From English-only policy to MTB-MLE: a proposed model for a contextualized three-way immersion program in the Philippines

By Junnie Armel T. Salud

The Philippines is a nation with rich linguistic diversity. Having two official languages, at least 19 recognized regional languages, and more than 180 native languages, policymakers find it difficult to come up with a language policy that addresses the medium of instruction in schools. Language policy for Philippine schools has fluctuated greatly over the last century with a different policy for nearly every generation.

Due to the richness of languages in the Philippines, the competition as to which language becomes the medium of instruction in schools comes into the equation. The school as an important unit of the community helps instill the importance of self-identity as reflected in one’s own language. If this will not be nurtured, the language that a student once owned will be replaced, together with a new set of foreign ideologies. However, students also need to keep abreast of the trends and become functional members of the international community. These competing views of language learning for both the mother tongue and the English language keep language-policymaking progressive and difficult at the same time.

This paper attempts to provide a balance in the language education policy discussion by proposing a model that encompasses other contextual factors not previously included during the inception of the mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) framework. The paper will also examine the previous language policies to trace the basis for the present language policy, the role of the English language, the initiatives of the government in today’s “language policy shift”, and the different perceptions of stakeholders about MTB-MLE.