The benefits of Mother Tongue in Teaching-Learning Process

INTRODUCTION

Background of the study

Mother tongue is the language that we are used to; it is commonly used at home. Mother tongue usually depends on the location. Language differs from one place to another. Under the new DepEd law, mother tongue has become part of the curriculum that is to be taught in the elementary or primary years of the children. Learning the lessons in mother tongue will help the students to appreciate their native language including the proper use of it. Not only learning of English Filipino subjects. Mother tongue is new field of teaching. Even the teacher learns because this new curriculum is not often used. It is added to the subject to faster the learning skills of the students teaching the mother tongue the better understanding of the English and Filipino subjects. Because these subjects have the same contents as to English and Filipino. It is simply a translation. But there are children who have a difficulty understanding. English but when it is translated or explained to the dialect used they understand easily.

Mother tongue is useful in communication especially with the children. Example of mother tongue is Cebuano, Ilonggo, Muslim and Manobo language. It depends on the morality of the population in the school and in the location of the school. Promotion of mother tongue is an aid developing the K+12 program due do speedy teaching to the children.

According to Bender et al., 2005,. The benefits of Mother Tongue- Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) may be more cost-effective than current monolingual models of education, or education that is provided in language other than the mother tongue. This is due to the increased efficiency that results when fewer students repeat and drop out. Although the start-up costs of an. Mother Tongue- Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) program may be higher than normal recurrent costs, they will be recuperated in the long term, as the system becomes more efficient, fewer students drop out, and more students learn and become productive members of the economy. Mother Tongue- Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) programmers also bridge the gap between the culture at home and the one at school and in mainstream society. They not only improve learning, they also broaden outlooks, increase tolerance and foster a respect for cultural diversity. These programmers are also effective in promoting a culture of peace and building equitable and inclusive societies.

According to the Ethnologies, there are 171 living languages spoken in the Philippines today. For the most part, this linguistic variety has not been accurately
reflected in governmental and educational policies. The current constitution declares both English and Filipino (Tagalog) to be the official languages of the country, as both are spoken in metro Manila, the nation’s capital.

Making English and Tagalog the official languages of the Philippines is a practical move, seeing as there needs to be language that can be used to do business and trade as well as to communicate on both national and international levels. Still, the constitutional declaration of these two languages as official and the other languages as auxiliary takes a discriminatory tone when looking at how it resonates in other policies and in the public sphere.
Statement of the problem

In their study there are some problems that we encounter:

- What are the reactions of the teacher when mother tongue is to be taught?
- What are benefits of mother tongue?
- How do children respond to the adjustment in learning mother tongue?

Objectives of the study

After the study we are able to:

- Know mother tongue is really beneficial
- Identify the ways of teaching mother tongue
- Rate students appreciation of mother tongue

Significance of the study

This study is important because students are now interested in the English and Filipino language. They forget their own language. In their study the minds of the children and teachers are open to the reason why the benefits of mother tongue because it’s a requirement to take and learn the mother tongue. Without knowing the benefits of mother tongue, you may not appreciate it on maybe think that it is just a waste of time learning the mother tongue. The study is limited only to the advantages of mother tongue. In the study it allows to conduct interview and make survey rating on the performance of the students in the mother tongue curriculum. This study includes the learning about the Cebuano dialect as the mother tongue taught in Kidapawan.

Definition of terms

Paradigm- is a clear and typical example of something
- Aberrant- means unusual and not socially acceptable
- Cadge- ask something for it and successfully get it
- Lacuna- not an important issue, not effective or convincing
- Translation- piece of writing translated to different language.
• **Dialect** - Manner of speaking a language that varies according to region or society/group. Also sometimes called a "variety".

• **Literacy** - Ability to read, write, calculate, (and otherwise use a language to do whatever is needed in life.)

• **Mother Tongue (MT)** - also known as L1 or home language

• **Bilingual Individual** - Ability to speak/ understand and sometimes read/write at least two languages.
Review of related literature (RRL)

Reviews of the country’s educational system tend to lead to painful discussions of the downward slide of the Filipino students’ academic performance, particularly in English, Science, and Math. In his Primer on Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education and other Issues on Language and Learning in the Philippines (alternately titled 21 Reasons Why Children Learn Better While Using Their Mother Tongue), Dr. Ricardo Ma. Duran Nolasco, a linguistics professor from UP, cites the high functional illiteracy of Filipinos and the high drop-out and non-completion rates of students as the problems the mother tongue-based MLE seeks to address. The Lubuagan Experience only proves that the strategy is effective and may very well be a source of empowerment for the millions of schoolchildren whose first language is neither Filipino nor English but one of the 170 or so languages in the Philippines. On July 14, 2009, in what The Philippine Star columnist Isagani Cruz hailed as “one of the most significant and far-reaching contributions of [then DepEd] Secretary JesliLapus to the history of Philippine education,” the DepEd issued Order No. 74 series of 2009, entitled “Institutionalizing Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MLE),”

DepEd Order No. 74, which supplants the 35-year-old BEP, takes effect in preschool education on June 2010. Asserting that “the lessons and findings of various local initiatives and international studies in basic education have validated the superiority of the use of the learner’s mother tongue or first language in improving learning outcomes and promoting Education for All,” Order No. 74 institutionalizes Mother Tongue-Based MLE—that is, the use of more than two languages for literacy and instruction—as a fundamental policy and program in the whole stretch of formal education, including preschool.

Under this framework, the learner’s first language (L1) will be used as the primary medium of instruction from preschool to at least Grade 3, and as the main vehicle to teach understanding and mastery of all subject areas like Math, Science, Makabayan, and language subjects like Filipino and English. Moreover, the mother tongue as a subject and as a language of teaching and learning will be introduced in Grade 1 for conceptual understanding, while additional languages such as Filipino, English, and other local or foreign languages are to be introduced as separate subjects no earlier than Grade 2.

In high school, although classes will be taught in Filipino and English, the L1 will be used as an auxiliary medium of instruction; when explaining concepts, teachers will be able to utilize the L1 to make sure students understand.
The MLE “starts from where the learners are, and from what they already know,” Nolasco writes in Primer. “The strategy is to develop the cognitive skills of learners in their L1 first and transfer these skills in their L2s later.”

DepEd Order No.74 is the latest and potentially the most pivotal step on the long road that is the medium-of-instruction debate. This debate has been ongoing since the first Constitution named Tagalog as the language of instruction in 1897, only to have this overturned when the Americans installed English in its stead in 1902. This flip-flopping between languages of education went on for several decades, following the streams of popular political and social thought. The two languages were eventually enshrined in the Department of Education’s BEP of 1974, which made Filipino the language of instruction for all subjects except for English, Mathematics, and Science. As has been shown in numerous surveys, proficiency tests, and the cries of alarm from corporate employers and the business community, the BEP has not proven quite as effective as hoped. English proficiency among Filipinos has been deteriorating, a serious problem for a people who doggedly regard English as the language of upward mobility and technology. The country, particularly the intelligentsia, takes pride in and relies heavily on its fluency in English for competitiveness in the global economy. Furthermore, judging from the comments of some language experts, the BEP has not improved language proficiency in Filipino either.7 “Studies show that a language’s efficiency is related to its direct usage,” says Dr. Yolanda S. Quijano, Director of the DepEd Bureau of Elementary Education. “For example, Cebuanos prefer to use English instead of Filipino, which negatively affects proficiency in Filipino. Children today, she adds, are generally fluent in oral Filipino, because of the influence of Filipino-dubbed telenovelas and shows on TV and the movies. However, reading and writing in Filipino is a different story altogether.

The situation is even worse when it comes to English. Quijano notes that English proficiency has been affected by the children’s lack of exposure to English, for instance, in the media. And since many of the educational materials available in schools and libraries are written in English, there is a decline in language aptitude, comprehension problems, discouragement, and demoralization.

Efforts have been made to rescue the Filipino’s command of the English language from the pits. President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo’s Executive Order No. 210 in 2003, and more recently, House Bill 4701, “Strengthening and Enhancing the Use of English as the Medium of Instruction in Philippine Schools,” authored by Cebu First District Representative Eduardo Gullas are examples of these efforts. However, as counter-intuitive as it seems, pressing for English as medium of instruction may not be the way to go in solving the problem. In fact, as language experts have said, it may simply be an extension of the myth that if something is good, then more of that something will be even better. “It’s not English—it’s the whole educational system,” said
Dr. Patricia B. Licuanan, psychologist, educator, and president of Miriam College, during a 2007 Forum on English for CEOs and business leaders organized by Philippine Business Education and the Asian Institute of Management. “The deterioration of English must be understood in the context of the general decline in Philippine education. The problem we are facing is not simply the deterioration of English but also the deterioration of Math and Science. And it is this general decline that undermines the competitiveness of the Filipino and the Philippines. Undue emphasis on English may distract us from the bigger problem. Upgrading education in general should improve the quality of English as well.”

The same goes for Filipino, a language based on Tagalog, which may only be a second or third language for many children living in remote areas, almost as alien as English itself. Children and even teachers come to class each day and struggle to learn concepts and express their ideas in an unfamiliar tongue, an intense, individual struggle that underpins the greater problem of the deterioration in educational standards. “You’re going to have a very, very silent classroom if you use second languages such as Filipino or English [to teach these children],” Nolascosays.

The Philippine dilemma is a familiar one for many Asia and African countries. Even UNESCO in its paper on “Education in a Multilingual World” (2003) has cited the possible difficulties facing mother-tongue instruction: the mother tongue may be an unwritten language; the language may not be generally recognized as constituting a legitimate language; the appropriate terminology for education purposes may still have to be developed; there may be a shortage of educational materials in the language; the multiplicity of languages may exacerbate the difficulty of providing schooling in each mother tongue; there may be a lack of appropriately trained teachers; and there may be resistance to schooling in the mother tongue by students, parents, and teachers.

Stephen L. Walter, chair of the Department of Language Development of the Graduate Institute of Applied Linguistics based in Dallas, Texas, states that the numerous reasons to ignore the language factor in educational policies of linguistically diverse developing countries often have little to do with educational effectiveness. These reasons include ethnic competition (using one language will give certain people advantages over other people), the nation-building construct (the belief that building a nation based on a common language is better than a linguistically diverse country), parental misunderstanding (the belief that children don’t need to be schooled in a language they already know), professional and institutional biases (officials and functionaries have based their career on their mastery of a certain language), language development chances (before a language can be used as a medium of instruction, it has to be developed first), curricular limitations, teacher development and professional support systems, the size of the target communities (the belief that it is not worth the effort to teach in a language only a few children speak), and demand-side constraints
Significantly, perhaps, few of these factors reflect a concern for educational outcomes," Walter points out. "Policy change will come only to the extent that the policy-making ‘bottom line’ is based on educational outcomes rather than ideology or up-front costs.”

With Order No. 74, the Philippines has set itself upon the path of mother tongue-based multilingual education. The MLE Primer lists the conditions for the DepEd’s implementation of MLE, including in-service MLE training of teachers; development, production, and distribution of graded L1 materials that are original, culturally relevant, reflective of local realities, and inexpensive; the establishment of a working orthography or spelling system in the concerned languages; the formation of a technical working group to oversee the program; the use of L1 for testing; and maximum participation from the local government units, parents, and communities under the concept of school-based management.

"According to some DepEd officials," the Primer adds, "it would take at least two more years of meticulous teacher training, materials production, pilot testing, planning and advocacy among education stakeholders, or until 2012, before the new MLE program can be implemented nationwide."For now, the DepEd will start small, with 100 to 200 schools. “It’s a massive undertaking, but it’s something we need to do,” Quijano asserts. With the help of partnerships with local and international NGOs as well as advocacy groups such as SIL, and the direct and active involvement of all sectors concerned—the mass media, the universities and teacher-training institutions, the local government units, the communities, and the parents—Quijano is optimistic that the work can be done."It won’t be easy, because we’re just starting out. But we are starting. And if we all help out, we will catch up.”

According to Laura Garbes, the Philippines is an archipelago in the Pacific with rich linguistic and cultural diversity. According to the Ethnologue, there are 171 living languages spoken in the Philippines today. For the most part, this linguistic variety has not been accurately reflected in governmental and educational policies. The current constitution declares both English and Filipino (Tagalog) to be the official languages of the country, as both are spoken in metro Manila, the nation’s capital.

Making English and Tagalog the official languages of the Philippines is a practical move, seeing as there needs to be language that can be used to do business and trade as well as to communicate on both national and international levels. Still, the constitutional declaration of these two languages as official and the other languages as auxiliary takes a discriminatory tone when looking at how it resonates in other policies and in the public sphere. The linguistic discrimination is present in the educational system in particular. For instance, as of 2011, the House government in the Philippines was still investigating instances when children in primary school were punished for not
speaking English (To learn more about this phenomenon, click here). These occurrences are not uncommon, and they stem from the view of English as the “language of success.” It is undeniable, that children able to speak English will be better able to communicate in international contexts.

However, a singular wish to teach children English at all costs, when coupled with punishment for using one’s mother tongue, is both psychologically and culturally damaging. On the psychological level, a child’s sense of identity is grounded in his or her mother tongue. If children are conditioned to pair English with success, they will increasingly view their own native language as irrelevant. They may not see the need to pass it on to the next generation, causing eventual language endangerment for minority languages, a significant cultural loss.

Luckily, things change and the Philippine Department of Education is proving that. DepEd is the new name for the Philippine government’s education department. Until recent years, the department had been under the thumb of imperialist legacy, left behind by first Spanish then US rule. In speaking with my father about his education, he explained that, “all the textbooks were American, from U.S. companies, including history books. The Philippine history we learned was from the perspective of the [United] States.”Given this legacy, the reformed DepEd has sought to address the criticism of not providing a good enough base for those wishing to pursue a university education. To achieve this, they pushed a bill through Congress that completely overhauls the current educational system. There are two major components of the bill that dramatically change the format of Philippine schools, starting in 2012.

The first is the extension of secondary school. Prior to 2012, there was a 10-year long education cycle. With this bill, the Philippines will adopt a K-12 cycle to ensure that students are prepared to go to university by the time of graduation from grade 12.

The second main component of the bill addresses the linguistic discrimination that occurs in emphasizing English education, by implementing Mother Tongue Based, Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE). This model promotes language of instruction in the mother tongue of the school district, rather than Filipino (Tagalog) or English. However, these other languages will be taught and incorporated into the curriculum gradually. Advocates of this approach point to pilot programs in the Philippines that have been successful in helping students gain full proficiency in the mother tongue, the national language Filipino, and English.

There is also support for this method from the United Nations (UN), in their “Education for All” program. The UN has come out in support of the move, because their own objective is to enhance education, with the belief that there needs to be national recognition of linguistic minorities. By starting with the language that one speaks at
home, the gap in understanding can be bridged, and students can better learn the curriculum.

The legislation is being implemented during this coming school year. The main concern that many educators have with this bill is the swiftness with which the bill demands a change, leaving teachers feeling unprepared for the dramatic switch. The fact that there are now 13 years of schooling for children, rather than 10, calls for an expanded curriculum that teachers are not used to. It makes some teachers feel that they are inadequately trained for such a cycle. Rechelle Guzman, member of the chamber of commerce in Pampanga, Philippines, elaborated on the difficulty of the language training adjustment in particular. “There are no available modules and materials or books to support our Mother tongue (Kapampangan) curriculum.” Without the proper tools, the legislation’s implementation is in danger of losing its effectiveness.

Furthermore, the definition of “mother tongue” is a contentious subject, as many parents teach their children English at home. “Mother tongue” is interpreted by some as the cultural language, but others as the language taught from birth, regardless of whether it is part of traditional heritage. Without a clear agreement, resistance to the bill and confusion within communities will remain.

While questions and concerns remain regarding the implementation of this bill, proponents of cultural preservation do believe this MTB-MLE bill is a step in the right direction. The reluctance of educators and administrators does not necessarily mean resistance. Guzman went on to say, despite the challenges, “Hopefully we will be able to fully comply with the mother tongue intervention in the curriculum by the 2nd quarter.”

Those with reluctance can take comfort in the success of those who had implemented a MTB-MLE system prior to the legislation. Among these schools is the TarikSoliman Elementary School, a public school located at BrgySagradaFamilia, Masantol, Pampanga, in the Philippines, whose principal asserted that they felt as if teaching in Kapampangan, the language of their village, has been the best policy. And crucially, this bill has opened up a national dialogue about the linguistic diversity in the country and how to deal with homogenous English-based education. The historic legislation brings the issue to the forefront of the country’s mind, as it affects the future of Filipino children greatly. In this way, the years of linguistic discrimination, both intentional and unintentional, are now being discussed on a national level. The bill’s passage also sends a clear message to those partaking in linguistic discrimination, that it is a practice that will no longer be accepted or ignored by the government. The bill itself can serve as an example for other countries seeking education reform. As No Child Left Behind expires in the U.S., the U.S. would do well to consider this bill when developing new policies. The MLB-MTE initiative was passed in when a complete education overhaul was already underway. The time may be right for a U.S. attempt at
education that accurately reflects the country's own linguistic diversity, especially when it comes to Indigenous languages in Native communities.

Cultural Survival advocates for Indigenous Peoples rights and supports Indigenous communities' self-determination, cultures and political resilience our cultural Survival envisions a future that respects and honors Indigenous Peoples inherent rights and dynamic cultures, deeply and richly interwoven in lands, languages, spiritual traditions, and artistic expression, rooted in self-determination and self-governance.

Why is mother tongue-based multilingual education important? It’s a question I’ve been asked often over the past five years in my role as the coordinator of the Asia Multilingual Education Working Group, which advocates removing barriers to quality education for ethno linguistic minorities in Asia.

The first day of school after my family emigrated from South Korea to Canada was the most frustrating and alienating experience I had ever had. I felt like I was lost on another planet. I could hear my teachers and classmates but couldn’t communicate with them. Once an active and talkative student, I grew quiet and shy. School was no longer a fun place and I felt excluded most of the time.

A few months later, I started to make progress. Using my strong reading and math’s skills in my mother tongue, Korean, I was able to translate and convert concepts and catch up on learning in English. With support from my teachers, classmates and parents, I slowly started to speak in English and raise my hand in the classroom. Finally, I felt a sense of belonging at school and in Canadian society. “Inclusive education through and with language – language matters” is the theme of this year’s International Mother Language Day, to be held on Saturday. It resonates with my experience and it speaks to the challenges faced by the 2.3 billion people worldwide who don’t have access to education in their mother tongue. For many of them, the barriers I faced are exacerbated by poverty and other factors.

Language is a key to inclusion. If children cannot understand, they won’t learn. Even if children from ethno linguistic minorities manage to enroll in school, they are often unable to follow classroom instruction and end up being pushed out of the education system. This results in further marginalization and exclusion from society. When language barriers are combined with other marginalizing factors such as gender, ethnicity, disability and geographical remoteness, the chances of children entering and completing basic education become very low? According to a recent Unesco Institute for Statistics report, children from marginalized groups in Bolivia, Ecuador, India and Laos, for example, are two to three times less likely to be in school.
Looking back on my own experience, I realise that the crucial factor in successfully transitioning from one language – and one education system – to another was the grounding I had in my mother tongue.

During my six years of primary education, I developed a strong understanding of concrete and abstract ideas, learning vocabulary and concepts that were transferable to my second language. Without this foundation, it would have been extremely difficult for me to become functionally bilingual and continue my education.

Research has increasingly shown that teaching in a mother tongue early in school helps reduce dropout rates and makes education more engaging for marginalised groups. Children who benefit from mother tongue-based-multilingual education (MTB-MLE) also perform better in their second language.

When I was studying in my mother tongue, my parents took a more active role in my learning than they were able to after we emigrated. This parental engagement is important for children’s intellectual and social development and is a good indicator of student survival rates. Parents of ethnolinguistic minority students are often unable to provide this support.

MTB-MLE programmes also bridge the gap between the culture at home and the one at school and in mainstream society. They not only improve learning, they also broaden outlooks, increase tolerance and foster a respect for cultural diversity. These programmes are also effective in promoting a culture of peace and building equitable and inclusive societies.

Multilingual education initially costs more than monolingual education. However, the long-term benefits far outweigh the initial investment. Monolingual education is not sustainable in multilingual nations, and thus MTB-MLE programmes are likely to result in considerable savings over the long term, while also tapping the previously untouched potential of billions of students.

**Mother Tongue- Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE)**

One of the changes in Basic Education Curriculum brought about by the new K-12 program is the introduction of Mother Tongue- Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) specifically in Kindergarten, Grades 1, 2 and 3 to support the goal of “Every Child- A- Reader and A –Writer” by Grade 1.”

MTB-MLE refers to “first-language-first” education that is, schooling which begins in the mother tongue and transitions to additional languages particularly Filipino and English. It is meant to address the high functional illiteracy of Filipinos where language plays a significant factor. Since the child’s own language enables her/ him to
express him/herself easily, then, there is no fear of making mistakes. It encourages active participation by children in the learning process because they understand what is being discussed and what is being asked of them. They can immediately use their mother tongue to construct and explain their world, articulate their thoughts and add new concepts to what they already know.

Currently, there are twelve (12) major languages or lingua franca that shall be language of instruction. The major languages are:

a) Tagalog  
b) Kapampangan  
c) Pangasinense  
d) Iloko  
e) Bikol  
f) Cebuano  
g) Hiligaynon  
h) Waray  
i) Tausug  
j) Maguindanaoan  
k) Maranao;  
l) Chabacano.

With this challenge posted about MTB-MLE, Capitol University, College of Education plans to institute the MTB-MLE Teacher Development Program through its Center for Professional and Continuing Education (CPCE) with focus on teaching reading in the mother tongue and the production of reading materials. Local stories, poems, biographies, folktales, legends, jokes, riddles as well as the traditional oral literature will be put into writing that will become part of the leaching-learning repertoire. The plan is to localize the Cebuano/Visayan materials to Cagayan de Oro context and linguistic use. Next focus will be the production of materials of the Indigenous Peoples found in the region.

**What is mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE)?**

Mother tongue-based multilingual education is the provision of education in a child's mother tongue, or a home language familiar to them, as well as providing them with an opportunity to learn a second (or third) language of wider communication. In MTB MLE programs, students’ gain initial literacy in their first language (L1) and the L1 is the only language of instruction in the early grades. At the same time, students begin learning oral and then written second language (L2). Once they have gained confidence in using the L2 for “everyday” communication, teachers begin introducing them to the more academic L2 terms they will need in higher primary grades. Both L1 and L2 are then used together for instruction to the end of primary school. In an environment where MTB-MLE is used, the education system will typically use a language other than a student’s mother tongue as the language of instruction at some point in the primary or secondary cycle. The language is often a national or a colonial language that many children may have limited knowledge of or ability to use, and generally not to the same level of proficiency as with their mother tongue.

**How many children do not receive an education in their mother tongue?**
An estimated 221 million school-age children speak languages not used as the primary medium of instruction in the formal school system (Walter, cited in Dutcher 2004). In certain countries, almost the entire population of children may have little to no knowledge of the language of instruction, particularly if it is a former colonial language like French or English, which remain the sole language of instruction in some countries. Indeed, 44% of languages spoken by more than 10,000 people are not used as languages of instruction in education. If all languages are included, a stunning 2.4 billion people—almost 40% of the world’s population—speak languages that are minimally used in the education sector (Walter 2009, cited in Pinnock 2009).

**What are the advantages of mother tongue-based multilingual education?**

Providing education in children’s first language, while at the same time providing them with support to learn a second language of wider communication, has several advantages: it increases access to school, as well as promotes equity in learning; it leads to improved learning outcomes; it reduces repetition and drop-out rates; and it can lead to lower education costs due to greater efficiency. In one study, analysis of data from 22 developing countries and 160 language groups revealed that children who had access to instruction in their mother tongue were significantly more likely to be enrolled and attending school. Conversely, lack of education in a child’s first language was a significant reason for children dropping out (Smits et al., 2008). Additionally, teaching children to read in their first language helps them to learn to read a second language, because language skills that are developed in a first language are transferrable to a second language. Moreover, mastering of the first language promotes cognitive development needed to more easily learn a second language.

**Does MTB-MLE cost more than other language models of education?**

No. In fact, MTB-MLE may be more cost-effective than current mono-lingual models of education, or education that is provided in language other than the mother tongue. This is due to the increased efficiency that results when fewer students repeat and drop out. Although the start-up costs of an MTB-MLE program may be higher than normal recurrent costs, they will be recuperated in the long term, as the system becomes more efficient, fewer students drop out, and more students learn and become productive members of the economy. One World Bank study in Mali found that mother tongue-based programs cost about 27% less for a six-year primary cycle than French-only programs, largely because of the decrease in repetition and drop-out (Bender et al., 2005). Another analysis shows that a 4% to 5% increase in a country’s education budget would cover the immediate costs associated with mother tongue instruction and
reduce education costs in the long run (Heugh, 2006). Analysis from Guatemala and Senegal estimates that the cost of producing local-language materials would be 1% of the education budget where orthographies and other language development units already exist, while countries where orthographies do not exist might see an increase of 5% (Vawda and Patrinos, 1999). These additional costs are mainly related to teacher education and the cost of producing materials—costs that will be recuperated in the long run.

**Does providing education in mother tongue languages increase ethnic conflict?**

No. The evidence suggests just the opposite: The presence of strong institutions—including a well-functioning education system that provides all children with an opportunity to learn—in areas of high ethnolinguistic diversity actually decreases the likelihood of war and slow economic growth (Easterly, 2001). Indeed, a review of the most linguistically diverse societies shows that they are also the societies with the largest number of out-of-school children—a recipe for social unrest, since social exclusion prohibits some members of a community or country from becoming educated, therefore contributing to poverty and disenfranchisement from the larger economy. Therefore, providing education in languages that children understand therefore contributes to a stable society by producing well-educated, productive members of society.

**How does the mother tongue help the learning of English?**

It does help the mother tongue of learning in English because in Research has shown that many skills acquired in the first language can be transferred to the second language. So, for example, if your child has developed good reading skills in Korean, she is likely to be able to apply these skills when reading English. (One useful reading skill is the ability to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words from context. Another one is the ability to decide which new words in a text are important to look up in the dictionary and which words can safely be ignored.) For this reason it helps if you can encourage your child to read good fiction and non-fiction in her own language. Similarly, the skills of being able to plan out a piece of writing or develop an argument in a persuasive essay can be applied in the second language once they have been learned in the first.

**What are the other reasons for maintaining and developing mother tongue proficiency?**

Firstly, many children in international schools plan to return to their home country at some point to continue their education there. This is a strong reason to make sure they do not have gaps in mother tongue language or cognitive development. And
secondly, ESL students who turn against or otherwise neglect their mother tongue can often suffer from problems of identity loss or alienation from their parents, and from their grandparents or other family members in their home country.

**How can ESL students best develop their mother tongue proficiency?**

For some students, developing mother tongue proficiency is easier because they have lessons each week in their native language. For students who are not in this fortunate position, there is still much that can be done to maintain the mother tongue. For example, parents can make sure that they have good reference books or textbooks at home - in the native language. Students should be encouraged to read good literature and to discuss school work. Some of the long summer vacation could be devoted to mother-tongue learning and reading.

This review begins with an overview of theory and research on first and second language acquisition in childhood. Scholars in developmental psychology, linguistics, and early childhood education continue to put forward competing theories. However, there is broad agreement that young children's ability to learn languages and their emerging reading and writing skills are affected by their social environments, including the language(s) to which they are exposed, the language socialization practices of their caregivers (Heath, 1983; Pesco&Crago, 2008; Van Kleek, 1994), and language instruction. Some children are born into home environments in which they are exposed to more than one language and they begin to acquire two primary languages simultaneously (e.g., McLaughlin, 1984). Some children start out as monolingual, and begin to acquire a second language sometime in early childhood, for example, in an early childhood program or through other interactions outside the home, and thus can be said to be acquiring a second language.

Before reviewing understandings of language acquisition in childhood, it is important to clarify that both L1 and L2 acquisition by young children (up to about age 7) appear to differ significantly from language acquisition by older children (Bongartz& Schneider, 2003; Cook, 2000, Hatch, 1978; Liu, 1991). The distinctive nature of young children's L2 acquisition calls for a distinctive approach to supporting L2 acquisition in the early years. Another distinction that Nicholas and Lightbown (2008) explain is that the pace of learning an additional language, and effective instruction or support for children to learn an additional language, will depend upon whether the child is has developed literacy in L1. Literacy entails the development of metalinguistic awareness, including the knowledge that the pronunciation of words is related to the written form (for most languages), and that there are 'right' and 'wrong' ways to say things (August & Shanahan, 2006). Populations without first language literacy have been overlooked in second language acquisition research literature (Tарone& Bigelow, 2005) – this includes very young children, as well as illiterate older children and adults. These clarifications
indicate the complexities of bi/multilingual learning and instruction in childhood, as well as the partial and evolving nature of our understandings of variables that affect learning outcomes for individuals at different ages and with different pre-existing skills. Investigators of multilingual acquisition have underscored the need to have more information on the development of each language when children are learning more than one language concurrently, and the dire need in the field as a whole of having bilingual developmental norms, especially with respect to different levels of language dominance (Yavas, 2007).

Language acquisition in childhood

Until recently, two explanatory approaches—behaviourist and nativist—dominated understandings about language acquisition. Following Skinner (1957), the behaviourists argued that infants continue to produce and to learn the properties of language (e.g., sounds, vocabulary, pragmatics, etc.) that are positively reinforced by the child’s caregivers and other members of the child’s social community. Critics of this account point to the speed of language acquisition in the early years and the stability of acquired meaning, neither of which can be explained by the behaviourist position. In stark contrast, nativists, following Chomsky (1965, 1975) argued that children have an innate grasp of how language works. Thus, while language input activates their inborn capacity for learning language, their learning is internally guided. Critics of this position point to empirical studies showing that the quality and quantity of a child’s exposure to language affects their learning (Hart & Risley, 1995).

More recently, developmental psychologists have applied contemporary theories of learning to explain language acquisition. They argue that language is a uniquely human, biologically based capacity, and that the inherent potential to learn language depends on the language environment – effectively, a biocultural perspective. Theories of second language acquisition To date, studies of language acquisition have been based primarily on studies of monolingual acquisition, resulting in more theory than empirical evidence. However, scholars agree broadly that children, including most children with specific learning impairments or low general intelligence, have the capacity to learn more than one language (Genesee, 2002).

Theories of second language acquisition are central to the current focus on mother tongue-based bi/multilingual learning. The behaviorist approach, referred to as the „contrastive hypothesis“ (Fries, 1945; Lado, 1957), assumes that the same processes of positive reinforcement that influence first language acquisition support the learning of second or additional languages.
However, behaviourists suggest that when the first and second languages are structurally similar, L2 is easier to learn because children can transfer their learning from L1 to L2.

The nativist-oriented "identity hypothesis” posits that universal cognitive structures and processes enable both first and subsequent language acquisition; learning neither benefits from, nor is hindered by, learning L1. The “interlanguage hypothesis” combines the contrastive and identity hypotheses, featuring both neuro-psychological and social-psychological aspects.

This approach emphasizes the role of a broad array of communicative strategies in second language learning, in addition to purely linguistic strategies. Strategies include avoidance of topics, changes in meaning, code-switching, borrowing, gestures, and facial expression, among others. In accounting for the speed, quality, and trajectory of second language learning, the interlanguage hypothesis highlights the role of the speech-language community, including the adequacy of learning opportunities, the quality of language input, and acceptance by the dominant culture. The “separate development hypothesis” proposes that after a period of mixing languages in the first two years of life, the two (or more) languages develop independently of one another, especially when the child is exposed to the two (or more) languages in distinct ways (e.g., different people use different languages, or different languages are used in different contexts) (De Houwer, 1994).

Social-interactionist theory posits that language learning result from the interaction of the learners' innate ability and their language environment, especially the feedback they receive from fluent speakers of L2 to monitor and improve their output. This theory emphasizes the importance of the learners' language environments and their opportunities to produce language and receive feedback. Critical to the focus of this review, recent investigations have considered the level of competence achieved by learners in their first language in determining the pace, quality, and outcomes of their second language acquisition. Two hypotheses are especially relevant to this discussion: the "threshold level hypothesis” and the "interdependence hypothesis.

“Skutnabb-Tangas and Toukomaa (1976) proposed the “threshold level hypothesis”, which posits that only when children have reached a threshold of competence in their first language can they successfully learn a second language without losing competence in both languages. Further, only when a child has crossed a second threshold of competence in both languages will the child’s bilingualism positively affect intellectual development, a state which they called “additive bilingualism.

Skutnabb-Tangas and Toukomaa developed the threshold level hypothesis after they found that Finnish children who migrated to Sweden and were required to
start school in Swedish before they had become sufficiently competent in Finnish showed weaker school performance and lower competence in both Swedish and Finnish. They characterized this low competence in both the first and second languages as „semilingualism,” explaining that if the child’s first language is insufficiently developed, the foundation for L2 is lacking. In their study, Finnish migrant children who started school in Sweden after they were highly competent in their first language and could continue to develop their first language abilities as they learned their second language attained high levels of competence in both languages and success in school.

Building on these findings, Cummins (1984) formulated an „interdependence hypothesis,” asserting that second language competence depends upon the level of development of L1. Cummins distinguished between two kinds of language mastery: „interpersonal communication” refers to oral communication skills that are used in everyday situations, while „cognitive academic language proficiency” (CALP) is achieved when the speaker can use language in decontextualized ways, including writing, permitting the use of the language as a cognitive tool. Cummins argues that if learners have achieved CALP in L1, this competence can be transferred to L2, permitting them to participate successfully in academic learning in L2. If, however, learners have not achieved CALP in L1, both academic learning and second language learning are adversely affected.

Accordingly, Cummins recommends beginning general academic instruction in the child’s mother tongue until the child has become highly competent (i.e., has achieved CALP) in L1. Recently, the concept and operational definition of CALP has been challenged by research-practitioners arguing that what counts as CALP has been arbitrarily defined and varies widely, and that it is pedagogically counterproductive to refer to any 14 classroom language as truly decontextualized (e.g., Aukerman, 2007).

Critics have urged teachers to hold children’s understandings of context in a central place in teaching and learning. Indeed, none of the hypotheses reviewed here have been conclusively supported by empirical research. Studies seem to confirm the threshold level hypothesis and the interdependence hypothesis, but existing research is based on small sample sizes. Studies have also been criticized for methodological shortcomings (see Sohn, 2005), discussed subsequently.

**Minority and majority language learners**

Young children learn a second language in different ways depending upon various factors, including their culture, particularly the status of their culture, language, and community within their larger social setting. Most important to this discussion, it is critical to distinguish among children who are members of a minority
ethnolinguistic group (minority language children) versus a majority ethnolinguistic group (majority language children); and among those within each group who are learning bilingually from infancy versus those who have learned a single mother tongue and are learning a second or additional language later in childhood. The focus of the current discussion is on young minority language children who learn a mother tongue that is different from the dominant or majority language in their broader social world. Attention is also given to Indigenous children who, in many cases, are not learning the mother tongue of their ancestors as L1.

Indigenous children and other groups who are not learning their ‘heritage mother tongue’ (McCarty, 2008) at home, but rather have learned the language of the dominant culture, are a unique population in discussions of mother tongue education. As defined earlier, these children have a heritage mother tongue that may or may not be spoken by anyone in their family or community, but which their family may wish them to learn through language ‘nests,’ (McIvor, 2006) and preschool or primary school programs. These special circumstances involve language recovery, which poses a number of special challenges and needs. As discussed later in this report, some of the most promising early childhood and primary school programs in the world have been designed to promote heritage mother tongue-based bilingual education.

**Parental influences on mother tongue acquisition and maintenance**

Parents and other primary caregivers have the strongest influence on children’s first language acquisition in the early years. These ‘first teachers’ attitudes, goals, and behaviors related to their child’s initial language development influence children’s developing language skills, language socialization, perceptions of the value of L1, and maintenance of L1. Gardner and Lambert (1972) were among the first investigators to characterize parents’ language attitudes as ‘instrumental’ and ‘integrative.’ Instrumental language attitude focuses on pragmatic, utilitarian goals, such as whether one or another language will contribute to personal success, security, or status. By contrast, an integrative language attitude focuses on social considerations, such as the desire to be accepted into the cultural group that uses a language or to elaborate an identity associated with the language.

Baker (1992) cautioned against the assumption that parents’ stated attitudes about their child’s language acquisition necessarily match their language behavior with the child: relationships between attitudes and behaviors are always complex. Most minority language parents are eager to see their children succeed in school and the broader society. Most minority parents also want their children to learn L1 and to be proud of their cultural heritage. Though few empirical studies have been reported, it seems that parents with these dual language goals tend to act more on promoting second language learning than on their expressed desire for mother tongue learning.
This behavior in turn affects children’s dual language behaviors: they sense that the home language is less important, resulting in weakening of L1 in favors of L2. This subtractive bilingualism can begin at a very early age, just as children are learning their first words. Advocates of mother tongue acquisition in the early years need to consider possible differences between parents' expressed desires and their actual language behaviors with their infants and young children.

Lao's (2004) study of English-Chinese bilingual preschoolers underscores the important contributions of parents' home language behaviour in supporting preschool children's first language development. She emphasizes that mother tongue development cannot be achieved without a strong commitment from parents. To enable parents to facilitate their children’s home language and literacy skills, she urges the provision of meaningful print-rich home environments, guidance from adults with high levels of literacy, partnerships with schools, and support for parents who need to improve their own oral and written skills in L1.

**Does the language of instruction in early education contribute to children’s psychosocial adjustment?**

The comparative lack of academic success of minoritised and Indigenous children stems in part from having to adjust to schooling in an unfamiliar language, compounded by the need to accept that their language and culture are not valued within formal education contexts. Many linguists, psychologists, and educators argue that respecting learners' cultural and linguistic backgrounds in educational settings is crucial in fostering their self-confidence as persons and community members, and in encouraging them to be active and competent learners.

Many studies show that mother tongue-based instruction can improve a child's self-esteem (Appel, 1988; Cummins, 1989, 1990; Hernández-Chavez, 1984). As Rubio (2007) points out, children perceive at an early age that languages are valued differently. When there is linguistic and cultural discontinuity between home and school, minority language children may perceive that language and culture are not valued—a perception that lowers their self-confidence and self-esteem and interferes with their learning (Baker & Prys Jones, 1998; Covington, 1989). In contrast, Wright and Taylor (1995) found that Inuit students educated in L1 (Inuktitut) showed increased self-esteem and cultural pride compared to Inuit children educated only in L2 (English or French). Educators in Africa have described many similar benefits of mother tongue-based bi/multilingual education, reporting that use of the learners' first language in school promotes a smooth transition between home and school, fostering an emotional stability that translates to cognitive stability. Such children learn better and faster, and retain knowledge longer (Kioko, Mutiga, Muthwii, Schroeder, Inyega, & Trudell, 2008).
It is often said that the mother tongue symbolizes a deep, between speakers and their cultural identity (McCarty, 2008). Indigenous scholars in Canada (Kirkness, 2002), the United States (Greymorning, 1997), and New Zealand (Harrison & Papa, 2005) make frequent reference to connections between language, community, place, and time. While most parents want their children to get a good education, parents also hope that their children will maintain their love and respect for their heritage language and culture, and for their home community. As one parent in a mother tongue-based education program in the North Solomons Province of Papua New Guinea said: —it is important to teach our children to read and write, but is more important to teach them to be proud of themselves and of us‖ (Delpit&Kemelfield, (1985).

What is the relationship between the language of instruction in early education and children's academic outcomes?

Improving school success includes but goes beyond the language of instruction and supports for language acquisition. Other factors, such as poverty, with its attendant risk factors such as poor nutrition, high stress, and high stigma/discrimination, must also be addressed. Children who begin school in an unfamiliar language face the dual challenges of acquiring the new language while learning the curriculum in that new language. For some populations—for example, low status minorities, refugees, and the children of illiterate parents—other risks and stresses further exacerbate these challenges. Several studies note that minority language children often live in families of low socio-economic status, who have a higher risk of school failure on that basis alone. Further, Benson (2009) points out that gender considerations cut across these situations of educational risk: in most traditional societies, girls and women tend to be monolingual, since they receive less exposure to the national language through schooling, salaried labor, or migration, than boys and men. Longitudinal research with large samples and diverse, relevant demographic characteristics is needed to yield differentiated answers about the effects of language policies and programs under varying circumstances.
References


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