



The Effectiveness of Mother Tongue as a Medium of Instruction in the Learning Development of Grade 1 Pupils at Baybay Elementary School

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Abstract

Background and Aim: The language of education is essential for how well children learn. The K–12 reform in the Philippines made Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) a part of Kindergarten through Grade 3 to help kids read, understand, and participate more in class. Although global research validates the advantages of mother tongue instruction, specific evidence from Philippine schools is still scarce. This study aimed to determine how well MTB-MLE helped Grade 1 pupils at Baybay Elementary School in Ozamiz City learn and grow. It wanted to find out what subjects were taught in Cebuano, how mother tongue instruction affected understanding, and how it affected student involvement in the classroom.

Materials and Methods: A descriptive qualitative case study methodology was used. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with five Grade 1 kids, supported by teacher interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. Triangulation was utilized to strengthen the credibility of the findings, and the data were assessed thematically.

Results: The findings indicated that Cebuano was predominantly utilized in subjects such as Araling Panlipunan, Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao, MAPEH, and Mother Tongue. It was also used as a support language in Mathematics and English. Students said they understood and remembered things better when taught in Cebuano. Classroom observations showed students were more active, confident, and excited during mother language instruction.

Conclusion: The study concludes that MTB-MLE improves Grade 1 students' understanding, involvement, and sense of cultural identity. It shows that teaching in a person's native language is not only a good way to teach, but it also changes society by connecting school and community and supporting Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education).

Keywords: Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE); Cebuano; Grade 1 pupils; Comprehension; Classroom Participation; Cultural Identity

Introduction

One of the most important educational decisions is the language of instruction because it directly affects students' long-term academic success and access to knowledge. UNESCO (2016) says that learning the first language early on helps create basic literacy, improves comprehension, and leads to better learning outcomes. The Philippine Department of Education also set up the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) policy as part of the K–12 curriculum. This guideline says pupils should learn in their native languages from Kindergarten to Grade 3 to make learning more effective and open to everyone.

Early learners, especially those in Grade 1, benefit greatly from being taught in their original language because of where they are in their development. Cummins' interdependence hypothesis asserts that proficiency in the first language facilitates the acquisition of a second language. Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory underscores the significance of language and social interaction in the learning process. Using their original language provides first graders a strong start on learning and makes it easier for them to master Filipino and English later on.

More than 170 languages are spoken in the Philippines, which has both good and bad effects. Cebuano, Hiligaynon, Ilokano, and Tagalog are four of the twelve mother tongues that are now officially used as languages of instruction (DepEd, 2012). Ball (2010) and Heugh (2006) found that kids who are taught in a language they already know do better in school and have more self-confidence and a stronger sense of who they are than kids who are taught in a language they don't know. There are still holes in the local evaluation of how MTB-MLE affects students' engagement, participation, and understanding in the classroom, especially in some school settings.





This study addresses the knowledge gap by analyzing the experiences of first-graders at Baybay Elementary School in Ozamiz City, where Cebuano serves as the primary language of instruction. It focuses on which courses are taught in the mother tongue, how this affects students' knowledge, and how their participation has evolved. This study contributes to the ongoing discourse over MTB-MLE and its impact on early education in multilingual nations such as the Philippines.

Objectives

The objective of this article is to evaluate the efficacy of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) in the educational advancement of Grade 1 students at Baybay Elementary School, Ozamiz City.

Literature review

Related Literature

The literature review situates the present study within the comprehensive discourse on mother tongue training, drawing on international and Philippine research. This section is divided into four main themes: (1) Theoretical Foundations of Mother Tongue Education, (2) Effects on Cognitive Development, (3) Cultural and Identity Impacts, and (4) Challenges in Implementation.

Theoretical Foundations of Mother Tongue Education

Many essential theories in linguistics and education advocate for the utilization of the native language as a medium of learning. Cummins' (2000) Interdependence Hypothesis posits that literacy and cognitive skills acquired in the first language (L1) can be transferred to additional languages, improving academic performance over time. Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis underscores the importance of understandable input in language acquisition, which is most facilitated through the learner's native language.

Some people think that bilingual education can help everyone learn better and make the world a more welcoming one. Fillmore (2014) stresses the importance of carefully planning the order of L1 and L2 lessons to get the most out of learning, while Edwards (1994) talks about how common multilingualism is worldwide. Policies like the Philippine MTB-MLE program are based on these theoretical viewpoints.

Effects on Cognitive Development

Empirical evidence indicates that instruction in one's mother tongue significantly enhances academic and cognitive performance. Heugh (2006) asserts that utilizing learners' first language enhances internal instructional efficiency by reducing repetition and dropout rates. Ball (2010) discovered that children who receive instruction in their native tongue attain greater levels of confidence, literacy, and comprehension than those who receive instruction in a foreign language.

SEAMEO-INNOTECH (2015) says that pupils in the Philippines who went to MTB-MLE pilot schools were better at reading and understanding their home tongue and Filipino than students who only spoke one language. Recent research by Tupas and Martin (2017) indicates that early utilization of the mother tongue fosters fundamental literacy and facilitates the transition to English and Filipino as second languages.

Cultural and Identity Impacts

Mother-tongue instruction not only helps with learning but also helps people feel better about themselves and their culture. According to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, learning is socially mediated, and teaching in a language that the learner is familiar with validates their cultural background. According to Ball (2010), children who receive an education in their native tongue grow more self-assured and prouder of their culture.

Gonzalez (2016) stresses that MTB-MLE improves collaboration between home and school and validates local knowledge. Parents are more likely to be involved in their children's education when they know what language is being used to teach them. This aligns with SEAMEO's (2019) conclusion that MTB-MLE fosters community engagement by linking local traditions with educational institutions.

Challenges in Implementation

In practice, MTB-MLE is hard to use even though it has several good points. International literature (Cenoz & Genesee, 1998; Crystal, 2006) discusses problems, including teachers not being well-prepared, not having enough teaching materials in regional languages, and having trouble teaching in multiple languages. The Philippines still has similar problems. Bernardo (2019) pointed out that teachers need more training to handle multilingual classrooms well. Tupas (2015) pointed out that the availability of instructional resources varies by location.

Some stakeholders and parents still think that English is the language of success and status, which makes people less likely to support MTB-MLE (Garbes, 2012). These issues underscore the necessity for ongoing legislative support, the augmentation of teacher competencies, and persistent lobbying to reshape perceptions of regional languages.





Research from the Philippines shows the problems and opportunities of putting MTB-MLE into action, while research worldwide focuses on the cognitive and cultural benefits of teaching in one's mother tongue. Research shows that teaching in one's native language promotes understanding, identification, and involvement. However, this only works if there is enough money, teacher training, and support from all parties involved. By investigating the localized effects of MTB-MLE on Grade 1 students at Baybay Elementary School, this study fills a gap in the empirical data from smaller school contexts and adds to the conversation.

Related Studies

Multilingual Education

Individual and societal multilingualism is common in many nations (Edwards, 1994). In fact, 75% of the world's people speak more than one language (Crystal, 2006). No country is really monolingual; nonetheless, low-income countries tend to be highly multilingual, often due to historical, political, and economic factors, including colonization and immigration (Cenoz & Genesee, 1998). MTB MLE uses the learner's first language (termed the L1) to teach basic literacy (reading and writing) and beginning academic content. The second language (L2) is taught in a structured and incremental manner, enabling students to transfer their knowledge from L1 to L2 (Fillmore, 2014).

Linguistic diversity

The U.S. Department of Education uses the phrase "linguistically and culturally diverse" to describe students in educational programs who are either not fluent in English (NEP) or only somewhat proficient in English (LEP). This term is used by teachers to describe kids who come from households and communities where English is not the main language spoken (García, 1991). First, learning the families' and cultural involvement in language acquisition is essential (Rbandamiller, 2011).

Conceptual Framework

One of the most important decisions that education ministries must make is what language to use in instruction. The language used in teaching directly affects how well kids learn and how well they do in school. Thanks to the introduction of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE), first-graders at Baybay Elementary School can now learn in a language they fully understand. This strategy gets more people involved in the community, strengthens cultural identification, and makes education more successful.

Cummins' theoretical distinction between Basic Interpersonal Communicative abilities (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) says that having a strong first language makes it easier to learn academic abilities in other languages. Krashen's Input Hypothesis posits that meaningful learning and the gradual mastery of increasingly complex concepts are facilitated by comprehensible input delivered in a language familiar to the learner. These perspectives provide a theoretical framework for the anticipated advantages of MTB-MLE concerning cognitive and societal impact.

The use of regional languages enhances educational outcomes by reducing academic failure, dropout rates, and grade repetition. So, MTB-MLE is not only better for pupils than monolingual education methods, but it also costs less (Heugh in Alidou et al., 2006). Additionally, teaching in a language that children are familiar with validates their culture and traditional knowledge, strengthens their sense of self, promotes cultural pride, and gives them a strong sense of identity. According to research, kids who receive an education in their native tongue do better academically and in life than those who are made to learn a foreign language (Ball, 2010).

Lastly, using a language that students are used to for teaching shows respect for their culture and knowledge. This makes a connection between the formal school system and the child's home and community. This, in turn, makes it easier for parents to get involved and makes the community more supportive of education. Language isn't a barrier to getting active in their children's schooling.



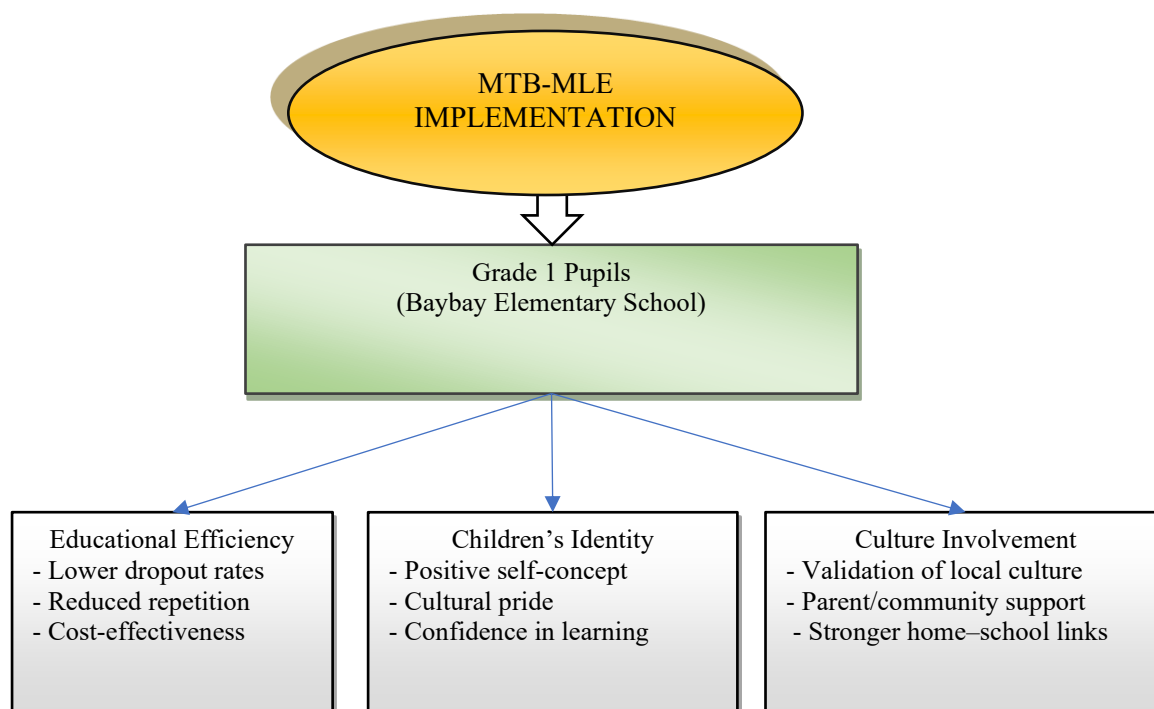


Figure 1. *Schematic Diagram of Conceptual Framework*

Here is what the variables mean:

- Children's Identity is the self-esteem, confidence, and cultural pride that kids get from learning in their first language.
- Educational Efficiency shows measurable signs like fewer times students have to repeat a class, better understanding of the material, and fewer students dropping out.
- Cultural Involvement stresses how knowing a language may help parents get involved and keep cultural traditions alive, which shows how important family and community are to education.



Methodology

This chapter talks about the research design, setting, participants, ways of collecting data, ethical considerations, and ways of analyzing data. The goal is to explain the study's methods clearly and thoroughly.

Research design. This study employed a descriptive qualitative case study approach to examine the efficacy of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) in the developmental learning of first-graders. The case study technique was selected to facilitate an in-depth examination of kids' views and experiences in the classroom, specifically at Baybay Elementary School. This design is good because it gives deep, contextualized information about learner outcomes and shows how complicated language use is in education.

Research Locale. The study took place at Baybay Elementary School, located in Barangay Annex, Ozamiz City, Misamis Occidental. The school was chosen because it is a typical public school in the area that uses Cebuano as its main teaching language and follows the MTB-MLE model. The location is accessible to the researchers and provides a relevant context for analyzing the regional impacts of mother-tongue education.

Research Participants. Five first-grade students from Baybay Elementary School's Section A participated. Their ages varied from seven to eight. Purposive sampling was used to choose a small number of participants because the study aimed to provide exploratory case analysis rather than generalizable findings. While the small sample size is acknowledged as a disadvantage, it enabled the researchers to obtain more concentrated and detailed data.

In addition to pupil participants, teachers and classroom observations were also included to provide triangulation and strengthen the reliability of findings.

Data Collection Procedures. Different methods were used to collect data to make sure it was reliable:

1. Students participated in semi-structured interviews in Cebuano to share their thoughts and experiences.
2. Interviews with teachers to learn more about their teaching styles and how things work in the classroom.
3. Watching students in the classroom to see how they interact and participate in lessons in their native language.
4. Review of lesson plans and instructional materials to make sure they follow MTB-MLE policy.

Field notes were taken during observations, and interviews were recorded on audio and video with consent.

Research Instruments. For this study, a variety of tools were used to collect accurate and thorough data:

1. *Interview Guide* For both teachers and students, a semi-structured interview guide was created. Simple, age-appropriate Cebuano questions were created for students, and English/Filipino questions were created for teachers. The guide covered three main topics: (a) subjects taught in the mother tongue, (b) the perceived benefits of mother tongue instruction, and (c) student participation and classroom engagement. The use of semi-structured questions allowed for more in-depth exploration of participants' answers while keeping things consistent throughout interviews.

2. *Checklist for Observations* An observation tool was used to track how students acted and participated in class. Some things on the checklist were using the mother tongue throughout class, paying attention, answering questions, and talking to other students. This tool ensured that data were collected systematically during classroom observations.

3. *Template for Document Reviews* We prepared a template for looking over lesson plans, teaching materials, and school records that have to do with the implementation of MTB-MLE. This supported the idea of including mother tongue training in the classroom.

4. *Devices for Recording Audio and Video* To ensure precision in data transcription and analysis, audio and video recordings of interviews and class sessions were conducted (with consent). These recordings were added to the researchers' field notes.

Ethical Considerations. This inquiry strictly followed ethical rules. Before any data was collected, both parents and students gave their permission. People may choose to take part, and they were told they could leave at any point without any problems. To keep things private, students were given fake names, and any information that could identify them was removed. The data was kept safe and only used for schoolwork.

Data Analysis. The gathered data went through thematic analysis. The transcription, coding, and classification of observation notes and interviews uncovered emergent themes, including comprehension, involvement, and cultural identification. A coding method was developed to facilitate the identification of trends



in the responses from educators and students. Triangulating data sources, such as documents, classroom observations, teacher interviews, and student interviews, made the conclusions more valid and trustworthy.

Results

This section summarizes and analyzes the study's findings regarding the utilization of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction for Grade 1 students at Baybay Elementary School. The results are organized into three major themes based on the research questions: (1) Subjects taught using the mother tongue, (2) Effects of mother tongue instruction on comprehension, and (3) Pupils' classroom participation and engagement. Each theme is supported by relevant literature to highlight consistency with previous studies.

1. Which subjects employ the mother tongue as the primary medium of instruction at Baybay Elementary School?

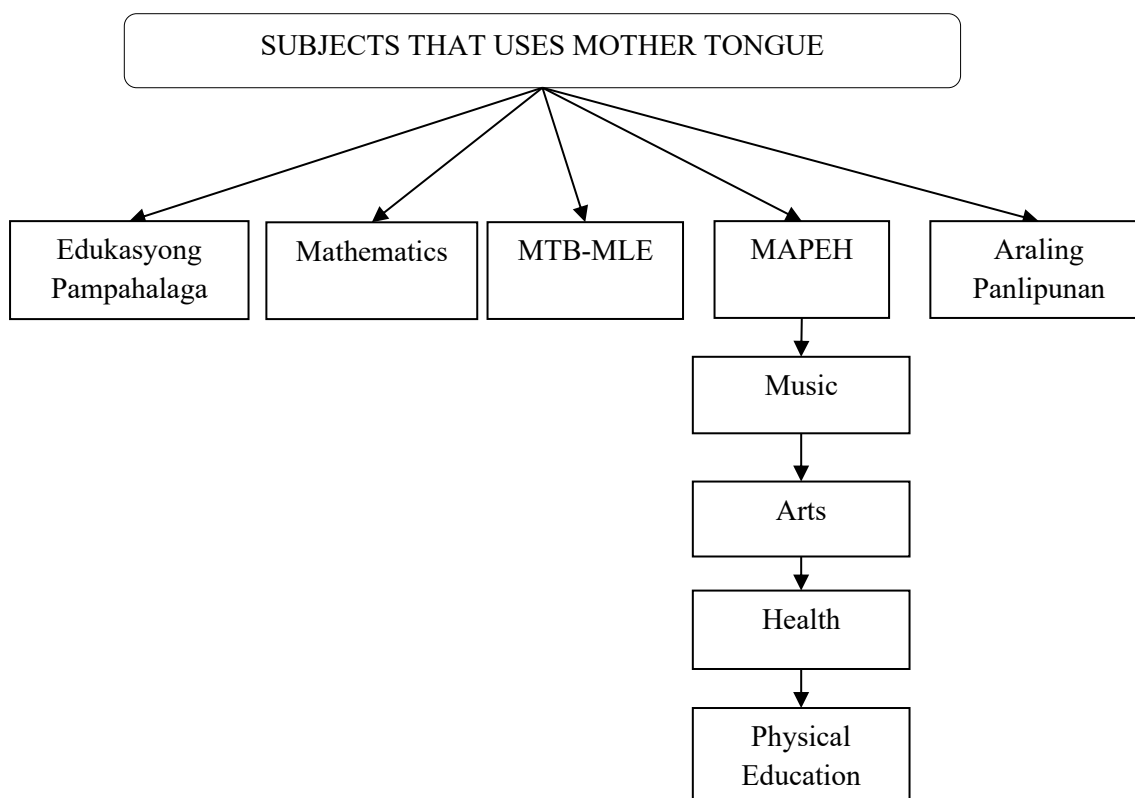


Figure 1: *Grade 1 subjects that use the mother tongue in teaching*

Figure 1 shows the subjects who are using their native language in teaching. These subjects are Edukasyong Pagpapahalaga, Mathematics, MTB-MLE (Mother Tongue Base-Multilingual Education), Mapeh, which includes Music, Arts, Health and Physical Education, and Araling Panlipunan. These subjects use the native language as a medium of instruction for the pupils to understand and participate well in class. However, two subjects remain as they are: English and Filipino. These subjects use English and the Filipino language in their discussion.

2. What are the perceived effects of mother tongue instruction on pupils' comprehension and understanding of those subjects?

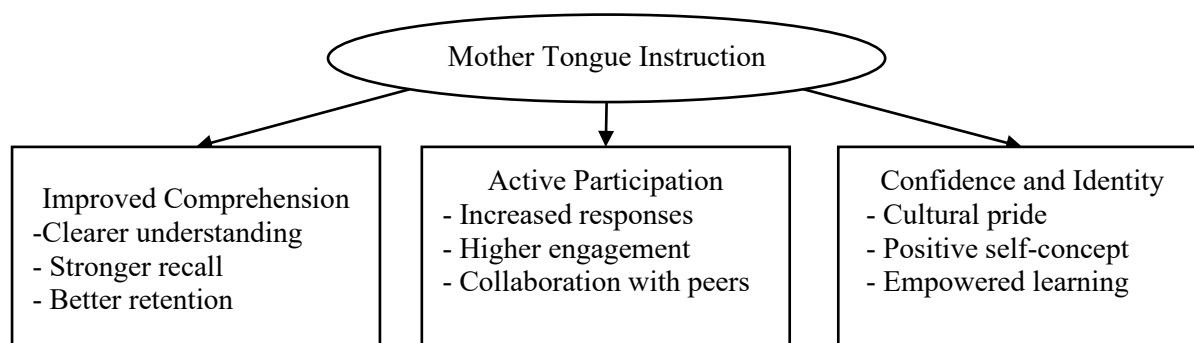


Figure 2: *Effects of mother tongue instruction on pupils' comprehension and understanding of those subjects*

The above figure shows the effects of mother tongue in the different learning areas of the two sections of grade 1 pupils in Baybay Elementary School. The two sections were asked about the effects of using the Bisaya or Cebuano language in teaching. They answered in common that this language helps them to understand more of the lesson and participate well in class. They also emphasized the great help of their mother tongue in their Mathematics subject. According to them, it helps them to know how to do the basics of Mathematics, such as adding and subtracting. To conclude, these students find it easy to learn theory in a variety of subjects by using this language.

In conclusion, these results demonstrate that teaching in the mother tongue is a transformative educational approach that improves understanding, engagement, and identity formation in first-graders rather than just being a linguistic adjustment.

3. What are the developments in Grade 1 pupils brought by mother tongue?

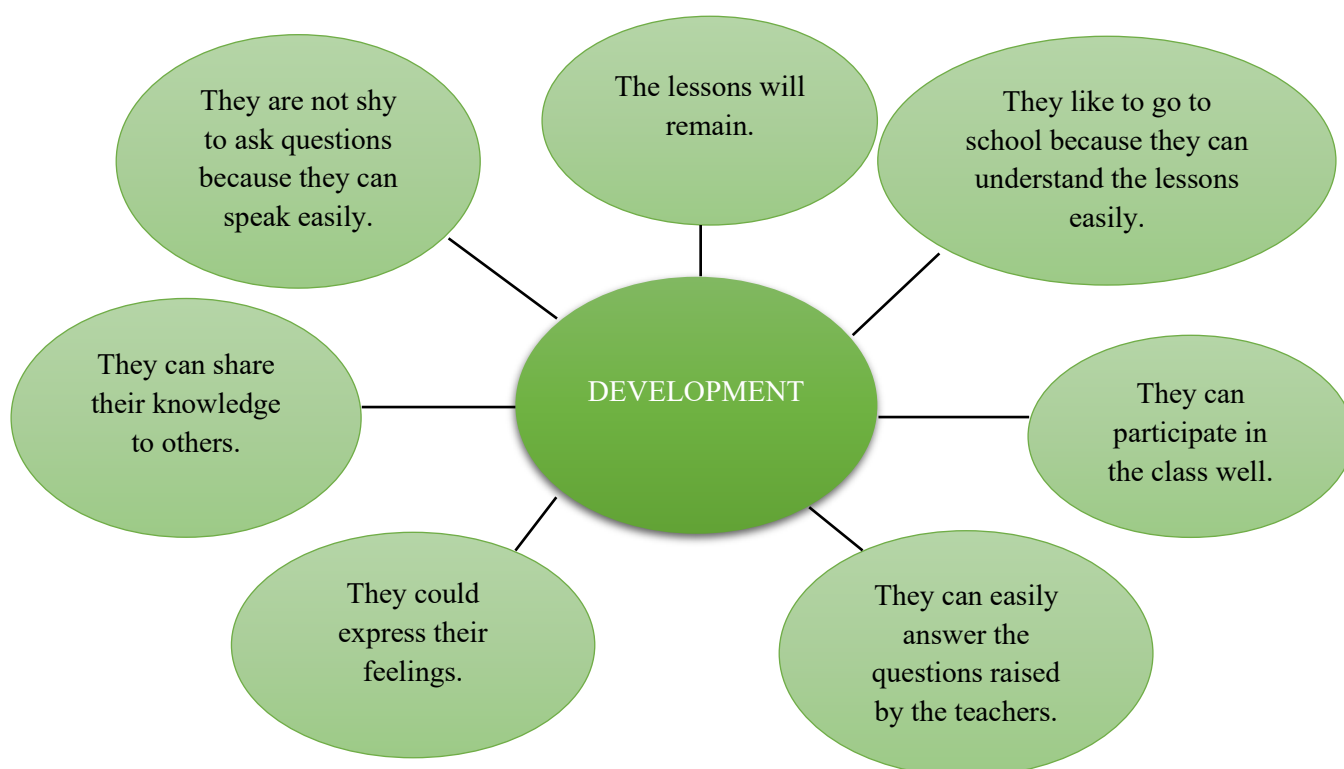


Figure 3: *The developments in Grade 1 pupils brought by mother tongue*



The pupils participated actively in their class discussion when using their mother tongue. Since the language used is the Bisayan language, which they are used to, they understood and reflected in each and every discussion. Also, they could easily relate to the topic and could share their thoughts in class without hesitation. Furthermore, by this, they were no longer afraid to raise their questions.

Discussion

Subjects Taught Using the Mother Tongue. The results showed that the mother tongue (Cebuano) was mostly utilized in classes like Music, Arts, Physical Education, and Health (MAPEH), Araling Panlipunan, Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao, and Mother Tongue as a learning area. Filipino and English were progressively introduced, especially in reading and writing assignments. The Department of Education's MTB-MLE rules say that Kindergarten through Grade 3 pupils must learn in their native language. This fits with how languages are used (DepEd, 2012). These results confirm that Cebuano integration gives students a solid basis for reading and understanding. SEAMEO-INNOTECH (2015) found that early first language use enhances students' performance on both local and national tests.

Effects of Mother Tongue Instruction on Comprehension. Teacher comments and student interviews showed that when lessons were taught in the students' native language, they learned the content faster and more accurately. Students remembered important subjects better and felt more confident while answering questions. One teacher said, for example, that "when instructions are in Cebuano, students immediately understand the tasks and can complete them with less guidance."

This finding aligns with Cummins' (2000) Interdependence Hypothesis, which posits that cognitive academic language proficiency in additional languages is cultivated through the utilization of the first language. It also backs up what Ball (2010) found, which was that pupils learn better when they can relate new information to their language and culture.

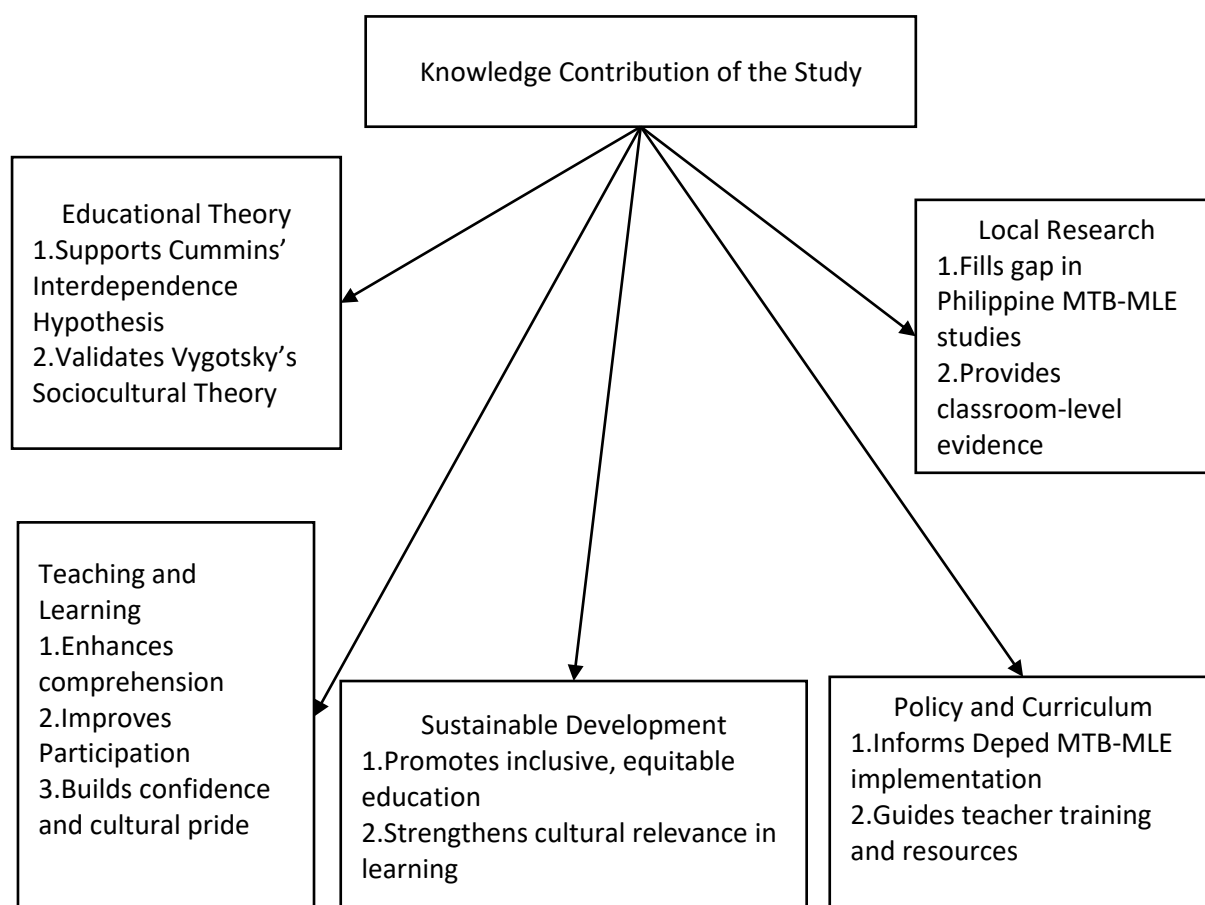
Classroom Participation and Engagement. What was observed demonstrated that pupils were more engaged in interactions that were held in Cebuano. They asked more questions, took part in more group activities, and seemed more excited. Participation was especially high in oral recitations, where students confidently answered in their first language.

These results align with Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which underscores the role of language in facilitating social interaction and learning. They also back up what Gonzalez (2016) found, which was that MTB-MLE helps with academic learning, identity development, and cultural validation.

Synthesis of Findings. The study shows that teaching students in their mother tongue improves their understanding, encourages their class participation, and boosts their self-esteem. The results confirm MTB-MLE's advocacy for educational efficacy and cultural inclusivity, aligning with both international and Philippine studies.



Knowledge Contribution



Recommendation

Based on the results, the following suggestions are made:

1. For teachers: Keep teaching in the first language in the early years, but slowly incorporate English and Filipino. Teachers should also have continual training in MTB-MLE pedagogy to make sure that what they do in the classroom works.

2. For School Administrators: Make sure that localized teaching materials, observation checklists, and programs for mentoring teachers are accessible to ensure that the implementation is of high quality. This will make MTB-MLE support systems stronger.

3. For policymakers: Make policies stronger by funding more research on MTB-MLE in other areas and helping teachers improve their skills. Wider use should also include ways to keep an eye on things and evaluate them to see how well they work and fix any problems that come up.

4. Future Research: To investigate the long-term impacts of MTB-MLE on academic performance, identity formation, and community engagement, conduct longitudinal research with larger sample sizes across various schools and grade levels.



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