MTB-MLE: the Philippine policy experience

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The Philippine educational system has been beset by low learning outcomes, low participation rates, and high dropout rates. Several international research studies have proven that these could be attributed to the language of learning in school. Filipinos have 12 major languages and around 163 minor languages, and the problem of what languages should be adapted as the language of learning for children’s improved academic performance remains a subject of debate.

The 2003 UNESCO position paper champions children’s rights, cultural identity, language, and values. This position was underscored by the report of the Presidential Commission on Educational Reform (2000), which states that (1) success in a bilingual educational system is best achieved by ensuring that the child becomes literate in his mother tongue before attempting to acquire literacy in another language, and (2) children who learn and write in the mother tongue before learning another language are more successful second-language learners than their peers who did not become literate in their first language. These beliefs support mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) implementation in the country.

This presentation aims to share the Philippines’ experience in the implementation of MTB-MLE, including a description of the historical evolution of the country’s MTB-MLE policy, the macro-level challenges faced by the Department of Education in its implementation, as well as the reforms and actions it has designed and applied to help reach the country’s goal of building a more equitable learning environment for all students.