

Are IMs Culturally Relevant?” A Critical Analysis of the Instructional Materials Used in Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education Program

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Benjamin B. Mangila

School of Teacher Education, J.H. Cerilles State College, Dumingag,
Zamboanga del Sur, Philippines
benman1586@gmail.com

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Abstract – *Instructional materials (IMs) play a very important role for successful teaching and learning. As such, they must be culturally relevant; that is, they reflect and accommodate cultural plurality in order to support student learning in diverse classrooms. Thus, this study was conducted to examine the cultural relevance of the instructional materials used by elementary teachers in the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) Program. It made use of the descriptive survey and Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as methods in examining critically the instructional materials commonly used in teaching mother tongue. Findings of this study revealed that instructional materials used by teachers in teaching the mother tongue subject are not culturally relevant as inconsistencies exist on the cultural messages contained in them. Thus, this study is very helpful as it serves as guide to DepEd officials and most especially to teachers in the making of localized and culturally relevant instructional materials as these greatly help concretize students’ learning experiences inside the classrooms. Furthermore, it also encourages the Department of Education to provide enough instructional materials to teachers as scarcity of material resources becomes a major reason why instructional materials become culturally irrelevant. Lastly, it also suggests that teachers must be regularly sent to trainings and seminars to equip them with the knowledge and skills needed in the production of localized and culturally meaningful instructional materials in their classrooms.*

Keywords - *cultural relevance, instructional materials (IMs), Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE)*

INTRODUCTION

Language is an important factor that affects education. Thus, Education for All (EFA) goals will not be attained if children are not given the opportunity to learn using their mother tongue. Using mother tongue or the home languages is seen as a key to increase children’s access to school as well as to facilitate learning, including the learning of a second language (L2). The use of vernacular or the child’s first language helps him/her easily learn how to read and write and to learn essential concepts in different academic subjects as well as other languages. It will be more beneficial if a familiar language is utilized during the early years of the child’s educational programs. It allows them to develop early reading skills faster compared to using a foreign language [1].

Malone [2], as cited by Sanchez [3], states that using the mother tongue gives children an equal opportunity to gain access and facilitate learning. Several studies claim

that using the child’s home language is an important factor that helps children easily learn how to read and write as well as learn academic contents and other languages. Also defined as the first language, home language, and heritage language, mother tongue is regarded as the language that is best for use especially in beginning education.

Meanwhile, Ouane & Glanz [4] as mentioned by Oyzon [5], define mother tongue as the language or languages that the child knows first and its grammar has been learned by the child before he/she starts to school. In multilingual societies, children may grow having more than one language. They may often have more than one mother tongue even if many languages are being spoken within the family or in their neighborhood. Therefore, education is made available in one of the languages known first by the child.

Furthermore, Licuanan [6] asserts that the use of the first language or the vernacular facilitates better student learning. It does not only enhance the quality of

education but also as a tool for learning a second language like English. She states further that using English as medium of instruction has detrimental effects because students would not learn well as much as they could when they are taught using the first language.

In compliance with DepEd Order No. 74 series of 2009 [7], the Department of Education Zamboanga del Sur Division implemented in June 2012 the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) Program in the province. This order requires the effective use of more than two languages for literacy and instruction. Apart from learning Filipino, the country's official and national language, and English, the international language [8], students in the MTB-MLE Program will be provided equitable opportunities to formally learn their mother or native tongue in the classrooms. As defined by Phillipson [9], mother or native tongue is any language that is spoken by at least one of the students' parents or by any member of the students' communities.

Depending on locality, a mother tongue subject that is taught in the MTB-MLE Program could either be Tagalog (with 21.5 million speakers), Cebuano (18.5 million), Ilokano (7.7 million), Hiligaynon (6.9 million), Bikol (4.5 million), Waray (3.1 million), Kapampangan (2.3 million), Pangasinense (1.5 million), Maranao (1 million), and Maguindanaoan (1 million) (2000 Philippine census as cited by Nolasco [10]; Nolasco [11]. In Zamboanga del Sur, Cebuano and Subanen are the two vernaculars. Subanen is the native language of the province; however, very few Zamboangans are able to use it. With more than 18 million native speakers, Cebuano has become the regional lingua franca in Visayas and Mindanao [10]. The predominance of Cebuano over the Subanen language forces DepEd Zamboanga del Sur to choose Cebuano as the mother tongue subject in all public elementary schools under the MTB-MLE Program.

The MTB-MLE implementation in the country is in consonance with the linguistic and cultural diversity in education that is espoused by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). UNESCO [12] presupposes that education should not only to prepare them to participate in national and global undertakings but also to address individual communities' distinctive linguistic and cultural needs. By teaching them in their mother tongue, the students will widen their knowledge and deepen their appreciation of their own language and culture [12]; [13]. These claims are strongly supported by Vygotsky's

Socio-Cultural theory which asserts that connections between language and culture precede the cognitive development and learning among children. According to Vygotsky (14), social interactions between people, like watching and learning from other speakers, is how a child acquires knowledge. Children will also have greater cognitive and linguistic skills if teaching starts with the experiences and vocabulary that they are already familiar with. He also believes that each culture has specific “tools” that are used for social interactions and are specific to each culture.

Most studies in language education, particularly those in the English language, focus mainly on textbook analysis. Generally considered as texts [15], textbooks and other instructional materials contain semiotic modes, which according to van Leeuwen [16], are meaningful resources of information. Semiotic modes can be categorized into four. Linguistic modes are the words found in written texts. Oral modes are utterances in oral communication. Visual modes include pictures, maps, and cartoon images. Materiality pertains to the surfaces of production such as plastic, rock, paper, etc., and tools of production like the brush and pencil [17]. When these semiotic modes play together, they produce a cultural discourse or a socially constructed schematic knowledge and representation [18]; [16] of people, products, places, practices, and cultural perspectives [19].

In spite of the richness of textbooks analysis in English language education, there are still other areas which are not fully investigated. Scholars seldom critically examine the actual use of instructional materials (IMs) in the classrooms. Canagarajah's [20] attempt to comprehend the drawings, writings, and glosses of students in textbooks discloses their struggles and ambiguities in learning the English language.

Even though textbooks analysis is usually done among language experts, analysis of instructional materials (IMs) that are used by teachers in their classes is seldom done. Not all textbooks are utilized in the class and not all classes utilize textbooks. Furthermore, some of these textbooks are not even culturally relevant to students [20]. Using culturally relevant instructional materials is one of the primary goals of the MTB-MLE Program in the Philippines. Thus, involvement of and the support from community members such as elders, educators, parents, and local “experts” are regarded in creating culturally relevant instructional materials [13]; [12]. Furthermore, students' knowledge, skills, stories, songs, and culture can also be conceived as educational resources [2]. How true this situation is in the actual

implementation of the MTB-MLE Program in Dumingag, Zamboanga del Sur is an area where this study finds worth investigating.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

In view of the foregoing scenario, this study was conducted to critically examine the cultural relevance of the instructional materials (IMs) commonly used by Grades I to III teachers in the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) Program. It also determined the instructional materials commonly used by teachers in teaching mother tongue. Furthermore, it also attempted to analyze the cultural discourses or messages present in the instructional materials commonly used, their similarities and differences, as well as the main causes why these similarities and differences occur on cultural discourses.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

Research Design

This study made use of both the quantitative and qualitative (mixed) methods of research in examining the cultural relevance of the instructional materials commonly used by teachers in teaching mother tongue. Descriptive statistics, a quantitative research approach, was used by the researcher in determining the most common instructional materials used in teaching mother tongue based on frequency and percentage distribution of teachers who have utilized them. Meanwhile, textual analysis, a qualitative research approach, was employed by the researcher in examining the instructional materials to ascertain the particular cultural discourses present in them.

Research Setting

This study was undertaken in the two central elementary schools of Dumingag, Zamboanga del Sur during the School Year 2016-2017. The said elementary schools were Dumingag SpEd Center and Guitran Central Elementary School. These elementary schools represented the two school districts, Dumingag I and II, of the Department of Education (DepEd) in Dumingag, Zamboanga del Sur, Philippines.

Research Participants

The respondents who were involved in this study were the 10 Grades I to III teachers who taught the mother tongue subject in both elementary schools. Five

teachers were chosen from Dumingag SpEd Center and another five teachers were selected from Guitran Central Elementary School. These teachers were purposely chosen by the researcher because of their first-hand knowledge about the teaching of mother tongue as an elementary subject as well as on the preparation and use of instructional materials for the said subject. Prior to the conduct of the study, the researcher sought written permission first from the district supervisors, school principals, and most importantly to the Grades I to III teachers who were the participants of this study. To establish anonymity among the participants involved, the researcher assigned codes to each participant and assured them that their responses would be treated with utmost confidentiality.

Sources of Data

The instructional materials that were commonly utilized by the Grades I to III teachers in teaching the mother tongue subject in the MTB-MLE Program were the researchers' main sources of the data analyzed in this study.

Data Analysis Procedure

The researcher conducted first a survey to determine the types and characteristics of the instructional materials used by teachers in teaching mother tongue. Only those common types of instructional materials (IMs) were carefully examined by the researcher. These instructional materials were tangible, could be kept, used, and reused in the class discussions. Other instructional materials that were rarely utilized were of least importance to teachers and to the researcher as well, thus, they were not considered in this study.

Descriptive statistics and in-depth discussions should complement each other in the use and analysis of the instructional materials. Descriptive statistics used dealt with numbers to highlight the frequency and percentage distribution of the instructional materials used. Meanwhile, the in-depth discussions made in this study were guided by Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) which involves three levels of analysis: description, interpretation, and explanation.

According to Fairclough [17], description as the first level refers to the textual analysis of formal properties of the given texts. At this level, the interplay of four semiotic modes – linguistic, oral, visual, and materiality – in creating cultural discourses is explained. In the interpretation level, texts are conceived as part of institutional contexts. They are not separate entities but

products of production and resources for use. Results from textual analysis are then linked to institutional practices, producers’ perceived interests, and consumers of texts.

The highest level is the analysis of social practices, in which the term ‘social’ encompasses all distinct processes – political, economic, global, etc. - where human beings are involved. This level analyzes the dialectal and complex relationship between texts and society. Texts could perform two roles. They may either reflect the common, dominant, and sensical views of the society or may challenge and change these views [17].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Instructional Materials Commonly Used by Teachers in Teaching Mother Tongue

To determine the instructional materials commonly used by teachers in teaching the mother tongue subject, the researcher conducted several classroom surveys among the ten teachers involved in the two elementary schools of Dumingag, Zamboanga del Sur. A total of 20 classroom surveys for eight consecutive days were conducted by the researcher. Four days were spent by the researcher in conducting the said classroom surveys for each elementary school.

The classroom surveys conducted by the researcher recorded different types of instructional materials (IMs) used by the teachers. During the classroom surveys, the researcher noticed several exercises written on the board, poems, and stories written on bond papers, cartolinas, and Manila papers, real and other three dimensional objects (e.g. bags, notebooks, pencils, balls, and toy fruits), compiled papers of synonyms and antonyms, singular and plural nouns, diphthongs, verbs, possessive and demonstrative pronouns, and adjectives which were paired with images of persons, animals, objects, etc., teachers’ guides and learners’ materials, and activity booklets in Cebuano that were provided by the Department of Education. These booklets contained sketching, coloring, matching type, etc. and other activities.

Table 1 presents the most common instructional materials with the corresponding frequency and percentage distribution of the teachers who actually used them in teaching mother tongue. The data showed that images were used by all teachers; word cards were utilized by 8 or 80% of the teachers; while big books were employed by 7 or 70% of these teachers in teaching mother tongue. Based on the given data, it could be

deduced that the three most commonly used instructional materials were word cards, images, and big books.

Table 1. Instructional Materials Commonly Used by Teachers in Teaching Mother Tongue

Instructional Materials	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Word Cards	8	80.00
Images	10	100.00
Big Books	7	70.00

Cultural Discourses Present on the Instructional Materials Used

Cultural Discourses in Word Cards

Word cards, also known as name or flash cards, contained not only the common names of people, places, objects, animals, etc. Some words written on these cards were adjectives, verbs, synonyms and antonyms. Each of them was written on a bond paper, if not, on a ‘cartolina or cardboard’. Teachers either manually wrote or printed the words on these cards. The common size of these word cards was equivalent to that of a one-fourth size of a bond paper.

A total of 112 word cards were written in the Cebuano language. More than half (53%) of these word cards were *pungan* (nouns), 35% were *pulong lihok* (verbs), 5% were *pulong hulagway* (adjectives), and 7% were *suhing-pulong* (antonyms) and *kapulong* (synonyms). Meanwhile, no word cards that contained *pulingan* (pronouns), *pungwayan* (adverbs), and words with *iglalanggikit* (affixes).

Generally, the word cards available were not contextualized. The ideas conveyed by these word cards were not necessarily culturally specific. For instance, the common nouns written on these word cards were just utilized in determining persons, animals or things (*i.e. lolo, lola, mangga, kalabasa, payong, okra, baka, usa*) but they did not give hints to a particular culture. Descriptions, connotations, or even cultural meanings attached to them were not also available. Meanwhile, the word cards having some adjectives just gave descriptions however the people, things, places, and animals being described were missing (*e.g. pula, dato, dako, gamay*). Lastly, the verbs written on the word cards potentially showed practices but the information regarding the persons who performed, to whom and in what situations was not even provided (*e.g. nagkaon, nagdula, naghalay, naglung-ag*).



Figure 1. Sample Word Cards Used In Teaching Mother Tongue

Cultural Discourses in Images

Images mostly contained visual modes of people, places, products, animals as well as practices. A number of images available were printed but some of them were manually drawn by the teachers. Some were even colored while others were not. Typically, a harder piece of paper (e.g. ‘cartolina and cardboard’) was used to draw or print an image to make it more durable for repeated use in the class.

Lots of images available were also decontextualized since they did not give other essential information (i.e. linguistic and other visual information) which could be utilized in determining the entity’s real location, its purpose, function, or meaning. Most of these images were procured and made individually by teachers while some of them were created by the pupils particularly those which were drawn on the activity booklets.

A total of 87 images were gathered by the researcher from the elementary teachers who were teaching the mother tongue subject. To a greater extent, cultural contents of these images were also linked to their materiality. For example, manually colored and printed images and may portray Cebuano, Filipino, non-Filipino cultures, or they may also depict no clear cultural meanings at all. Both the printed and manually colored images could construct or even showcase some elements of the Cebuano culture or the Filipino culture in general.

In their mother tongue subject, there were several printed images used by the teachers. For instance, there was an image of the national flag which was pasted on the display wall and on the cardboard used in teaching a lesson. An image of our national hero, Dr. Jose P. Rizal, was not only posted on the classroom wall but another image of him was also used as an instructional material. Aside from him, there were also images of the present and former presidents of the Philippines, Pres. Rodrigo Roa Duterte and Benigno “Noy” Aquino, III and the world-renowned boxer, Manny Pacquiao. Likewise, some images of well-known Filipino celebrities were also used. Images of these famous Filipino celebrities

were of Coco Martin, a popular actor, and Sarah Geronimo, a popular singer and actress. Other images showed some of the famous places in the Philippines like the renowned Banaue Rice Terraces and Tangub City, dubbed as the Christmas Symbol of the Philippines. Furthermore, some images taken depicted Filipino culture like those images portraying common Filipino celebrations like the fiesta (e.g. Pista ng Patron), Buwan ng Wika (National Language Month), Pasko (Christmas), and Araw ng Pagtatapos (Graduation Day).

There were also printed yet manually colored images that showed Filipino values. These values, as shown on given images, included pakikisama (companionship), pagtutulungan (cooperation), pagkamasipag (industry), pagmamahal sa kapaligiran (love for the environment), and pananampalataya sa Diyos (religiosity).



Figure 2. Printed yet Colored Images Depicting Common Filipino Values

However, there were other printed and colored images used which portrayed non-Filipino culture as well. For examples, there were images of families whose members had certain features which are not typical to us Filipinos; there were images showing Caucasian professionals wearing their uniforms at work; and there were also images showing blonde children dreaming of what they would like to become in the future.

Furthermore, there were also some images that didn’t depict clear or specific culture at all generally because they were decontextualized. Examples of these were the images of the crow, the hen and her chicks, the cats and the dogs, the meat and the banana, the bees, and the hand marks.

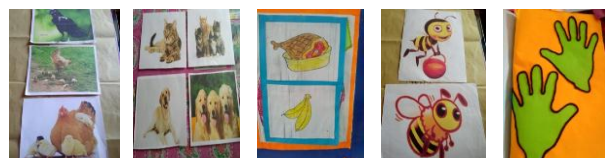


Figure 3. Some Images Depicting Ambiguous Cultural Contents

Cultural Discourses in Big Books

Generally, stories could contain three semiotic modes: linguistic, visual, and materiality. For example, in the stories collected, their contents were simple and brief. After the characters were briefly described, a problem was presented, and then came the resolution. Most stories were about people, although few stories talked about personified characters (i.e. animals and objects). There were 25 big books used by teachers in teaching mother tongue but only 3 of them were written in Cebuano, 18 stories were in Filipino, while only 4 in English. Although most stories were written in Filipino and English, teachers still used them in teaching mother tongue. To do this, teachers often translated these stories during their classes to help pupils understand better.

There were two patterns used in naming the characters that were used in these stories. Some names sounded distinctly Cebuano and Filipino while some were “Englishized” names. These distinct Cebuano and Filipino names were Aling Oktopeda, Emang Engkantada, Lam-ang, Ani, at Ingkong while the “Englishized” names were Jessie, Momon, Monica, Raquel, Celia, Conrad, Joey, and Lucy. Mostly, the main characters in these stories were young.

Generally, the stories took place in rural areas as shown by grasslands, hills, trees, and rivers. They mostly dealt with family members’ relationships; children’s responsibilities at home, in school, and on themselves; and Filipinos’ positive attitudes and smiles during troubled times. Some stories did not only employ personified characters but also depicted and taught Filipino values like unity, industry, respectfulness, kindness, perseverance, etc. These stories included “Nagakahiusa,” “Si Langgam at Si Tipaklong,” “Si Emang Engkantada at ang Tatlong Haragan,” “Ayan na si Bolet Bulate,” “Si Joey at ang Gulay Gang” and “Si Agong at Si Kune”. A popular Bicolano story titled “Biag ni Lam-ang” was also used by teachers which showed not only the epic hero’s adventure but also cultural beliefs, values, and practices of early Filipinos.

Sometimes, the quality of the materials used and clarity of the cultural contents were compromised. For instance, based on the interviews with these teachers, they said that in teaching their pupils a lesson about family, they used to tell stories showing images of unusual families. These family members were called using Filipino terms like “itay,” “inay,” “kuya,” and “ate” however they had characteristics not common to us Filipinos. Even the children introduced were different from typical Filipino parents. Indeed, there existed a

mismatch between the concept taught and the story from where it was mainly based.

Similarities and Differences on the Cultural Discourses Present

Basing mainly on the analysis of the three commonly used instructional materials, the researcher clearly observed that there was no one-to-one correspondence between the language subject taught and the culture that should be considered. For instance, the cultural messages that were created or present on the word cards, images, and big books that were used in teaching mother tongue were really very different. More specifically, the multiplicity of cultural discourses was mostly depicted only on images and big books but no specific cultural messages could be seen on the word cards for they were only utilized to give distinct names and not the full descriptions and connotations or cultural meanings that could be attached to people, places, animals or even to objects.

Causes of Similarities and Differences on the Cultural Discourses Present

The multiplicity of the cultural discourses which transpired on the instructional materials commonly used by teachers was not largely brought by the teachers’ conscious efforts to challenge the correspondence between the language subject and culture. Instead, this multiplicity of cultural discourses was due to the teachers’ lack of material resources and awareness as to what culture that should be considered in the subject. The teachers were more concerned with presenting these word cards, images, story books, as well as other instructional materials regardless of their size, quality, and contents rather than having no materials to present during the class. Thus, the teachers’ main concern in using these instructional materials and other resources was not actually linguistically and culturally ideological but more of practicality.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

One of the primary goals of the implementation of the MTB-MLE Program in the country is the creation and use of localized and culturally meaningful instructional materials. However, findings of this study revealed that the instructional materials created and used by teachers are not culturally relevant at all due to the inconsistencies on the cultural discourses that are present in them. These findings do not corroborate with the claims made by Vygotsky in his Socio-Cultural Theory which asserts that teaching must start from the

experiences and vocabulary that the learner is already familiar with so that they can easily make connections with the new ideas and skills that are taught. He also stresses that children’s cognitive skills will only be fully developed when there is an intimate relationship between the learner, his first language, and cultural milieus. Moreover, the inconsistencies found in cultural discourses occur because of the teachers’ lack of material resources as well as knowledge about the culture that shall be included in the making of these instructional materials. Thus, the Department of Education, through its Instructional Materials Development Committee, should always consider the specific cultural information that shall be included in the making of instructional materials for the mother tongue subject. DepEd also has to provide enough books and other instructional materials to teachers handling mother tongue subjects as scarcity of instructional materials is also seen as a major problem why inconsistencies on cultural messages occur in the instructional materials prepared by teachers. Teachers can also be included as members of the IMs development committees in their respective schools to ensure the production of culturally meaningful instructional materials. Furthermore, they must also be sent to seminars and trainings to equip them with the knowledge and skills on the production and actual use of instructional materials in the classrooms.

This study, however, has a certain limitation. Given the study site is small, its findings may not generally tell about the cultural relevance of the instructional materials used by other teachers. Thus, it calls for a similar investigation in another schools to examine also the cultural relevance of the instructional materials that teachers use in teaching the mother tongue subject. Furthermore, it recommends that another study shall be undertaken to investigate the teachers’ actual use of these instructional materials during the class discussions to ascertain if correspondences or inconsistencies on cultural discourses also occur. Lastly, it also recommends that aside from conducting the same study in the MTB-MLE subject, other language subjects like English and Filipino, can be considered other areas of interest.

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