


Chapter 5

Discontinuing Mother Tongue as Medium of Instruction: A Critical Inquiry of Language Policy From a Translanguaging Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This chapter critically analyzes the new language-in-education policy in the

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3373-0107-5.ch005

Philippines through a translanguaging lens. We explore the mother tongue's role in early childhood learning, emphasizing its cognitive, academic, and sociocultural advantages. We then critique the policy, showing how privileging English and Filipino as media of instruction aggravates learning difficulties, perpetuates educational inequality, and suppresses linguistic and cultural identity. In response, we advocate for translanguaging as a framework for policy reform to embrace the multilingual realities of Filipino learners. Our analysis calls for strengthening integration of linguistic diversity into the curriculum, rethinking teacher training, reforming assessment practices, institutionalizing multilingual support, and addressing linguistic inequality. By positioning the policy within a translanguaging lens, we highlight the urgent need to disrupt linguistic hierarchies and reimagine language-in-education as a transformative space for learning, empowerment, and social justice.

INTRODUCTION

Think about Muhammad, a Grade 2 pupil at a remote island school in Tawi-Tawi. Sinama is his mother tongue – the language of his home, his family, and his world. He still has a lot to do in his reading journey, just like many children from cultural backgrounds. However, because of the new language-in-education policy, Muhammad is now required to learn English and Filipino, languages he does not have much exposure to. He used to be an engaged and outspoken pupil, but now he sits quietly, bewildered and distant, as lessons are taught in languages he does not understand. When classes like science are taught in English, a language he has yet to decode, the problem becomes even worse. He might understand the idea of exercise through “amusay” (paddling), an activity embedded in his daily life, but the term “physical activity” means nothing to him. Muhammad’s story is not an isolated case. It depicts the silent struggles of countless Filipino children who are being pushed to learn in languages that do not speak to their minds, or their hearts. When a child like Muhammad is forced to learn in a language he does not understand, is it the child who is failing – or the system that refuses to listen?

Language-in-education is currently undergoing a global metamorphosis towards embracing multilingualism. Multilingualism has been recognized as critical for fostering cognitive flexibility, cultural awareness, and academic success (UNESCO, 2022). Many countries across the globe with linguistically diverse populations, such as Finland, South Africa, and Canada, have adopted plurilingual policies that integrate multiple languages in education to enhance learning outcomes and promote linguistic equity (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017). **Plurilingual policies** recognize and support the way learners use all the languages they know, not as separate systems, but as an integrative, flexible set of language skills (Canagarajah, 2012; García & Wei,

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