

CHALLENGES OF TEACHERS IN THE TRANSITION FROM MOTHER-TONGUE BASED TO ENGLISH AS A MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION: A PHENOMENOLOGY



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Challenges of Teachers in the Transition from Mother-Tongue Based to English as A Medium of Instruction: A Phenomenology

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Abstract

An important aspect of the educational process is the language that is utilized as the medium of instruction. It affects both students' and teachers' ability to learn new information efficiently. The transition from mother tongue to English as a medium of instruction brings a variety of obstacles and difficulties among teachers and learners. According to the literature, teachers perform critical roles in any educational program. This study utilized the Husserlian Phenomenology research design in elucidating the lived experiences of teachers during the transition process. Coliazzi's descriptive phenomenology was used in analyzing the participants' experiences. Before collecting data, the researchers utilized bracketing and a purposeful sampling strategy to reduce researcher bias. There were seven (7) participants in this study when the data saturation was reached. The interview was conducted using a semi-structured questionnaire. Based on the data analysis, four emerging themes were extracted: The Gap, The Bridge, The Aftermath, and The Triumph. These themes are evident signs of how teachers managed and survived the transition hurdles. It is recommended for an educational institution to find ways and support teachers to enhance their language teaching skills.

Keywords: *transition, English language, mother-tongue, phenomenology*

Introduction

The language that is used as a medium of instruction is an important factor in the teaching and learning process. The shift from Mother-Tongue, notably Sinugbuanong Binisaya, to English as the medium of instruction for Grades 4 to 6 learners and the lack of vocabulary and literacy skills in the English language are the typical challenges among Grades 4 to 6 teachers. The use of effective communication techniques and communication tools is strongly correlated with learner's cognitive engagement (Shi et al., 2021). When developing effective approaches and strategies (Matcha et al., 2019) that will aid learners in understanding the language (Hu & Wu, 2020) and the lesson content (Amador, 2016), it is important to consider the difficulties that teachers and learners encountered (Zakarnah et al., 2020) during the transition. As a form of intervention (Snyder et al., 2017), teachers on the other hand translated Sinugbuanong Binisaya terminologies into English. The learner's vocabulary skills will grow as a result and their understanding of the second language will also get better (Kaharuddin, 2018).

Along with the full implementation of the Enhanced Basic Education Curriculum of 2013 is the use of MTB-MLE as the medium of instruction for K to 3 learners except for Filipino and English subjects (Adriano et al., 2021). However, the use of the English language as the medium of instruction in Grades 4 to 6 in most subject areas makes it hard for the teachers to convey the content of the lessons to the learners (Tenorio, 2022). Without prior knowledge of the language, learners have a hard time understanding the lessons. The transition period is a critical stage for learners as they are being introduced to Filipino and English languages (Gaylo, 2020). According to UNESCO (2018), learners can master oral fluency in the second language when vocabulary and literacy skills are already built in their mother tongue which they use as their first language. The study of Monje et al. (2021) concluded that the sounds and grammar structures of the second language can be easily conveyed when the mother tongue is being taught along with it.

The use of Mother-Tongue as a medium of instruction for K to 3 learners has helped them to understand the lessons better which enables them to interact well in the discussion. However, during the transition, the learners struggle with the use of English as a medium of instruction. Pursuant to DepEd Order No. 28, s. 2013, the Department of Education is mandated to use the first language of the learners as the medium of instruction in all subject areas except for Filipino and English. According to Garces (2019), learners were placed in an unfamiliar environment due to the change in the medium of instruction used in the transition which begins in Grade Four. The study of De Guzman et al., (2018) found that the majority of the teachers concur that it is beneficial for the learners to simultaneously learn Mother-Tongue and English languages.

According to Augst & Akos (2009), if learners are not given adequate support throughout the adjustment period and encounter unsuccessful experiences at school, they may feel incompetent, unproductive, or inferior (Boligo et al., 2023). This study focuses on the difficulties that teachers and learners have in switching of mother tongue to English as the language of instruction. In this transition, teachers are essential as learning facilitators. Teachers can help learners by clarifying and introducing concepts that are new to them (Steyn, 2017). Learners who struggle to comprehend language's subject matter are more likely to have low academic performance due to poor literacy and vocabulary skills (Antipuesto et al., 2023). The majority of the learners struggle with understanding mathematical concepts and skills in reading and writing numbers in symbols and words up to 100,000 since their prior knowledge of numbers is in Sinugbuanong Binisaya as the transition to the new medium of instruction begins in Grade 4 (Segarino et al., 2022).

Teachers will have to make significant alterations to the way they introduce the concepts before moving on to the actual lesson (Ugbamen et al., 2022; Pableo et al., 2022). The learners themselves must first grasp the concepts to do better than what is expected of them (Cariaga et al., 2022). Since this would take a lot of time, the competencies intended for a certain period will not be met (Gabriel et al., 2022). There is a tendency for either not covering all the competencies for a grading period or for covering them but not going into the mastery of the subject matter. Hence, the purpose of this study is to enable the development of an intervention that will benefit all struggling teachers and learners during the transitional phase (Melchor, 2020). To address the concerns, challenges, gaps, and problems associated with the use of English as a medium of instruction which began in Grade 4, this study intends to identify the interventions made by the teachers. This study can be used as the foundation for developing teacher training programs on instructional strategies and pedagogies throughout the transitional phase.

Research Questions

The main purpose of the study was to determine the challenges in the Transition from Mother Tongue to English as a medium of Instruction. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following question:

- 1.What are the challenges of the teachers in the transition period from Mother-Tongue Based to English as a medium of Instruction?
- 2.What are the strategies, techniques, and approaches being used?
- 3.What are the different milestones that they achieve when they use these techniques and approaches?
- 4.What is the meaning of their experience?
- 5.What recommendation can be proposed based on the findings of the study?

Literature Review

Language is the vehicle for transmitting the intended message to the receiver plays a key role in unifying a vast and complex notion and provides individuals with outlets for developing diverse skills and abilities (Nath, 2010). Language serves as the bridge to build connections and understanding for both teachers and learners. The literature used in this study provides an understanding of the challenges brought during the transition of teaching from Mother-tongue based to English as a medium of instruction in the intermediate level specifically Grade 4 learners. This study emphasizes the different challenges encountered by the teachers and the strategies, techniques, and approaches they used toward effective learning despite the transition.

Many studies state the positive effects of MTB-MLE implementation. It includes the improvement of academic skills (Cummins, 2000; Thomas & Collier, 1997). There will be stronger classroom participation (Benson, 2005; Dutcher & Tucker, 1996), increased access to education, and strong develop learners' critical thinking skills. It is also stated that multilingual education has effects on cultural pride. According to Cummins (2000) and Dutcher and Tucker, (1996) multilingual education increased parent's participation and increased the achievement of girls (Benson, 2005).

MTB-MLE implementation indeed has many positive effects. However, several studies say otherwise. The study of Piper et al. (2018) showed that the learners assigned to the Mother Tongue group had somewhat lower outcomes in subjects like Mathematics and demonstrated a decline in English literacy level (Namanya, 2017). The transition of the medium of instruction from the mother tongue to English has a negative effect on learners. They have confusion, difficulties, and apprehensions in understanding the content since they were over-attached to their first language which is the MTB. According to Alberto et al. (2010), MTB-MLE may cause adverse effects on children's English literacy that could their lifelong learning and competitiveness.

These articles were collected from the different sources to provide an understanding on how teachers cope with the transition of instruction from Mother-Tongue Based to English at the intermediate level. It also shows how teachers manage the process of the transition period. It is also beneficial to others who want to have additional information on how the teachers faced the problems and challenges met in transitioning pupils with MTB-MLE exposure to English and the strategies to facilitate the transition to English. The result of this study will also suggest inputs to the institutions to be the basis for policy development and to have intensive training to provide authentic measures to ensure learners are properly introduced to English as their medium of instruction and that English as a subject should be reintegrated to the early grade levels.

Methodology

Research Design

This qualitative study utilized the Husserlian Phenomenology research design. The purpose of this study is to explain and investigate the participants' lived experiences about their challenges in the transition from Mother-Tongue Based to English as a medium of instruction. The phenomenon is based on the word – transition. To deliver an in-depth understanding of the teachers' lived experiences, the teachers' transitional journey will be explained. Furthermore, this study addressed the participants' struggles, the strategies and techniques they used in the transition period, and how they can be of great help in sustaining quality education.

Participants

1. Participants must be teaching at any school within the Santander District.
2. The participants must be teaching specifically in Grade 4 as this is the transition period from Mother-Tongue to English as a medium of instruction.
3. Participants could be of any gender.
4. The participants should have been teaching in grade four for more than 4 years.

Instruments

A purposive sampling technique was used in this study in which participants were selected by the researchers to thoroughly elaborate on their experiences as teachers inside the classroom. To provide further information about the qualities of the participants who willingly participated in this study, an inclusion criterion is provided.

Procedure

A letter requesting permission to hold an interview was delivered to all the school heads of Santander District. When the letter request was granted, the participants were provided with a transmittal letter seeking consent to conduct the interview. After receiving the approval from the respondents, scheduled interviews with guide questions are being set on a face-to-face basis. The interviews were recorded with the participant's permission. To analyze the lived experiences and performances of the participants, a structured interview with guide questions is being utilized. The researchers created their questionnaire for the interview that would be reviewed and validated by the experts (Cabello & Bonotan, 2020). To avoid participants' manipulation, appropriate ethics are strictly observed throughout the data-gathering procedure.

Data Analysis

This study applied the 7-step Analysis of Colaizzi's Descriptive Phenomenology. These are transcribing all the subjects' descriptions, extracting significant statements, creating formulated meanings, aggregating formulated meanings into theme clusters, developing an exhaustive description, identifying the fundamental structure of the phenomenon, and returning to participants for validation. (See Table 1. The Analysis [Appendix 1])

Results and Discussion

The following themes were formed through data analysis: Theme 1: The Gap, Theme 2: The Bridge, Theme 3: The Aftermath, and Theme 4: The Triumph.

The Gap

Communication is an important part of human connection because it allows people to convey their thoughts, ideas, and feelings (Miranda & Wahyudin, 2023). To have effective communication, speaking is one of the most essential skills to learn and improve (Crisianita & Mandasari, 2022). A gap can exist between the sender and the recipient in any type of communication. As a result, there may be misunderstandings, confusion, and misinterpretations.

According to participant 3,

"During the transition period from Mother Tongue Based to English as a medium of instruction, there are lots of challenges that I have met and one of them is this, learners are not comfortable speaking in the English language. They feel very awkward in speaking using the English language. Another challenge is, they can't easily understand English, so they need translation."

It is usual for learners to feel embarrassed and uncomfortable while speaking a language they are unfamiliar with, and they may struggle to understand the language without sufficient instruction and support. To fill the gap and assist learners in connecting their past knowledge to the new topics presented in English, translation is required.

Participant 1 clarified that,

"The learners couldn't understand the lessons well if I only use English as a medium of instruction. Learners couldn't express their ideas in English. Since the medium of instruction used in lower levels is mother tongue-based (Cebuano) while English is the language used in the higher levels"

Learners are better at ease speaking in Cebuano, the language of teaching at lower levels, which is their mother tongue. Consequently, they find it difficult to understand the lessons and express their ideas in English.

Participant 5 stated that,

"Some of the challenges that I encountered in the transition period from Mother-Tongue Based to English as a medium of instruction are: 1. Learners are unfamiliar with the English terms/words resulting in poor comprehension; 2. Learners' difficulty and reluctance to speak English in daily conversation even in their class activities; and 3. Poor English comprehension resulting in inadequate cognitive,

linguistic and academic competencies.”

Due to unfamiliarity with the English language and its vocabulary, the learners find it hard to understand the lessons. Thus, they have trouble understanding, processing, and applying information, as well as communicating effectively in English.

Participant 7 said that,

“The transition is challenging since most of my learners do not understand my instructions and I still need to bridge the gap. Bridging is a big help for us to meet halfway or else everything will be useless.”

The transition is really challenging for the teachers and the learners as well, and bridging the gap is essential in meeting the common goal. Both the teachers and the learners should work together to adjust and compromise for effective learning to happen.

The statements of the participants play a major role in understanding the difficulties they face in transitioning from Mother-Tongue to English as a medium of instruction. The transition hurdles, language barriers, poor comprehension, and other pedagogical challenges emerged during the transition. Being aware of how tough to handle these difficulties, teachers still tried with all their means to fill these gaps though it is critical to overcome these gaps so that students can fully understand the teachings and teachers may properly communicate the knowledge.

The Bridge

It is critical to bridge the communication gap between a teacher and a student to create a positive and productive learning environment (Trujillo, 2020). Bridging the gap in this context entails recognizing the points of communication failure and taking steps to improve communication for effective learning.

Participant 7 stated that,

"I used to simplify my words and sentences before giving more complex one, I gave them simple but incomplete sentences and I let them supply the missing word, and sometimes to the point of having a debate even if their sentences seemed to be crooked."

Being exposed to simpler language, being given incomplete phrases, and asked to fill in the missing word, and being encouraged to participate in debates even when their words are imperfect can gradually and continuously develop the language skills of the learners.

Participant 5 said that,

"Some of the routines I do to deal with these challenges are: 1. Daily English words introduction (Word a Day); 2. Encouraging learners to communicate using English; and 3. Listening and reading session during remedial time; I also apply the 10:00 o'clock habit where pupils are given time to speak straight English in 10 minutes."

Implementing routines in class is a big help to bridge the gap and develop the learners' comprehension, vocabulary, and communication skills in English.

Participant 3 mentioned that,

"With the challenges, I as a teacher tried my best to speak in English more often in my class so that if they hear me speaking in English, they will imitate what I do and there's a great chance that they would also be able to acquire this skill in a gradual manner. The opportunity of learning the English language was achieved, and they tend to appreciate the English language."

Leading by example and speaking English frequently in class provides an opportunity for the learners to follow the teacher and slowly learn to speak the language until they come to value and appreciate the English language.

Participant 6 emphasized that,

"Focus on academic language, literacy, and vocabulary; promote classroom interaction using English as a medium of instruction and stimulate higher order thinking skills and use of learning strategies."

The participant highlighted the language used in academic contexts and made sure that the students possessed the literacy and vocabulary abilities required to comprehend and interact with academic content. Additionally, encouraging learners to speak and communicate with each other in English, and engaging them in critical thinking and problem-solving helped achieve more fruitful learning outcomes.

Participant 5

"With those challenges I encountered, I believe that speaking English as a medium of instruction helps the learners to enhance their capability to learn not just in English but also in the other learning areas. English language is a universal language, as a teacher, helping them to develop their English comprehension and communication skills somehow helps them become globally competitive. It is our duty to help learners and encourage them to face their inefficiency in speaking English by using them in their daily conversation. It also provides a solution to every learner who encountered difficulties in speaking English and these results will help them overcome

their difficulties not just in English but also to other academic areas."

Using English as a medium of instruction can help students improve their abilities in areas other than English. Since English is a universal language, assisting students in developing their comprehension and communication skills can help them become more globally competitive. Learners must utilize English in everyday communication to assist them in overcoming challenges and to improve their academic achievement.

This theme *The Bridge*, underlined the strategies, techniques, and approaches utilized by the teachers during transition. This "bridge" can take many forms, including instructional materials and other learning activities, all of which help to improve the learning experience and foster deeper understanding between the teacher and the students. The communication gap can be reduced and the potential for meaningful learning can be fully realized by deploying effective "bridges."

The Aftermath

There are several notable achievements that teachers can achieve after successfully bridging the communication gap between teachers and learners (Perfecto, 2022). These accomplishments include not only the progress of the students but also the growth of the teachers as educators. This topic investigates the achievements that teachers can attain after effectively overcoming the communication gap with their students.

According to participant 3,

"The different milestones that I achieve when using these techniques and approaches are the following: 1. Learners are having improvement in understanding English language.; 2. Their reading ability in English is developed.; 3. They learned more in English grammar.; 4. They can understand better in English at present compared to the past months and days.; 5. There is progress in terms of their pronunciation."

The participant's techniques and approaches have resulted in various positive outcomes for the pupils in terms of English language proficiency. These achievements include improved comprehension of the English language, improved reading skills, an expanded grasp of English grammar, and development in pronunciation.

Participant 2 stated that,

"Learners improved in their comprehension skills, can express ideas during class interaction, and habitually speaks English."

During class interactions, the learners were able to express their ideas which indicates an improvement in their communication skills. Additionally, the use of the English language has become a habit for them, indicating that they become more comfortable and familiar with the language.

Participant 7 mentioned that,

"Despite the difficulty in understanding and expressing themselves using English language, I have witnessed a little development day by day. I believe that everything is just a matter of practice and a gentle push, you just got to believe in the process, and everything will be fine in due time."

In terms of the student's development in learning English, participant 7 was hopeful and remained positive and confident that with constant practice and encouragement, students will eventually improve.

Participant 5 stressed that,

"Some of the things that I considered as my achievements are: 1. I have seen that learners have enhanced their English vocabulary skills; 2. Learners develop their communication skills using English and 3. Learners develop their reasoning skills using the English language as well as enhance their cognitive, linguistic, and academic competencies."

The students were learning new terms and were able to use them accurately. They were able to express themselves in English and can think critically and logically in the language, which improved their cognitive, linguistic, and academic abilities. Participant 5 was overjoyed with the student's progress and growth in learning English language. It was a great achievement for a teacher.

The *Aftermath* theme pointed out the positive outcomes such as improved student learning outcomes of bridging the gap between the teacher and the learners during the transition from mother tongue to English as a medium of instruction. Additionally, effective communication and collaboration between teachers and students can have long-term and far-reaching consequences for both individual students and the greater educational community.

The Triumph

Throughout their careers, teachers encounter numerous significant turning points and accomplishments that not only contribute to their growth but also to the success of their students. When the teachers achieve their objectives, it is the "Triumph".

Participant 1 said that,

"All these challenges made me a better teacher. It made me more learner focused, flexible and patient, of course with proper training, teaching and coaching, giving me and me learners the tools to succeed."

Being positive and motivated and with proper training and coaching, both teachers and learners can be successful in dealing with the challenges inside the classroom.

Participant 7 expressed that,

"It is an overwhelming feeling knowing that as a teacher, I have played a part in their improvement and that my efforts have paid off."

The biggest achievement of a teacher is knowing that his efforts contributed to the improvement of the students and made a positive impact on their lives.

Participant 4

"The challenges I experienced made me a better version of myself. I was able to embrace the struggles and did some intervention to help my learners who were struggling also."

Having a positive attitude towards the difficulties encountered can help the teacher improve as well as the learners and overcome the different challenges inside the classroom.

The Triumph theme highlighted the success of both teachers and the learners and the school. This accomplishment is the conclusion of efforts to close the communication gap between the teacher and the pupils, which has benefited both sides. The Triumph results in a sense of accomplishment and rekindled enthusiasm for teaching.

Conclusion

The teachers' lived experiences in the transition from Mother-Tongue to English as a medium of instruction were never easy. Their struggles and challenges are evident and need to be heard and valued. Transition hurdles, language barriers and difficulties, and poor comprehension were the common challenges in which teachers were able to manage and fill these gaps. Bridging the communication gap is crucial but it doesn't hinder teachers from achieving their goals to help learners improve their language skills and overcome difficulties in the transition. Although the process was difficult, teachers can succeed and reap the rewards of their efforts with perseverance, dedication, and the appropriate resources. Teachers need to keep looking for methods to develop their instructional techniques and adjust to the demands of their students. Additionally, schools and other learning institutions can also give teachers the tools and the training they need to bridge the gap and help students succeed.

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Table 1. *The Analysis*

Significant Statements	Theme Clusters	Emergent Themes
<p><i>"During the transition period from Mother Tongue Based to English as a medium of instruction, there are really lots of challenges that I have met and one of them is this, learners are not comfortable of speaking in English language. They feel very awkward in speaking using English language. Another challenge is, they can't easily understand English, so they need translation."</i> (P3)</p> <p><i>"The learners couldn't understand the lessons well if I only use English as a medium of instruction. Learners couldn't express their ideas in English. Since the medium of instruction used in lower levels is mother tongue based (Cebuano) while English is the language used in the higher levels"</i> (P1)</p> <p><i>"Some of the challenges that I encountered in the transition period from Mother-Tongue Based to English as a medium of instruction are: 1. Learners are unfamiliar with the English terms/words resulting to poor comprehension; 2. Learners' difficulty and reluctant to speak English in daily conversation even in their class activities; and 3. Poor English comprehension resulting to inadequate cognitive, linguistic and academic competences."</i> (P5)</p> <p><i>"The transition is challenging since most of my learners do not understand my instructions and I still need to bridge the gap. Bridging is a big help for us to meet halfway or else everything will be useless."</i> (P7)</p>	<p>Hesitation to Speak & Comprehension Challenges</p> <p>Language barriers exist.</p> <p>Language difficulty</p> <p>Bridging necessary</p>	The Gap
<p><i>"I used to simplify my words and sentences before giving more complex one, I gave them simple but incomplete sentences and I let them supply the missing word, and sometimes to the point of having a debate even if their sentences seemed to be crooked."</i> (P7)</p> <p><i>"Some of the routines I do to deal with these challenges are: 1. Daily English words introduction (Word a Day); 2. Encouraging learners to communicate using English; and 3. Listening and reading session during remedial time; I also apply the 10:00 o'clock habit where pupils are given time to speak straight English in 10 minutes."</i> (P5)</p> <p><i>"With the challenges, I as a teacher try my best to speak in English more often in my class so that If they hear me speaking in English, they will imitate what I do and there's a great chance that they would also be able to acquire this skill in a gradual manner. The opportunity of learning English language was achieved, and they tend to appreciate English language."</i> (P3)</p> <p><i>"Focus on academic language, literacy and vocabulary; promote classroom interaction using English as medium of instruction and stimulate higher order thinking skills and use of learning strategies."</i> (P6)</p> <p><i>"With those challenges I encountered, I believe that speaking English as a medium of instruction helps the learners to enhance their capability to learn not just in English but also to the other learning areas. English language is a universal language, as a teacher, helping them to develop their English comprehension and communication skills somehow helps them become globally competitive. It is our duty to help learners and encourage them to face their inefficiency in speaking English by using</i></p>	<p>Language Simplification Techniques</p> <p>Routines</p> <p>Encouraging English acquisition</p> <p>Academic language promotion</p> <p>English for competitiveness</p>	The Bridge

<p><i>them in their daily conversation. It also provides a solution to every learner who encountered difficulties in speaking English and these results will help them overcome their difficulties not just in English but also to other academic areas." (P5)</i></p>		
<p><i>"The different milestones that I achieve when using these techniques and approaches are the following: 1. Learners are having improvement in understanding English language.; 2. Their reading ability in English is developed.; 3. They learned more in English grammar.; 4. They can understand better in English at present compared to the past months and days.; 5. There is progress in terms of their pronunciation." (P3)</i></p> <p><i>"Learners improved in their comprehension skills, can express ideas during class interaction and habitually speaks English." (P2)</i></p> <p><i>"Despite the difficulty in understanding and expressing themselves using English language, I have witnessed a little development day by day. I believe that everything is just a matter of practice and a gentle push, you just got to believe in the process, and everything will be fine in due time." (P7)</i></p> <p><i>"Some of the things that I considered as my achievements are: 1. I have seen that learners had enhanced their English vocabulary skills; 2. Learners' develop their communication skills using English and 3. Learners develop their reasoning skills using English language as well as enhanced their cognitive, linguistic and academic competences." (P5)</i></p>	<p>Progress in English mastery</p> <p>Improved English proficiency</p> <p>Belief in progress</p> <p>Language achievement highlights</p>	<p>The Aftermath</p>
<p><i>"All these challenges made me a better teacher. It made me more learner focused, flexible and patient, of course with proper training, teaching and coaching, giving me and me learners the tools to succeed." (P1)</i></p> <p><i>"It is an overwhelming feeling knowing that as a teacher, I have played a part of their improvement and that my efforts have paid off." (P7)</i></p> <p><i>"The challenges I experienced made me a better version of myself. I was able to embrace the struggles and did some intervention to help my learners who were struggling also." (P4)</i></p>	<p>Challenges as opportunities</p> <p>Sense of fulfillment</p> <p>Personal growth and resilience</p>	<p>The Triumph</p>