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Huntahan* vocab assessment toward enriching mother tongue-based classroom practices

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Abstract

This two-phase action research examined the profile and knowledge level of Grade III pupils about their knowledge on the distinct local vocabularies in order to formulate enrichment or intervention, to address any deficiency or lack of, and to assess whether such enrichment programs are effective for authentic, localized implementation of the MTB-MLE. The research instruments used in the first phase included survey and vocabulary assessment test. The researchers initially employed descriptive statistics to interpret the result. Majority of the respondents have established residency in Lopez, Quezon for at least four years. All of the pupils speak Tagalog only at home. The first phase of the research revealed that the pupils of Lopez West Elementary School Bldg. 1 performed satisfactorily in the language test. Most of them found that the most difficult words are generally content words. The initial results of this study serve as baseline information implying that the pupils' level of understanding of the Lopezeños words needs enhancement and/or reinforcements; hence, there is an urgent need to implement the 2nd cycle of this action research. The second phase once implemented seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention and/or enrichment activities that may guide language teachers in the conduct of classroom-based, culturally sensitive, contextualized language instruction.

Keywords

first language teaching and learning or mother-tongue based multilingual education, language assessment, vocabulary enrichment

*Huntahan is a local vocabulary, which means casual talk or conversation.

Introduction

Roughly, there are more than 6000 languages used by 6 billion people in the globe—nonetheless, only about 300 are considered majority languages while remaining 5700 languages are being considered as 'minority or local languages'. Local languages have already found a niche in basic education here in the Philippines with the implementation of the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) in the K to 12 Curriculum. Martin (2008), on one hand, argued that even before the legislation of K to 12 was passed, teachers in the public schools across the nation have already been using first language or mother language in teaching basic concepts to school children. In his article, Granali (2013) reported that teachers were hopeful about the new curriculum but admitted that its first year was a struggle because the instructional materials came late and the week-long training was not enough. Nonetheless, Department of Education (DepEd) issued additional guidelines to respond to this adjustment.

Dekker (1999, p. 103), in her paper on the education of children from Kalinga, an ethnolinguistic community in Northern Luzon, comments on the many different experiences and artefacts that confront

children as they enter school: "The first grader is confronted with many things in the school situation that are unfamiliar: the classroom with desks, the flag ceremony, the pictures on the wall representing children from the city and different lifestyles and the textbooks depicting other cultures and, most crucially, even the language used is foreign".

MTB-MLE responds to the scenario posited by Dekker. Much more, the program will also cover the protection and development of minority languages including inclusion of the local languages in the curriculum beginning kindergarten. For this reason, the use and promotion of a local language in schools at the basic education level are required.

UNESCO, from now and then, has strongly rallied that a child should be educated in his or her first language for as long as possible. Unfortunately, this has been a gargantuan task to achieve in many places around the world considering the cost in terms of material production and teacher trainings. The Philippines, with 168 living languages, is within the realm of this macrocosmic educational phenomenon (Dumatog & Dekker, 2003). Responding to the challenge, Dekker and Young (2007) delineate that within the Philippines, language policy makers address the issue on hand by providing multilingual education using the first language of the learners as foundation for quality language education vis-à-vis on meeting the needs of a culturally and linguistically diverse country.

Beginning School Year (SY) 2012-2013, the MTB-MLE has been implemented in all public schools, specifically in Kindergarten, Grades 1, 2 and 3 as part of the K to 12 Basic Education Program (DepEd Order No. 16, 2012). Hence, the MTB-MLE aims to develop the following areas: (1) language development, which establishes a strong education for success in school and for lifelong learning; (2) cognitive development, which focuses on higher order thinking skills (HOTS); (3) academic development, which prepares the learner to acquire mastery of competencies in each of the learning areas; and (4) socio-cultural awareness, which enhances the pride of the learner's heritage, language and culture.

Teaching and learning the first language is not only good for one's local language. Dekker, Duguian, and Walter's paper (2008) on "The bridge to Filipino and English: 3rd year results of the First Language MLE Program in the Philippines" purported the value of Mother Tongue Education in the learning of the second and third languages. Essentially, they concluded that when children learn in their mother tongue their cognitive skills continue to build, enabling greater ability to handle cognitively demanding study and strengthening learning of other languages.

MTB-MLE includes the learning of local vocabularies. How is vocabulary defined? The definition of vocabulary in the Random House Webster's Unabridged Dictionary (Flexner, 2003) is "the stock of words used by or known to a particular people or group of person." *Word* is, subsequently, defined as a unit of language, consisting of one or more spoken sounds or their written representation, that functions as a principal carrier of meaning." In this action research, Lopezeños' vocabularies (vocab), which are considered part of the mother tongue linguistic repertoire of Lopezeños, transcended from the past to the present generations of the town's history, arts and culture. Traditionally, it is the elders' cultural obligations to hand down these language components to their children and to these children's children directly or indirectly at home or elsewhere within the boundaries of this town. Although the mixing of other dialects from other territories has remained a crucial factor to the development of these vocabularies, conservatives believe that it is in formal education that this language could better find its place for nourishment and usage. Once the students are immersed to their native vocabularies, it is more likely that students will further appreciate their culture and tradition (Huntahan Team, 2010).

Ocampo and Hermosa (1997) tag vocabulary or word meaning as one of the most essential components of comprehension. Their learning modules set (heeding Anderson and Freebody 1981 model) three primary views or frameworks on the significance of vocabulary development. These views are instrumentalist, aptitude, and knowledge position. First, the *Instrumentalist* stance states that vocabulary may be viewed as the cause of comprehension no matter how the vocabulary is acquired where vocabulary should be taught directly rather than isolated. Second, the *aptitude position* regards a

good vocabulary as only a demonstration of a quick mind just like in word drills. And lastly, the *knowledge position* claims that good vocabulary and comprehension are products of abundant knowledge about one's environment and culture; hence providing experiences for students to talk and write about the target vocabularies is the key in enhancing such knowledge.

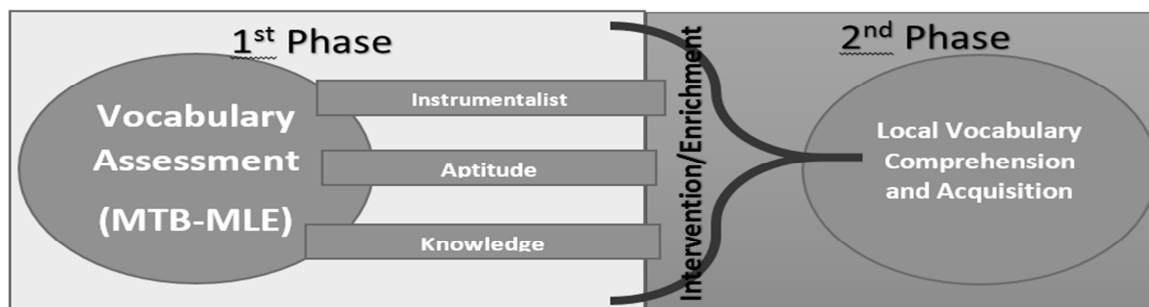


Figure 1: Conceptual and action research operational framework

MTB-MLE, as the integration of local vocabularies in the teaching and language learning of Filipino or Tagalog in relation to their second language, may it be in content subject or the language subject itself is such a fertile soil for action research. In an analysis of vocabulary assessments, Read (2000) identified three continua for designing and evaluating vocabulary assessments: (a) discrete—embedded, (b) selective—comprehensive, and (c) contextualized—decontextualized. At the outset of this action research first cycle, such method of assessment serves as the groundwork. On the other hand, since the MTB instruction covers until Grade 3, incoming Grade 4 pupils were the subjects of this action research to assess how MTB instruction in primary years influenced their vocabulary development. The preceding views, positions, and studies stated in this brief review of literature serves as the backbone of this research. Figure 1 visualizes how this study is framed.

In Lopez, Quezon, the Huntahan Team (2010) of Lopez National Comprehensive High School conducted a community research on its local languages, specifically vocabularies that are still used and some considered dormant. With the Huntahan team's collection of Lopez, Quezon vocabularies as primary reference, the study revealed that on a language test assessment; first year and second year students' generally performed satisfactorily indicating the need for more explicit Lopezenos' language use and instruction in Filipino or Mother-Tongue related subjects. Will this be the same in the case of elementary students exiting primary grades in Lopez, Quezon? So far, little research or no action research has been done to determine the level of awareness and/or knowledge of Grade Three on the distinct Lopez, Quezon vocabularies or language. Thus, this two-phase action research aims to examine the knowledge level of such students, to devise or formulate enrichment or intervention needed to address any deficiency or lack of, and to assess whether such enrichment programs are effective for the relevant and authentic implementation of the MTB-MLE in the promotion of local language in Lopez, Quezon.

Research Questions

In light of the background information and needs assessment to conduct such study, this two-phase action research cycle sought to answer the following:

A. First Cycle

1. What is the profile of grade three pupil- examinees in terms of:
 - 1.2 Length of residency in Lopez, Quezon; and
 - 1.3 Language/s spoken at home;

2. What is the Grade Three pupils' local vocabulary assessment result when they are grouped according to sections or classes?
3. Based on the achievement test, what are the local vocabularies in which pupils find difficulty and ease in understanding?

B. Second Cycle

1. What enrichment language programs or interventions can be applied to enhance pupils learning and use of such language?
2. What are the effects of such programs or interventions to the vocabulary development and literary skills of the pupils?

Methodology and research design

The first cycle of this action research employed quantitative collection and analysis of data. The use of survey questions and test questionnaires that assess the level of vocabulary knowledge of pupils is applied at the onset. Hence, the pupils' performance is defined as the score, which they earned on a teacher-made vocabulary achievement test administered at the end of the school year. On one hand, the second cycle of the study will utilize a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. The study data analysis is based on the action research format proposed by Mills (2000).

Data analysis and interpretation

1st Phase: Based on the review of literature, a language pre-test was constructed by the researchers. The test underwent face and content validation by language experts. Afterward, it was be piloted to a parallel group of students. Item analysis was then be employed. Once the test was validated, the results were subjected to descriptive statistics (mean, mode, range, etc.). Based on the results, 15 most difficult and the 15 familiar words were classified for analysis to respond to the aforementioned research questions.

2nd Phase: After the presentation of the 1st phase results to the concerned teachers, orientation or discussion of the proposed enrichment or literature-based intervention will be done. The representatives of the students' outputs will be critiqued and qualitatively analyzed based on the creative use of the Lopezeño. Post-test will also be given to assess the effect of the intervention. The same descriptive measures will be employed for analysis and interpretation with the combination of qualitative method.

Results and discussions

This part of the paper reports the results of the data analysis and interpretation of the first phase research questions.

A. First Cycle

1. What is the profile of Grade Three pupil- examinees in terms of:
 - 1.1 Length of residency in Lopez; and
 - 1.2 Language/s spoken at home;

The research team was able to cover one hundred seventy Grade Three pupils who were enrolled in Lopez West Elementary School Bldg. 1.

Table 1 shows that a great majority comprising 89% of the pupils have lived in Lopez, Quezon for more than four years. Their parents have established their residency in this municipality. This further illustrates, however that almost 11% of the examinees have transferred in the school for 3 years or less which could be attributed to so many reasons.

Table 2 shows that Tagalog/MT is the only dialect that is used by the Grade Three pupils of Lopez West Elementary School Bldg. One hundred percent of these pupils use this language even at home for they have been used to it since birth. None of them interacts with their family members using English or other variants of language.

Length of Residency	SPED	Panchita	Alitaptap	Subli	Carinosa	Percentage
3 years and below	1	7	3	4	4	11%
4 years and above	32	24	35	29	31	89%
Total	33	31	38	33	35	100%

Table 1: Profile of grade three pupils examinees in terms of length of residency

Language Spoke at Home	SPED	Panchita	Alitaptap	Subli	Carinosa	Percentage
English	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tagalog*	33	31	38	33	35	100%
English and Tagalog	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 2: Profile of grade three pupils examinees in terms of language spoken at home

**first language or mother tongue which is exhibited with the use of local vocabularies*

2. What is the grade three pupils' Lopezeños vocabulary assessment result when they are grouped according to section or classes?

Rank based on Mean by Section	Number of Examinees	Mean	Interpretation	Standard Deviation	Highest Score	Lowest Score
2.1 SPED	33	16.24	Satisfactory	1.48	23	10
2.2 Alitaptap	38	15.57	Satisfactory	2.12	23	9
2.3 Subli	33	14.32	Satisfactory	1.24	24	9
2.4 Panchita	31	12.93	Fair	1.48	21	3
2.5 Carinosa	35	12.14	Fair	2.14	19	6
Overall Mean		14.24	Satisfactory			

Table 3: Mean of every section

Table 3 shows the mean of every section/class with its general average and range of scores. From Three sections garnered scores which are below the median; the researchers could safely generalize that the pupils experienced medium level of difficulty in taking the achievement. Thus, the Grade Three pupils need enhancement. Overall, the pupils of Lopez West Elementary School Bldg. 1 performed satisfactorily. This further indicates that the pupils' level of understanding the Lopezeño words needs some attention and reinforcements by the school involved. Although there are so many factors to consider affecting the outcome of the measurement and evaluation, the researchers recognize that something must be done to improve the level of pupils' understanding of distinct Lopezeño vocabulary.

3. Based on the achievement test, what are the Lopezeños' vocabularies in which the pupils find difficulty and ease in understanding?

Ranked according to the level of difficulty (1 being the most difficult), the items or vocabularies that were drawn from the achievement test scores of higher, middle, and lower level groups of pupils are presented accordingly. Based from the vocabulary items taken from the test, words were ranked according to the level of difficulty. Most of the Grade Three pupils found *kubakob* as the most difficult

word while *nagkukumahog* is the easiest word for them. In general, the most common words classified as most difficult are classified as adjectives, verbs, and nouns respectively.

Conclusion

Majority of the pupils have established residency in Lopez, Quezon over the past 4 years. The researchers looked into this area, because the length of stay in this town may be tantamount to the language exposure of the students although follow up study is deemed necessary. Aside from this factor, the kind of language/s spoken at home may influence the vocabulary acquisition. Pupils' difficulty in comprehending Lopezeño or the local vocabularies may then be attributed to the length of residency in Lopez, Quezon, the language use in school and at home, and in totality—the pupil's individual experiences (Anderson & Freebody, 1981, as adopted by Ocampo & Hermosa, 1997). It is evident that the most of the difficult words are generally content words—adjectives, nouns and verbs. As a rule, pupils who have not been exposed to those words inside and outside the school find difficulty in comprehending their meanings. Thus, the researchers support the role which the environment plays for the learners to experience such vocabularies, which made them to claim that students, whose family members and classroom teachers provide implicit or direct linguistic supports, are at their best advantage for easy word comprehension and acquisition. This research report provides a simple yet meaningful quantitative assessment that will guide language teachers in the conduct of intervention and/or assessment although qualitative research remains to be done for triangulation. Serving as handy baseline information, language teachers may craft differentiated and localized instruction activities that will enhance the development of vocabulary and foster appreciation of one's culture. It is now in the creativity of the language teachers in addressing the gap toward the promotion of multi-lingual and culture-based instruction. At this point, the second phase of this action research awaits implementation.

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