

Embracing linguistic diversity in mother tongue education: the case of the Philippines

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With over 180 languages, the Philippines is one of the most linguistically diverse countries in Asia. The literature has shown that linguistic diversity is a challenge in the implementation of mother tongue education not only in the Philippines but also in other parts of the world. In 2012, the Philippines started its implementation of mother tongue-based multilingual education and the Department of Education anticipated the adjustment of schools in linguistically diverse contexts by recommending the use of a “multiple monolingual model” and “lingua franca model”.

To know how schools in this context adapt to their unique language ecology, a nationwide survey of 200 schools was conducted to identify the challenges faced and strategies used by schools in program implementation. Data gathered from 50 schools in linguistically diverse contexts revealed that they faced more challenges than other more linguistically homogeneous contexts.

Data revealed modifications that schools made in the Department-proposed models to adjust to the demands of their contexts. These modified program models are presented along with the rationale for such. Program areas where schools need help are identified, and context-driven strategies are shared. Finally, the presentation expounds on issues that confound program implementation in linguistically diverse contexts, particularly sociopolitical factors and the tension between the promotion of local languages as mother tongues and the use of lingua franca. By unpacking the program potentials and problems in linguistically diverse contexts in the Philippines, insights in language policymaking, program design, and implementation are shared with similar developing linguistically diverse countries.