Panel session: MTB-MLE in the Philippines

Panel introduction

The mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) experience in the Philippines has been a story of collaboration among various stakeholders. NGOs; higher education institutions; local government units; local writers, publishers, media, and businesses; as well as individual advocates came together to help the MTB-MLE champions in the Department of Education to formulate policies and programs to mainstream the implementation of MTB-MLE all over the country. This panel includes three papers that describe the synergy of the various actors and the strategic role taken by some specific sectors.

Policies, practices, and prospects in MTB-MLE: synergies for sustainable and inclusive basic education in the Philippines

By Antonio D. Igcalinos

This paper examines the implementation of MTB-MLE in the Philippines in view of, and as provided for in, Republic Act No. 10533 in its broader, beyond-the-school context, probing into the synergies among key stakeholders to determine the state of policy implementation after four years.

Existing studies on language-in-education policy in the Philippines have focused mainly on what happens inside the classroom, on pedagogy, and on learning content, while leaving questions on inclusion, identity, diversity, participation, and meaningful interaction among learners to the often unsteady decision-making at the top level of government.

A policy ecosystems analysis of the foundational principles of MTB-MLE, the legal provisions that articulate these, and the broader community as the locus and testing ground was done to understand why we are in the current state of implementation as well as to keep the conversation open on what can be done to make policy implementation inclusive and sustainable.
The vital role of teacher education institutions in facilitating synergy of MTB-MLE initiatives in Eastern Visayas, Philippines

By Voltaire Q. Oyzon

With the implementation of MTB-MLE under the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, this study sets out to document the collaborative efforts of a teacher education institution (the Leyte Normal University/LNU), local government units, visual artists, local writers, and information technology experts in Eastern Visayas to respond to the challenges in the implementation of the said program.

Like other non-Tagalog speaking regions, the Eastern Visayas lacks mother tongue primary texts, vocabulary lists, grammar lessons, and, more fundamentally, the references needed for educators to create these materials. To fill this void, LNU, together with the different groups mentioned above, (1) proposed an orthography for Winaray, (2) created a language corpus, which led to (3) frequency word lists, (4) a five-language classified dictionary (English-Winaray-Kana-Inabaknon-Tagalog), (5) a 1,000-word reference Winaray-English dictionary, (6) software for determining the grade level of a Waray text, and (7) grammar and teacher training, (8) a comprehensive Winaray-English dictionary (in progress), (9) creation of Winaray stories for children. Under the auspices of LNU and other government agencies, these activities were spearheaded by local writers.

For a very long time, the local language of Eastern Visayas was never officially used in universities and schools. With the implementation of MTB-MLE, it is now necessary for the universities to recognize the local talents who are experts in the local arts and culture and tap their expertise, from the codification of the local language to the development of educational materials such as stories for children, etc.
Popularizing MTB-MLE beyond the school gates: the strategic participation of provincial government units

By Leslie Gumba

With over 170 distinct languages spoken all over the archipelago, the Philippines was among the first in Southeast Asia to institutionalize the use of the mother tongue in basic education in 2009. However, it has been noted that barriers to successful implementation include low social regard, limited use of local languages, and lack of literacy materials and other resources.

Addressing such concerns would require collaboration among various MTB-MLE stakeholders in the community. It has been found that local governments can play a strategic role as they harness their influence and resources to create synergy and support for the implementation of MTB-MLE beyond the school gates.

At least three particular local government units in the Philippines have initiated provincial-level policies and programs to increase the visibility of local languages and promote bilingualism in public spaces like government offices, business establishments, local media, daycare centers, as well as in schools and universities. They also organized festivals and competitions for the same purposes, and allocated resources to train teachers in MTB-MLE and provided instructional materials like big books and bilingual dictionaries. These initiatives, often lodged at the local tourism office, are perceived as means to strengthen the formation of local identities and to support the education sector. The use of local languages in labeling, branding, and promoting local products and services can potentially promote the perception that mother tongue can also generate livelihood.