

# Views and Opinions of Stakeholders in the Implementation of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education: A Phenomenological Study

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## ABSTRACT

This study aimed to describe the views and opinions of stakeholders towards the implementation of mother tongue-based multilingual education as a medium of instruction. It looked into the experiences and challenges that took place while also emphasizing the meaning that stakeholders attached to their experiences. Further, this study utilized a qualitative design, employing a phenomenological approach to gain access to the value of individual experiences. The data came from the narrative accounts from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. There were 8 participants for in-depth interviews and eight for a focus group discussion for triangulation purposes. The participants' accounts were carefully transcribed, then translated and analyzed with the help of an expert. Findings revealed that learners' responses to mother tongue-based education can be both negative and positive. To cope with the unfavorable experiences which are most significantly brought about by the difficulty in understanding the mother tongue used in the classroom, the teachers engage in lack sessions, peer-mentoring, research, study and seminars. They also use strategies such as presenting pictures and other interactive activities. The stakeholders' insights into mother-based education revealed that they find such type of education to be practical and helpful, but they highly recommend that to make their teaching more effective, Davao City should have its orthography to be used in mother tongue-based instruction.

**Keywords:** Mother tongue-based, multilingual education, views and opinions, phenomenology

## INTRODUCTION

Many inadequacies of schools are derived from their religious and colonial past. The opposition to the use of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction shows that both parents and teachers do not appreciate the advantages of mother tongue education. The two most significant obstacles to mother tongue teaching include the push for a language of wider communication and the lack of suitable teaching materials. By doing so, teachers are getting the students into the habit of translating from the first language into the second language. By introducing the target language through the native language, there is no full attention to training students to understand the target language without seeking outside aid. Educators are not creating opportunities for them to learn.

The UNESCO publication Languages Matter: Global Guidance on Multilingual Education, which was released on International Mother Language Day in February 2025, highlights the importance of employing students' mother tongues in education. It states that 40% of the world's population lacks access to education in a language they understand, with this proportion climbing to 90% in some low- and middle-income nations. The report calls for multilingual education policies that improve learning outcomes, protect cultural heritage, and promote inclusivity.

A study published in Labour Economics in December 2024 assessed the Philippines' mother tongue-based education policy, which is implemented in 2012. While the program intended to strengthen basic skills by including 19 local languages into early education, the study discovered a negative impact on reading and math skills among the first cohort of youngsters exposed to the strategy. According to the authors, substantial language diversity creates obstacles for effective implementation.

A 2024 study published in the Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development examined language attitudes in Central Mindanao's linguistically heterogeneous surroundings. The study discovered that learners and parents preferred Tagalog over local mother tongues, which presents problems for MTB-MLE implementation. This trend may have an impact on the efficacy of using local languages as instructional media in multilingual classroom settings.

In 2017, one of my unforgettable experiences was when I applied to the Department of Education for the national item in kindergarten position. During the demonstration, I was instructed to use my mother tongue as the medium of instruction in the subject. My lesson was about the traffic light, wherein I had to introduce the three colors of the traffic light in the mother tongue. Since I have difficulty in the use of my mother tongue, I asked for the help of my friends who were teaching in the public school with the belief that they are competent in the mother tongue given that the public schools are strictly implementing the use of mother tongue-based multilingual education. Then, during the actual demonstration, I used the three colors in the mother tongue, such as "pula" for red, "lunhaw" for green, and "merengue" for orange. After my demonstration, my friends informed me that the mother tongue of orange is "kahel" and not "merengue." The people who observed my demonstration were principals and heads of different schools, yet none of them reacted nor corrected me after the demonstration. It made me realize that even school heads and mother-tongue teachers are not too familiar with the home language. These are authentic experiences that are rare to find on the internet, and these motivated me to pursue this study. Although there is literature that supports the relationship between teachers and kindergarten pupils in the implementation of mother tongue-based multi-lingual education in the Philippines, no studies have been conducted that have determined the struggles and lived experiences of teachers in implementing mother tongue-based education in kindergarten schools. Through the experiences of others - my friends, classmates, and coworkers- I am driven and motivated to conduct a study about the views and opinions of stakeholders in the implementation of mother tongue-based multilingual education in kindergarten.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a qualitative descriptive-phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences and perspectives of key stakeholders: school heads, teachers, and parents regarding the implementation of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) in kindergarten classrooms in Davao City. Guided by the phenomenological approach, the study aimed to capture the essence of participants' experiences and how they interpret these within their educational contexts (Patton, 2015). Data was gathered using semi-structured interviews, Focus Group Discussions (FGD), and Single Group Discussions (SGD), using interview guides validated by subject-matter experts. The researcher acted as both interviewer and transcriber, with assistance from a language expert for translation. Participants were chosen through purposeful sampling (Shuttleworth, 2008), involving two principals, four teachers (including two kindergarten educators), and two parents. The study focused on two public elementary schools in Davao City, selected for their differing contexts, one urban and one smaller suburban, providing a contrast in stakeholder experiences with MTB-MLE.

Data was analyzed using Colaizzi's seven-step method, which includes transcription, extraction of significant statements, meaning formulation, clustering into themes, integration, and participant validation (Speziale & Carpenter, 2007). Ethical principles such as informed consent, truthfulness, privacy, and confidentiality were strictly observed throughout the process (Kitchen & Tate, 2000). Participants were informed of their rights and voluntarily participated in the study after signing consent forms. To ensure trustworthiness, the study applied Lincoln and Guba's (as cited in Shrank, 2006) four criteria: credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. These strategies ensured that the findings were grounded in authentic, verifiable experiences and could be considered rigorous, contextually rich, and meaningful within the broader discourse on early childhood multilingual instruction.

## RESULTS & DISCUSSION

This section presents the outcomes of the qualitative analysis performed on the responses to the research questions. The results are structured based on the emerging themes, sub-themes, core concepts, and their categorization.

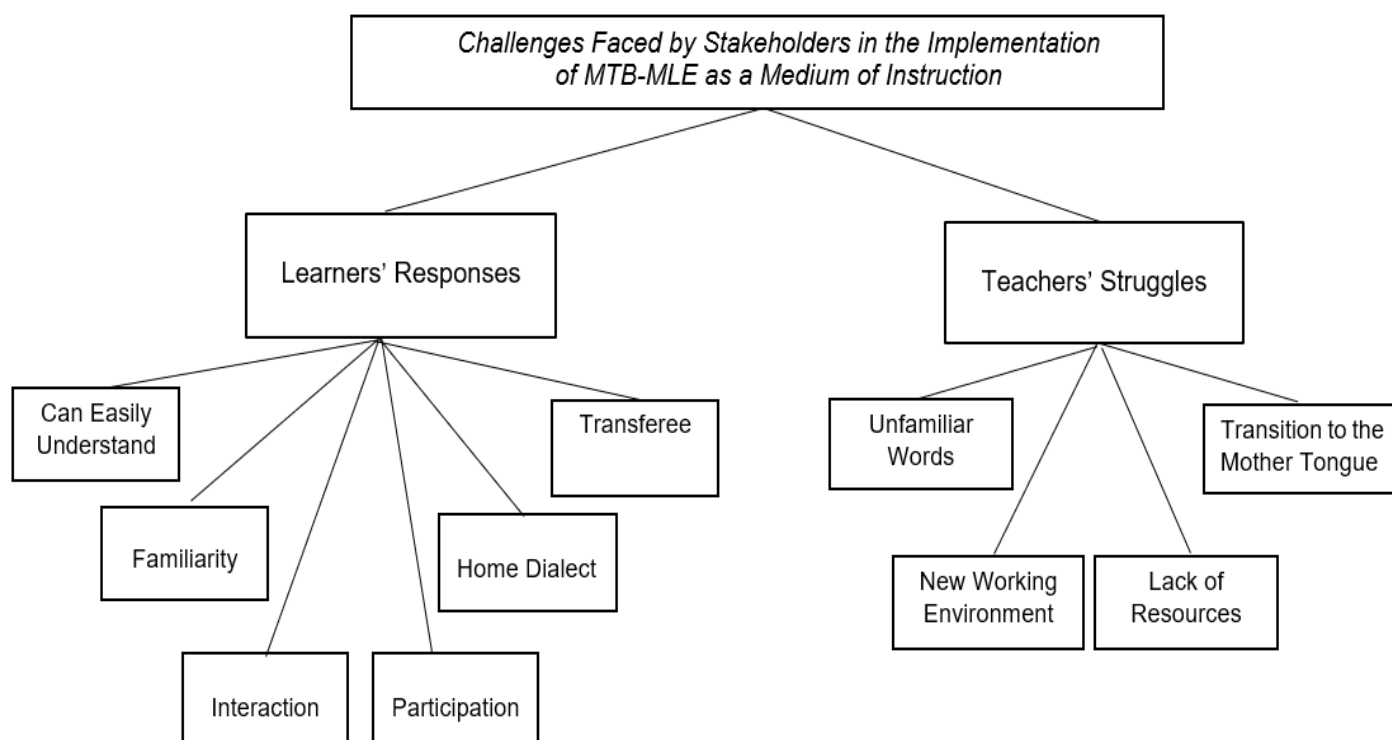


Figure 1. Challenges Faced by Stakeholders in the Implementation of MTB-MLE as a Medium of Instruction

Several key themes emerged from the in-depth interviews, highlighting the impact of the implementation of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) on stakeholders. Participants, educators, and parents shared their views, experiences, and reflections, emphasizing how these experiences influenced their personal and professional growth. Their responses underscored the idea that learning extends beyond the classroom, urging educators to adopt more flexible, learner-centered approaches. Figure 1 illustrates the challenges encountered by stakeholders during the implementation of MTB-MLE.

### Challenges Faced by Stakeholders in the Implementation of MTB-MLE as a Medium of Instruction

The challenges identified in implementing Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) are categorized into two main themes: learners' Responses and Teachers' Struggles, as shown in Figure 1. These themes reflect linguistic, cultural, and instructional barriers encountered by both students and educators within the classroom context.

Under the **Learners' Responses**, one central theme is that learners **can easily understand** when the language used in instruction is familiar to them. Several teachers observed that students showed higher comprehension levels when taught in their native dialect. Participant 1 remarked, "*Dili magnganga ang bata sa imuhang gigamit na language na Bisaya tungod ilang nasabtan sa akua,*" which means, "The use of the mother tongue during early childhood plays a crucial role in shaping children's cognitive and linguistic development, influencing their ability to acquire a second language." (Kesmi, 2024).

Closely related to this is the theme of **familiarity**, where students are more comfortable and confident when the instructional language mirrors the one spoken at home. Parent-participant 1 shared, "*Unya familiar pud sa learners ang atuang ginastorya kay mao man mostly ang ginagamit sa balay. So dali ra gyud sa mga bata ang pagsabot unya interactive learning na siya,*" translated as "The learners are familiar with the language we are using because it is mostly spoken at home. So, it is easier for the children to understand, and the learning becomes more interactive." Mehrotra (1998) similarly argued that foundational learning occurs more efficiently in a language that learners already understand and use daily.

The use of the mother tongue also improved **interaction** in class. Teachers noticed that students were more engaged when they understood the language. Participant 1 recounted, "*Mu inter-act gyud sila sa imuha, mutubag*

*gyud sila... kay kung mag-English mangud ka... silent mode,*” which means, “They really interact and respond... but when you use English, they go silent.” This is supported by NAEYC (1996), which advocates for using children’s home languages to promote comfort and engagement in early learning environments.

Increased **participation** was also noted as a benefit of MTB-MLE. When students understood what was being said, they were more likely to raise their hands and contribute, even if unsure of the correct answers. As Participant 1 shared, *“Apil man sila, mujoin man sila, maski dili kabalo magtaas-taas og kamot,”* or “They join in—even those who don’t know the answer still raise their hands.” This encourages inclusivity and builds confidence among learners.

However, challenges arose with **transferee learners**—students who moved from regions where Bisaya is not commonly spoken. This led to language gaps, especially for Muslim and Ilonggo learners. Participant 6 described, *“Ang akong school kay halos estudyante tanan kay mga Muslim. Ang uban gikan pag Cotabato... mao na ang challenges nako sa pagtudlo sa Mother Tongue,”* meaning “Most of my students are Muslim. Some are from Cotabato... that’s a challenge when teaching in the mother tongue.” The varied linguistic backgrounds of students in public schools often resulted in comprehension difficulties during instruction.

Another challenge under learners’ responses was the **home dialect** mismatch. In many cases, the dialect used in school (Sinugbuanong Binisaya) differed from the language used at home, especially for children who were exposed to English or Tagalog. Participant 3, a parent, noted, *“My daughter is mostly exposed to television and uses English and Tagalog at home... she is struggling in mother tongue,”* reflecting a growing tension between language policies and the increasingly multilingual reality of many homes. Sibayan (2010) also discussed how English exposure remains critical for global competitiveness, yet it often conflicts with MTB-MLE implementation in diverse urban communities.

On the other hand, teachers’ struggles emerged as equally significant. One key issue was the use of **unfamiliar words** in MTB-MLE materials. Though the policy promotes the mother tongue, some of the terms were uncommon or unfamiliar to teachers themselves. Participant 6 explained, *“Let’s say for example kanang shapes nga dili nato... oblong, anu diay na ‘Pihing’? Murag layo ra kaayo sa atoang nahibaw-an na mga words,”* which translates as “For example, a shape like an oblong is called ‘Pihing’? That is very far from what we normally use.” This aligns with Burton (2013), who highlighted the challenges in standardizing dialects across regions under a single “mother tongue” label.

Adjusting to a **new working environment**—especially for teachers with backgrounds in English-medium instruction—was another obstacle. Participant 2 reflected on her experience transitioning from a call center job to public school teaching: *“Gikan kog call center... nasanay nako nga English ako ginagamit... karun murag Bisaya tanan maski sa libro... naglisod kog sabot,”* which means “I came from a call center... I was used to using English... now everything is in Bisaya, even the books, and I am struggling to understand.” McCarty (2011) and Shohamy (2006) emphasized that such transitions require institutional support to ensure educators can adapt effectively in multicultural, multilingual classrooms.

A **lack of resources** also compounded implementation issues. Teachers often found textbooks confusing or lacking contextual relevance. Participant 8, a principal, stated, *“The teachers had to use the books, but they could not understand. So we really had a change from Sinugbuanong Binisaya to Filipino Tagalog,”* revealing a need for better-aligned materials. Gallego and Zubiri (2011) argued that teaching must begin with what learners already know linguistically and culturally—an element often overlooked in national textbook development.

Finally, the **transition to the mother tongue** as a medium of instruction was not seamless. Teachers frequently had to adjust lessons on the spot, translating content into more familiar terms for the students. Participant 6 shared, *“Translation og Tagalog ana akong ginabuhat para mas masabtan pa nila ako ginatudlo,”* or “I translate into Tagalog so they can better understand what I’m teaching.” Al-Seghayer (2010) cautioned that constant translation can limit the depth of both first and second language development, particularly in academic subjects like Math and Science.



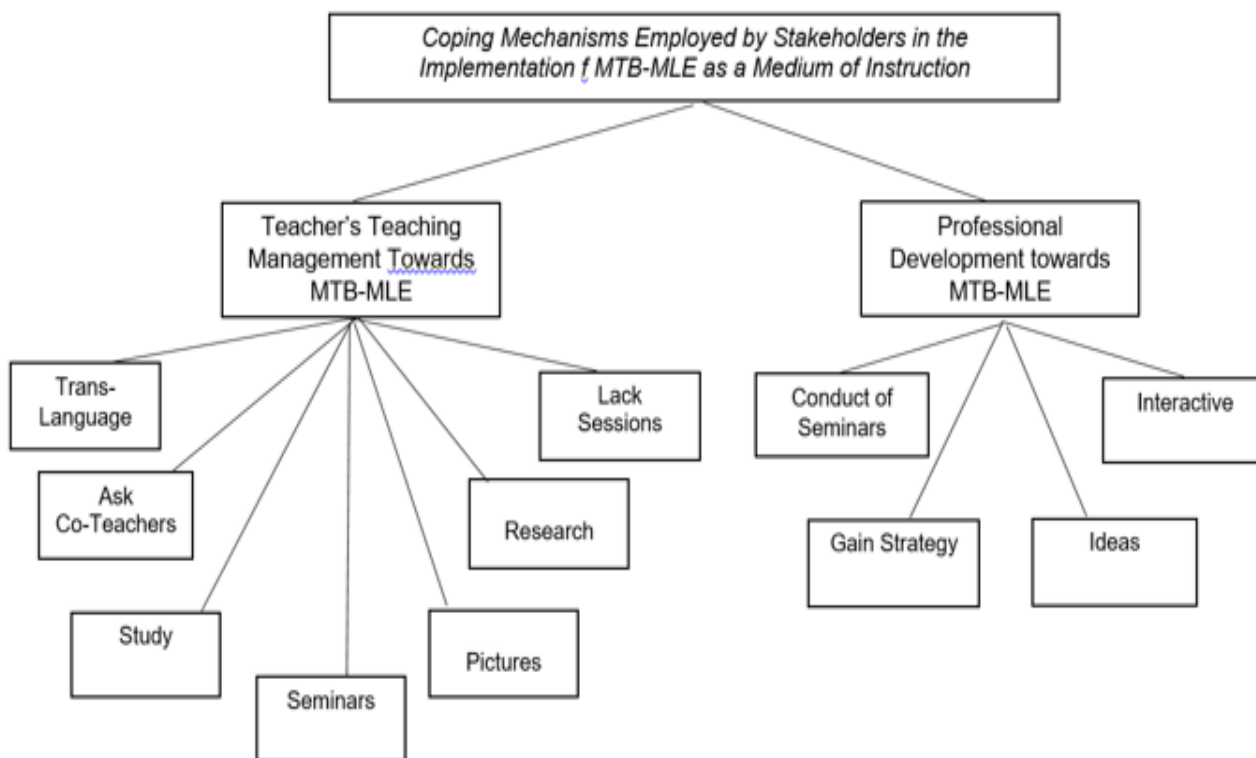


Figure 1. Coping Mechanisms Employed by Stakeholders in the Implementation of MTB-MLE as a Medium of Instruction

Stakeholders, primarily teachers, adopted a range of coping strategies in response to the challenges brought about by the implementation of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE). As shown in Figure 1, these strategies fall into two broad categories: Teacher Teaching Management and Professional Development. The teachers' ingenuity, collaboration, and willingness to adapt proved instrumental in navigating both linguistic and instructional difficulties.

### Teacher's Teaching Management Towards MTB-MLE

One of the most immediate responses to language-related challenges was the use of **trans-languaging**—the practice of switching between Bisaya, Tagalog, and English for clarity. Participant 6 shared, *"Anu translation og Tagalog ana akong ginabuhay para mas masabtan pa nila ako ginatudlo,"* translated as "I translate it into Tagalog so they can better understand what I am teaching." This strategy allowed teachers to bridge gaps in understanding, particularly for transferee students unfamiliar with the local dialect. Alidou et al. (2006) and Shohamy (2006) both recognized trans-languaging as an essential technique in multilingual classrooms to support inclusivity and comprehension.

Teachers also sought **support from co-teachers** with more experience in MTB-MLE. As Participant 2 said, *"Pag maglisod pud ko naga ask kog help sa akong mga coteachers... At least nakoy mapangutan-an every naa koy mga terms na maglisod jud ko og sabot,"* or "When I struggle, I ask help from my co-teachers...at least I have someone to ask when I don't understand certain terms." However, peer mentoring created a collaborative environment in which educators exchanged knowledge and supported one another's professional development.(AERO & ANLF 2024).

Another effective strategy was **self-study**. In the absence of consistent institutional training, teachers took it upon themselves to review lessons and materials. Participant 5 remarked, *"Sanayon jud nako siya or studyhan og taman-taman... mao jud siguro na ako gamiton,"* meaning "I really have to get used to it and study it thoroughly...I think that is what I need to do." This initiative reflects the principle of teacher agency, highlighted

by McCarty (2011) as critical in implementing localized curriculum changes.

The **use of visual aids**, such as pictures, emerged as a practical solution to vocabulary challenges. Participant 6 noted, *“Mangita ko og mga pictures para ma deepen ang understanding sa bata labaw na sa mga words na lalum,”* or “I look for pictures to deepen the children’s understanding, especially when the words are difficult.” This hands-on, visual approach is consistent with Mehrotra (1998), who emphasized the importance of learner-friendly and culturally relevant materials in mother tongue instruction.

In schools that lacked formal seminar access, teachers conducted **lack sessions**—informal professional dialogues among colleagues. As Participant 4 explained, *“We overcome this... by conducting lack sessions... making instructional materials, test papers, and sharing insights with the teachers,”* which shows their proactive approach to team-based learning and capacity-building.

Teachers also supplemented their learning by engaging in **research**, particularly online searches and consultation with peers from other schools. Participant 2 said, *“Nagasearch jud ko pud sa internet o naga ask pud sa other teachers sa other districts,”* meaning “I do research online and ask other teachers from different districts.” These efforts illustrate the resourcefulness of educators in navigating gaps in training and standard materials, which aligns with Shohamy’s (2006) emphasis on teacher-driven adaptation.

**Seminars**, when available, played a crucial role in enhancing instructional quality. Participant 2 highlighted the value of the Marungko Approach, stating, *“Marungko jud ang pinaka the best nga idea nga akong nakuha... kay every letter is different... mas maremember siya sa bata,”* or “Marungko is really the best idea I’ve learned... each letter is different, and it’s easier for children to remember.” However, not all teachers had access to such sessions. Participant 6 shared, *“Wala pako naka attend og any MTB-MLE seminar,”* or “I have never attended any MTB-MLE seminar.” These points to the need for institutional support, as stressed by Cirilo, in 2024, which explored the experiences and perceptions of teachers in implementing MTB-MLE. The research highlighted several challenges faced by educators.

### Professional Development Towards MTB-MLE

Stakeholders recognized that continued professional development was vital for the effective implementation of MTB-MLE. One key strategy was **conducting seminars** that allowed teachers to reflect on best practices, apply new strategies, and reassess their approach to instruction. Those who had the opportunity to attend seminars gained confidence in handling MTB classes more effectively.

Such sessions allowed teachers to **gain strategies** tailored for young multilingual learners. For example, the Marungko Approach mentioned by Participant 2 enhanced phonetic learning and made instruction more interactive and memorable. As Gallego & Zubiri (2011) noted, professional development programs provide the necessary pedagogical tools that align with linguistic and cultural diversity in the classroom.

Teachers also emphasized that effective MTB-MLE should be **interactive**, where learners are actively involved and responsive. Through trial-and-error in practice and collaborative sessions, teachers **exchanged ideas** for making lessons more engaging, such as using storytelling, role-playing, and games in the local language. These strategies are rooted in learner-centered education, as advocated by Mehrotra (1998) and NAEYC (1996), both of which encourage the development of classroom methods that support active learning in multilingual contexts.

### Insights and Realizations of the Participants Towards the Implementation of the MTB-MLE Instruction

The stakeholders involved in this study shared meaningful insights and realizations gained from their experience with the implementation of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE). These reflections provide a deeper understanding of its impact on learners, educators, and the overall learning environment. The emerging themes from this section include effectiveness, helpfulness, ease of understanding, need for patience, and the importance of developing a localized orthography.

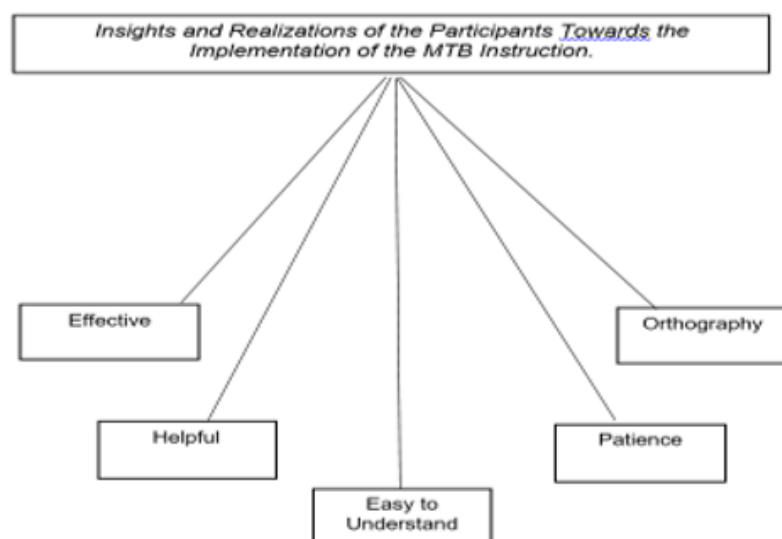


Figure 3: Insights and Realizations of the Participants Towards the Implementation of the MTB-MLE Instruction

Many participants affirmed that MTB-MLE is **effective** in improving learner engagement and comprehension. Teachers observed that children became more confident in classroom interactions and were able to express themselves better when taught in a language they understood. As Participant 1 stated, “*Effective jud kaayo siya... maka stimulate gyud siya og learning sa atong mga kabatan-onan,*” meaning, “It is truly effective... it really stimulates learning among our young learners.” This resonates with the findings of Baker (2001), who emphasized the cognitive and academic benefits of using a learner’s first language in early education.

Participants also found the mother tongue **helpful** in facilitating classroom learning. It allowed both teachers and students to better connect with lesson content. Participant 7 shared, “*Nakatabang pud syempre, Bisaya man gud ato gamiton, masabtan nila ang mga lesson,*” translated as, “It’s helpful, of course—because we use Bisaya, they understand the lessons.” This supports Alidou et al. (2006), who argue that children learn best when taught in the language they speak at home.

In addition to being practical and helpful, many found MTB-MLE to be **easy to understand**, especially for students who are exposed to the dialect in their everyday lives. However, challenges still arose due to regional differences in language. Participant 3, a parent, said, “*Some of the words are quite difficult kung Bisaya,*” or “Some of the Bisaya words are quite difficult.” This insight highlights the need for localized linguistic adaptation even within so-called “mother tongue” instruction—a critique supported by Burton (2013), who notes the lack of standardization in regional dialects within MTB-MLE programs.

One recurring realization was the necessity of **patience** on the part of teachers. Implementing MTB-MLE required not just technical skill but emotional resilience, especially when dealing with students from mixed dialect backgrounds. Participant 5 remarked, “*Kailangan jud og taas na pasensiya sa bata about anang MTB-MLE para makasabot sila og tarong,*” meaning, “You really need a lot of patience when it comes to MTB-MLE so that the children can properly understand.” This emphasizes the emotional labor required of teachers, especially in early childhood settings.

Perhaps the most compelling and consistent realization among stakeholders was the **need for a localized orthography** for Davao-based learners. Seven out of eight participants expressed the necessity of developing an orthographic system that accurately reflects the specific Bisaya variant spoken in Davao City. Participant 2 said, “*Unta naa lang juy Orthography na Bisaya na pang Dabawenyo kay para ang mga terms mas dali sabton sa mga bata,*” or “I hope there will be an orthography for Davaoeño Bisaya so that the terms will be easier for the children to understand.” Similarly, Participant 8, a school principal, noted, “*There is no clear orthography of Davao... my recommendation is to come up with the real Orthography of the Davaoeño Filipino,*” pointing to a systemic gap in materials development. This aligns with Gallego & Zubiri (2011), who emphasized that instruction should begin with what learners already know, including the specific language variety they use daily.

In summary, participants recognized the promise of MTB-MLE in supporting learner comprehension and classroom participation. However, they also emphasized the importance of cultural and linguistic context, the emotional readiness of teachers, and the urgent need to localize and standardize the language of instruction to serve its intended purpose truly.

## IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTION

In the experiences of teachers handling little young minds with different needs and learning styles, it was challenged in each one of them educators to impart knowledge through mother tongue-based instruction. I understand those stakeholders, the principals, teachers, and parents, who are having difficulty in teaching learners and adopting another dialect as a medium of instruction. On the other hand, I commend their love and passion for teaching as they find ways to teach these learners in their innovative way. Though they have experienced challenges in adopting the different dialects that are new to them, it does not hinder them from providing an effective way of learning for their learners. They viewed the implementation of the mother tongue-based education curriculum as a challenging part of their chosen field of teaching.

Because teachers love their profession, they cope in different ways. They innovate, research, study, and upgrade their learning to teach effectively. The support of the heads, the presence of the parents to their learners, positive motivation, and sharing of experiences by teachers as well as the parents provide a greater opportunity to explore and learn from their live experiences to provide productive learning for their students.

In this study, I have found out that the love and passion of teaching in their chosen profession and the dedication of their work were motivated to inspire and touch the lives of every young individual. They have struggled, but because of their love of teaching, they tried their best to provide a good education for their learners. Teaching is a noble profession; I commend those teachers who spend their lives and time educating learners and molding them to be good citizens in this world. As they viewed the impact of education and the changes of the curriculum in the education system, these educators accepted these changes and issues wholeheartedly and extended patience to provide a meaningful education to their learners. The insights conveyed from the experiences of the key informants have also allowed different eye-openers to run freely, indicating the need for further strokes for the improvement of the quality. Stakeholders -principals, teachers, and parents played a vital role in society and the education of this learner who experienced the challenges of the MTB as a medium of instruction in the educational system of the Department of Education. These qualifications can be attained through the availability of experts and department heads to render their service to them in providing inputs, sending them to seminars and training courses and workshops, and encouraging them to conduct lack sessions once a week or month. With this line of the plan, the motivation, confidence, and capability of the key informants in handling and teaching MTB-MLE as a medium of instruction would have positive remarks and productive learning to their learners.

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