, the researchers elicited responses that described the primary grade teachers' perspectives, initiatives, challenges encountered, and recommendations in using Hiligaynon as a medium of instruction. Such provided a schematic presentation of questions or topics explored by the researchers.

Data Gathering Procedure

A pilot interview was conducted to improve the teachers' instrumentation. After finalizing the instrument, letters seeking approval for the interview were sent.

The date, time, and venue for the interview were arranged at the convenience of the participants. All essential details concerning the interview were discussed with the participants. Participants consented to the interview protocol as indicated in their signed informed consent form. The interview took place twice, with a gap of two weeks between the first and second interviews. The interview was done one person at a time using the conversational style. Safety precautions were observed due to the current situation. The researchers recorded all findings and observations. During the interview, the researchers asked follow-up questions for the study participants to discuss each point thoroughly in line with the study's objectives. The information collected and recorded from the interview were saved and safely stored for methodical analyses.

Mode of Analyses

Data analysis. The data analysis was conducted in a through recording, systematizing, and disclosing the methods of analysis with enough details to prove the credibility of the process. As cited by Maguire and Delahunt (2017), thematic analysis is the primary qualitative method that should be learned. It supplies essential skills that will be functional in conducting additional analysis. Patterns and themes within qualitative data were identified using the six-step analysis introduced by Braun and Clarke (2006), including familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up. All information elicited from the interview was incorporated into a whole context in line with the purpose of the study. Afterward, the researchers generalized the findings of individual interviews.

Rigors of findings. The credibility of the study was established through the information from the study participants. The primary grade teachers were carefully selected based on the inclusion criteria set. This strategy ensured truthful and credible information from the primary grade teachers, who were considered the main source of information. Additionally, this study was carried out in the natural environments of the respondents, using suitable methods and taking into consideration the experiences of the researched can add validity to the study. With that, the actual settings around which the research study is framed allowed other researchers and

research grounded in theory helped the researchers form on the intial coding and categorization from which further analysis of the textual data occurs. The researchers used software tools such as spreadsheets to filter codes or categories into meaningful patterns. Such relationships between emerging categories led to findings from the textual data. The process of data collection, data analysis, and interpretation were in detail.

Furthermore, this research study provided a transparent description of the steps undertaken from the conceptualization on readers to make the transferability judgment themselves.

An external researcher corroborated and confirmed the appropriateness of the methodology implemented and determined if the data supported the findings and conclusions derived from the process.

Ethical Considerations

The researchers acknowledged the goodwill of the study participants and ensured the permission of their School Head or Principal before conducting the interview. A short briefing with the concerned participants was observed to address questions associated with data collection. The researchers compromised to obtain a high standard of professionalism and adhered to the ethical principles of research. The researchers introduced themselves to the participants at the outset of the data gathering activity. They informed them of the purpose, procedure, and information the researchers would elicit from them. The researchers conducted the interview process individually to seclude their responses. Also, the participants signed the consent form explicitly stating the assurance of full privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality of the information they will provide.

The results of this research study may be issued and published in any form for academic utilization and may be used as a reference for future research. Hence, the identifiable information of the participants will be secured and will not be publicized without their consent. The recordings and materials containing the study participants' information were properly disposed of a month after the research report was completed.

Results and Discussion

Perspectives in Using Hiligaynon as a Medium of Instruction

The Department of Education (DepEd) implemented the K to 12 Curriculum last June 2012 with the inclusion of MTB MLE, mandates the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction for kindergarten to at least grade 3. The primary grade teachers interviewed concerning using Hiligaynon in teaching had varying perspectives as they carried out this policy.

The teacher-participants understood that MTB-MLE would lead to communication development. It will build confidence in communication among the pupils when they start their primary education. In Hiligaynon, the learners can freely express their thoughts and understand the concepts taught by the teachers. Conversely, there are terms in Hiligaynon that the students cannot comprehend.

> Teacher 2: "*My pupils are more confident to speak and participate in the class when using Hiligaynon. Eventually, this will help them develop their communication skill. Only, there are Hiligaynon terms that they cannot understand, especially if these terms are not familiar to them or come from other places in the province.*"

> Teacher 3: "*Even though some Hiligaynon phrases are beyond the comprehension of my students, they nevertheless gain from it. Due to their increased comfort with the language we use to train them, they have greater confidence in their ability to master the subject.*"

While Hiligaynon is an effective medium of instruction, there are instances that primary grade learners find difficult to understand. As the teachers use the learners' mother tongue, it provides a strong foundation for developing cognitive skills and comprehension of the academic content (Department of Education, 2016). Using Hiligaynon in teaching will prepare the children to develop literacy abilities to succeed in school (Medilo, 2018). Conversely, the student's lack of understanding of the local terms is one of its setbacks. The current finding confirms the claim of Lartec et al. (2014) that underscored students' limited vocabulary as an

impeding factor in implementing MTB-MLE in the country. With this issue, the teachers are expected to be linguists or polyglots to convey the students' requisites. Training programs are suggested for the teachers to improve their vocabulary regarding the mother tongue they utilize and develop their teaching knowledge using mother tongue-based instruction (Lartec et al., 2014). Along with this, some teacher-participants expressed:

> Teacher 1: *"Hiligaynon should be a subject, but not used as a medium of instruction because it hinders the child's understanding when it comes to English contexts."*

> Teacher 2: *"Hiligaynon could be taught as a subject. But I have some reservations about utilizing it as the main language of instruction."*

> Teacher 3: *"There must be more research done on using Hiligaynon as a teaching language."*

Amidst claims of success with MTB-MLE, Dutcherb (2003) admitted that it is ultimately ineffective when there is inadequate language development (Navarro, 2016). Relative to this, the study of Dio and Jamora (2014) found that the difficulty of translating technical terms in Mathematics, which came about from the teachers' inability to translate technical terms to the dialect, resulted in confusion and weak results in standard tests, which use English as the medium. This situation happened in using technical terms in Mathematics, English, and Science subjects. There are instances where no equivalent words in the mother tongue exist for a particular term in the subject. These cases may create confusion in translating the word into the mother tongue, which may eventually create difficulty for the students during standardized examinations that use English as the medium. Hasselbring and Phil (cited in Medilo, 2018) pointed out that the children would not understand some of the phrases used because they were different from what is utilized in that child's community. Other issues include the undesirability of mother tongue utilization in some situations (Fóris-Ferenczi & Bakk-Miklósi, 2011; Sanchez, 2013), affording little time for mother tongue, and its haphazard implementation (Obiero, 2010). The following responses reflect these observations:

> Teacher 1: *"Maybe in some subjects like ESP and Araling Panlipunan, Hiligaynon can be used but not effective in*

subjects like Science and Math. It confuses the children, especially in counting numbers and basic mathematical operations."

Teacher 2: *"Using Hiligaynon requires more time and enough training in using it."*

Teacher 3: "*This is another product of wrong experimentation. The Department was in a hurry to implement it without a more thorough study of its effectiveness."*

The primary grade teachers were also concerned with the primary pupils moving up to intermediate grades without being fully equipped with English. The English language is the medium of instruction for the intermediate grade levels. The teachers perceived that most pupils could not comprehend well as they were more exposed to *Hiligaynon* during the primary years. The participants verbalized:

Teacher 3: *"When the pupils reach grade four, they will not use MTB anymore, for they will use English. Students will experience a hard time adjusting to the new medium of instruction that even the equivalent terms for colors and shapes become tough for them."*

Teacher 1: *"Hiligaynon turns out irrelevant when they move up to higher grade levels. It will mean learning from the start again as they will be introduced to familiar subjects but with different language of instruction."*

The mother tongue should supposedly be used to support learning the first language and other languages later. Learners begin their education using their first language to develop a strong foundation in their mother tongue before effectively learning additional languages (Department of Education, 2016). However, the participants' testimonies contradict this statement. Learning the first language appears to obstruct and does not facilitate learning English and intermediate-grade subjects.

Accordingly, educators and curriculum implementers must undertake a comprehensive study to ameliorate this concern. This problem should be given major attention and effort as it affects pupils' learning. Nolasco (2010) further added that good curricula must be developed, a pool of adequately trained teachers in the

required languages, content, and methodology, sufficient and suitable/relevant teaching materials, and community empowerment (Medilo, 2018).

The Challenges of Teaching using Hiligaynon as a Medium of Instruction

The implementation of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education brought up changes that demand adjustments.

Moreover, establishing this rule led to several challenges for the teachers. The foremost challenges the elementary grade teachers encountered were the lack of proper training and the absence of learning resources in the mother tongue. The study participants shared:

> Teacher 1: *"I speak Hiligaynon, but it is entirely different when talking about teaching Hiligaynon. It requires knowledge of the content and structure."*

> Teacher 2: *"I did not have any background using MTB-MLE as a language of instruction. I am not trained to do the work."*

> Teacher 3: *"When I was in college, we were taught to use English or Tagalog in teaching, not Hiligaynon."*

From the statements, it is clear that the teachers did not have the proper background and adequate training in using Hiligaynon as a medium of instruction. Belisario et al. (2014) explained that many teachers are not prepared to use their mother tongue in teaching.

Teachers who teach multilingual students need to be oriented and instructed on dealing with students who speak multiple languages. Thus, training and seminars are deemed essential. In addition, the teacher's expertise is expanded through training and seminars. Seminars and training provide a chance for instructors to learn from and collaborate with others.

The teacher also struggled in search of resources to aid them in using Hiligaynon as a medium of instruction. Two participants expressed:

> Teacher 1: *"The teaching of Hiligaynon would not have been such a strain for us if there had been enough resources."*

> Teacher 2: *"There are no enough books written in Hiligaynon. We provide materials, but I struggle to understand the terms."*

The deficiency of Hiligaynon-based materials was one of the challenges the teachers encountered in the usage of Hiligaynon as a medium of instruction. Lartec et al. (2014) stated that learning objectives would not be attainable if resources were insufficient.

Therefore, there is a need to provide enough instructional materials to aid both the teacher's and the pupils' learning (Lartec et al., 2014). Accordingly, the Department of Education should ensure enough effective materials to help teachers teach effectively.

Initiatives Exerted by the Primary Grade Teachers in Using Hiligaynon as a Medium of Instruction

It is usual for primary teachers to find themselves handling students from different linguistic backgrounds. When asked about their initiatives to remedy the challenges they encountered in using Hiligaynon as a medium of instruction, they responded:

> Teacher 2: *"I would research and give examples to them because books are limited."*

> Teacher 1: "*I would translate terms to Tagalog and then English if they find the Tagalog and English terms more familiar to them."*

The teachers affirmed that resourcefulness and appropriate strategy helped them survive the challenges of teaching in Hiligaynon. Using the mother tongue in teaching in a multilingual setting affects how learners learn. Consequently, the teachers tried to adapt by finding ways to resolve the difficulty. Researchers and practitioners have long known that what teachers do in the classroom is a key determinant of student learning outcomes (Kane et al., 2013). Hence, the learners' knowledge relies on the teachers' strategies and methods. Teachers' learning is crucial due to continuous change and education development since most learning occurs through daily practice (Grosemans et al., 2015). The teacher participants implemented the ability to bring two languages together and transfer the academic content from one language to another.

In this case, the learners use their prior knowledge that exists and that there is a process of mental translation going on throughout language learning (Shiyab & Abdullateef, 2001).

Additionally, Petrocchi (2006) noted that when students translate, they unconsciously follow three steps: analysis, transfer, and restructuring. In this way, a mental process occurs in their minds unconsciously every time they speak the other language. Storing and retrieving information made by the learner to connect first (L1) and second language (L2) involves mental connections.This bridges between the mother tongue and target language. Students must build this bridge between L2 and L1, using translation to transform from one language to another and observe the differences and similarities between the two languages (Koppe & Kremer, 2007). The translation is very beneficial to learning when it comes to learning through using the students' mother tongue because it serves as a bridge to connect students to the lesson (Lartec et al., 2014).

The primary teachers also used their creativity to think and plan to adapt to the changes in the educational system on having mother tongue as a medium of instruction.Teachers regularly require adaptation and have been highlighted as essential for teachers. It plays an important role in helping to navigate the constantly changing demands of teaching work. More precisely, (Martin et al., 2012) define adaptability as a capacity of an individual to constructively regulate psycho-behavioral functions in response to new, changing, or uncertain circumstances, conditions, and situations. The capacity of a teacher to be flexible enough in using other languages means that the problems in translating lessen (Lartec et al., 2014).

The participants said:

Teacher 2: *"We have no other option but to adjust to the changes. We are expected to be adaptable."*

Teacher 3: *"We tried to adapt as expected of us as teachers. We must embrace the changes in using the mother tongue as a medium of instruction.*

Experiences of change, novelty, and uncertainty are common in teaching. Teachers have to think of alternative strategies in the

constantly changing educational system in which they can adjust their thoughts, actions, and emotions to deliver effective teaching.

Adaptability pertains to the means of understanding young people's capacity to deal with new, changing, or challenging situations (Martin, 2012). The teachers in primary grades developed the ability to adapt to the changes within the system and make the best use of available materials for maximal results.

Recommendations of the Primary Grade Teachers

Regardless of all the difficulties and challenges in teaching Hiligaynon, the teachers shared their thoughts about the underlying difficulties that MTB-MLE brought to them. They believed that there are measures that can help minimize, if not eradicate the cons of Hiligaynon as a medium of instruction.

The teachers proposed:

> Teacher 1: "*Hiligaynon instruction is not necessary for all topics. There are various restrictions on using dialect for instructions*."

> Teacher 3*: "Hiligaynon may be offered as a subject only as Hiligaynon and not as a language for instruction."*

According to Walter (2010), as cited by Begi (2014), learning is effective when learners and teachers speak the instruction language well. While using the mother tongue as a medium of instruction boosts children's confidence, it was not proven true for children using multi-languages. Some teachers were not well-versed in using the language in teaching. Others were not equipped with knowledge of the content and pedagogy in Hiligaynon.

Grounded on this, they believed that a separate subject in Hiligaynon might be offered, but this shouldn't be used as a language for teaching other subjects. The teacher plays the most crucial role in the child's education as a mentor and facilitator of learning (Lualhati, 2018).

Consequently, they should be empowered and prepared to handle subjects in the primary grades to address the changing needs of the times.

Teacher 2: *"Certainly, we should find ways for students to understand the lessons taught in Hiligaynon. We have to keep ourselves updated with the current trend in teaching Hiligaynon and become resourceful to deliver effective instruction."*

Teacher 3: *"We are supposed to develop our learning skills as teachers. For us to stay relevant, we must adapt and follow the trend in education."*

To cope with the setbacks in using the mother tongue as a medium of instruction, significant attention and effort are still necessary to be given to the approach to ensure an effective and successful language of instruction (Lartec et al., 2014).

Instruction has evolved into a varied and complicated process, and every educator is now accountable for improving student outcomes by employing the most effective instructional techniques to close achievement gaps. As Green (2010) put it, students will surely win when teachers learn and deepen their pedagogy.

Conclusion

The primary grade teachers have varying perspectives on using the mother tongue. While some teachers believe it to be an effective medium of instruction, other teachers find it weak and irrelevant. Difficulty in translating local terms, complex vocabulary, and insufficiency of learning materials written in Hiligaynon are the major challenges in using Hiligaynon as a medium of instruction. The lack of proper training for teachers handling subjects taught in Hiligaynon adds to the problem. Consequently, it brings problems in carrying out effective delivery of instruction. The primary grade teachers take the initiative to use Hiligaynon as a medium of instruction effectively. They develop such adaptability skills to navigate the changes within the educational system and make effective teaching and learning happen. They use appropriate methods and employ resources vital for bridging the gap and developing an understanding of the first language, which will lead to effective learning of the subject. The recommendations tended by the primary grade teachers call for the re-visitation of Hiligaynon as

a medium of instruction and holding of training that will necessarily equip the teachers with the knowledge and pedagogical skills in teaching the primary grade subjects using Hiligaynon as a medium of instruction. Accordingly, the Department of Education officials may initiate efforts to assess the implementation of mother-tongue-based instruction in the primary grades. This will result in identifying problems and issues and enforcement of programs and policies for the effective utilization of the mother tongue in teaching.

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