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Research Article

Challenges and Coping Mechanisms of Public Elementary School Teachers in Implementing Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education

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Abstract
This study examines the challenges encountered by public elementary school teachers and the coping mechanisms employed in implementing Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) in the District of Moises Padilla, Schools Division of Negros Occidental, Philippines. A quantitative descriptive-correlational research design was employed, involving 50 public elementary school teachers selected through total enumeration. Data were collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire covering five dimensions of implementation challenges and five categories of coping mechanisms. Descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, weighted mean, and standard deviation, were used to analyze the data, while Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient was employed to examine the relationships between the variables. The findings indicate that teachers experienced a high level of implementation challenges, particularly in addressing learner-related concerns (M = 4.02, SD = 0.70) and curriculum implementation and assessment (M = 4.01, SD = 0.81). Despite these difficulties, teachers reported very high utilization of coping mechanisms, particularly collaboration and support and the use of localized instructional materials (M = 4.57, SD = 0.54). Significant positive relationships were established between the identified challenges and coping mechanisms. No significant differences were found in teachers' assessments when grouped according to demographic and professional characteristics. The study concludes that effective multilingual education requires sustained institutional support, contextualized instructional resources, collaborative professional development, and responsive classroom practices. Educational administrators are encouraged to strengthen teacher support systems and develop targeted interventions addressing multilingual instructional demands.

Keywords
multilingual education; teacher challenges; coping strategies; instructional resources; elementary education

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This study was conducted in accordance with ethical standards.

INTRODUCTION

Language serves as a fundamental medium through which learners develop literacy, construct conceptual understanding, participate in classroom interactions, and acquire academic competencies. In multilingual educational environments, the language of instruction significantly influences learners' access to knowledge, their ability to communicate ideas, and their engagement in the learning process. Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) has consequently been recognized as an educational approach that promotes inclusive and meaningful learning by utilizing learners' first language as a medium of instruction, particularly during the foundational years of education. International educational perspectives emphasize that children are more likely to understand instructional content when teaching is delivered in a language they understand, thereby supporting literacy acquisition, conceptual development, and equitable educational participation (UNESCO, 2016). Similarly, multilingual education emphasizes the importance of recognizing learners' linguistic resources and building connections between their first language and additional languages to facilitate academic development

(Cummins, 2021). However, the effectiveness of mother tongue instruction depends not only on language policy but also on teachers' competencies, instructional approaches, availability of appropriate learning resources, and institutional support. The integration of mother tongue instruction with additional language development also requires pedagogically appropriate bridging strategies to ensure continuity in learners' language acquisition and academic progression (Perfecto, 2022).

In the Philippines, MTB-MLE was institutionalized through Department of Education Order No. 74, s. 2009, and subsequently integrated into the K to 12 Basic Education Program under Republic Act No. 10533. Its implementation involved the development of localized instructional materials, teacher training, curriculum adaptation, and community participation. Nevertheless, implementing the policy across linguistically and culturally diverse communities has presented considerable challenges. Research on Philippine language-in-education policies has identified differences between policy intentions and stakeholders' experiences, particularly concerning the appropriateness and practical implementation of mother tongue instruction (Adriano et al., 2021). Similarly, studies examining teachers' perspectives have documented difficulties associated with linguistic diversity, teachers' language proficiency, instructional materials, and the delivery of lessons in multilingual classrooms (Atong & Ventura-Escote, 2023; Cirilo, 2024). These concerns are further reflected in research on the implementation of MTB-MLE in linguistically diverse Philippine settings, which emphasizes the difficulties of matching instructional languages with the actual linguistic backgrounds of learners and teachers (Metila et al., 2016). Moreover, the implementation of the program has required sustained institutional preparation and monitoring, as demonstrated by the Philippine Institute for Development Studies' evaluation of MTB-MLE implementation processes (Monje et al., 2021). These findings suggest that successful implementation requires continuous attention to the relationship between educational policy, classroom realities, and the resources available to teachers. The challenges associated with MTB-MLE become particularly evident in public elementary schools, where teachers must address variations in learners' linguistic backgrounds, learning readiness, and levels of comprehension. The availability of instructional materials, teachers' familiarity with the prescribed mother tongue, and the linguistic composition of classrooms can influence the consistency and effectiveness of instructional delivery. These concerns became more pronounced during the COVID-19 pandemic, when teachers encountered additional difficulties in preparing and delivering mother tongue-based instruction under alternative learning arrangements (Aguasan et al., 2023). Similarly, the experiences of non-Chavacano pre-service teachers demonstrate how differences between teachers' linguistic competencies and the language requirements of MTB-MLE can create difficulties in instructional preparation and classroom application (Bonifacio et al., 2024). These challenges highlight the importance of teacher adaptability, professional confidence, and the ability to employ appropriate instructional strategies. Teachers' beliefs about their capacity to organize and execute instructional activities are particularly relevant because teacher efficacy influences their persistence, instructional decisions, and responses to classroom challenges (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). Furthermore, motivation and social cognitive processes help explain how individuals develop and sustain adaptive behaviors when confronted with demanding professional responsibilities (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). Beyond classroom instruction, parental participation and community engagement may also contribute to the responsiveness and sustainability of educational initiatives. Research emphasizes that parental involvement extends beyond assistance with academic activities and includes broader forms of participation that support learners' educational experiences (Cariaga & Gerodias, 2025). Similarly, culturally responsive and inclusive approaches to parental engagement are important in addressing differences in community circumstances and educational participation (Cariaga et al., 2025). The sustainability of parental participation in school governance further highlights the importance of collaborative structures in supporting educational quality (Cubero & Cariaga, 2026), while instructional leadership plays a significant role in maintaining institutional direction, supporting teachers, and strengthening educational improvement initiatives (El Halaissi & Cariaga, 2026).

Although previous studies have examined MTB-MLE implementation, teachers' experiences, linguistic challenges, and stakeholder perceptions, further investigation is necessary to understand how specific implementation challenges relate to the coping mechanisms employed by public elementary school teachers in particular educational contexts. Existing literature has established that linguistic diversity, instructional resource limitations, teacher preparedness, and institutional conditions influence the implementation of mother tongue instruction (Adriano et al., 2021; Atong & Ventura-Escote, 2023; Burton, 2013; Metila et al., 2016; Monje et al., 2021). Other studies have explored challenges arising from alternative instructional arrangements and differences in teachers' linguistic backgrounds (Aguasan et al., 2023; Bonifacio et al., 2024; Cirilo, 2024). However, a contextual and empirical gap remains concerning the extent to which the different dimensions of MTB-MLE implementation challenges are associated with teachers' coping mechanisms, particularly their instructional adaptation, professional development, collaboration, utilization of localized instructional materials, and integration of technology. Addressing this gap is important because identifying implementation difficulties alone does not sufficiently explain how teachers respond to these challenges or which adaptive practices may require additional institutional support. A context-specific examination can therefore provide a clearer understanding of the relationship between implementation conditions and teachers' professional responses.

In response to these concerns, this study examines the challenges encountered and coping mechanisms employed by 50 public elementary school teachers in the District of Moises Padilla, Schools Division of Negros Occidental. Specifically, it investigates the demographic characteristics of the participating teachers, the level of challenges encountered in implementing MTB-MLE, the extent of coping mechanisms employed, and the relationship between implementation challenges and coping mechanisms. Anchored in the understanding that effective multilingual education requires alignment among linguistic resources, teacher competencies, instructional practices, and institutional support, the study seeks to generate localized empirical evidence that can inform teacher professional development, instructional resource planning, school-based interventions, and educational management. Its findings may also contribute to strengthening collaborative

practices among teachers, school administrators, parents, and other educational stakeholders in promoting inclusive and culturally responsive instruction. Methodologically, the investigation adopts a systematic approach to examining the relationships among the identified variables, consistent with established principles of quantitative and educational research design (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Nevertheless, the study is limited to one school district and relies on self-reported questionnaire responses; thus, its findings should be interpreted within the characteristics of the participating teachers and the specific research setting. By examining both implementation challenges and teachers' corresponding coping mechanisms, the study contributes context-specific evidence that may support more responsive and sustainable MTB-MLE implementation in Philippine public elementary schools.

METHODOLOGY

Design

The study employed a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design to determine the challenges encountered by teachers and the coping mechanisms they employed in implementing MTB-MLE. The descriptive component characterized the respondents and measured the levels of the study variables, while the correlational component examined the statistical associations between implementation challenges and coping mechanisms. This design was appropriate because the study examined naturally occurring experiences without manipulating the research variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

Locale and Participants

The research was conducted in the Department of Education District of Moises Padilla, under the Schools Division of Negros Occidental, Philippines. The investigation focused on public elementary school teachers with experience in implementing MTB-MLE. The respondents consisted of 50 public elementary school teachers from the District of Moises Padilla. Total enumeration sampling was employed to include all qualified teachers identified as members of the study population. Respondents represented different age groups, educational backgrounds, teaching experience levels, and grade assignments.

Instrument

Data were collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire based on the research objectives, related literature, and relevant Department of Education policies. The instrument measured two principal variables. The first variable, implementation challenges, covered instructional materials and learning resources, language proficiency and competency, learner-related challenges, parental and community support, and curriculum implementation and assessment. The second variable, coping mechanisms, covered instructional adaptation, professional development, collaboration and peer support, utilization of localized instructional materials, and technology integration. The questionnaire also collected demographic information concerning age, sex, highest educational attainment, years of teaching experience, and grade level taught.

Validity and Reliability

The questionnaire underwent content and face validation by experts in educational research, language education, curriculum and instruction, and research methodology. The validators assessed the relevance, clarity, coherence, and adequacy of the items. The instrument was subsequently revised based on their recommendations. A pilot test involving 30 public elementary school teachers from another district in the Schools Division of Negros Occidental was conducted. Cronbach's alpha was identified as the measure of internal consistency.

Collection

Permission to conduct the study was requested through the appropriate Schools Division and district authorities. After authorization, the researcher coordinated with school heads regarding survey administration. Respondents were informed about the research objectives, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and their rights as participants. Informed consent was obtained before questionnaire administration. Completed questionnaires were retrieved, checked, encoded, and prepared for statistical analysis.

Analysis

Frequency counts and percentage distributions were used to describe the demographic characteristics of respondents. Weighted means and standard deviations were used to determine the levels of implementation challenges and coping mechanisms. Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient was used to examine the relationships between the challenge dimensions and coping mechanisms. Analysis of variance and independent-samples t-tests were also used to examine differences in respondents' assessments according to demographic and professional characteristics. Statistical analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Ethical Considerations

The research procedure provided for voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, and responsible handling of questionnaire responses. Formal authorization was sought from the relevant educational authorities.

Limitations and Rigor

The study was limited to 50 teachers from one district, which restricts the generalizability of the findings to other educational settings. The use of self-reported questionnaire responses may also introduce response bias. Instrument validation and pilot testing were undertaken to strengthen measurement quality.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study involved 50 public elementary school teachers whose demographic characteristics included age, sex, educational attainment, teaching experience, and grade level taught. Table 1 presents their distribution. The largest age group consisted of teachers aged 30–39 years, followed by those aged 40–49 years. Female teachers represented nearly all respondents. In terms of educational attainment, most participants had completed bachelor's degrees with master's units, suggesting that a considerable proportion had pursued graduate-level studies. Teachers with 11–15 years of experience constituted the largest professional group. Regarding grade assignment, most respondents taught Kindergarten to Grade 3.

This distribution is particularly relevant because these grade levels were directly associated with the earlier implementation of MTB-MLE. Nevertheless, the limited representation of male teachers and Grade 6 teachers should be considered when interpreting the demographic profile.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of the Respondents (N = 50)

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	20–29 years	3	6.0
	30–39 years	17	34.0
	40–49 years	16	32.0
	50 years and above	14	28.0
Sex	Male	1	2.0
	Female	49	98.0
Educational attainment	Bachelor's degree	14	28.0
	Bachelor's degree with master's units	33	66.0
	Master's degree	3	6.0
Teaching experience	1–5 years	8	16.0
	6–10 years	8	16.0
	11–15 years	15	30.0
	16–20 years	7	14.0
	21 years and above	12	24.0
Grade level taught	Kindergarten	9	18.0
	Grade 1	13	26.0
	Grade 2	13	26.0
	Grade 3	14	28.0
	Grade 6	1	2.0

Note. Percentages are based on the total number of respondents.

The study examined five dimensions of implementation challenges. Table 2 presents the descriptive results. The findings indicate that teachers experienced high levels of challenges across all five dimensions. Learner-related challenges received the highest mean, suggesting that differences in linguistic readiness, comprehension, participation, and learning needs were among the most pronounced concerns in classroom implementation. Curriculum implementation and assessment ranked second, highlighting the difficulty of translating instructional requirements into appropriate classroom practices and assessment procedures. Parental and community support also emerged as an important concern. This suggests that effective multilingual instruction requires cooperation beyond the classroom, particularly when families have differing expectations regarding the language of instruction. Instructional materials and resources remained another considerable challenge, reflecting the need for accessible and contextually appropriate teaching materials. Language proficiency and competency obtained the lowest mean among the five dimensions, although its interpretation remained high. This indicates that teachers also encountered language-related concerns when delivering instruction through the prescribed mother tongue. These findings are consistent with the implementation concerns discussed in previous Philippine research, particularly those involving resource availability, teacher preparedness, linguistic diversity, and stakeholder participation (Adriano et al., 2021; Atong & Ventura-Escote, 2023; Burton, 2013). The results emphasize the need for coordinated institutional support rather than dependence on individual teacher initiatives.

Table 2. Level of Challenges Encountered by Teachers in Implementing MTB-MLE

Dimensions	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Instructional materials and resources	3.92	0.76	High
Language proficiency and competency	3.86	0.82	High
Learner-related challenges	4.02	0.70	High
Parental and community support	3.99	0.84	High
Curriculum implementation and assessment	4.01	0.81	High

The study also assessed the extent to which teachers employed different coping mechanisms in implementing MTB-MLE. As presented in Table 3, all five coping mechanisms received very high ratings. Collaboration and support and the utilization of localized instructional materials obtained the highest mean scores, followed closely by instructional adaptation. This finding suggests that teachers frequently modified their teaching strategies and classroom activities to address implementation difficulties. Such practices highlight the importance of collaborative professional practices and context-responsive instructional resources in multilingual classrooms (Atong & Ventura-Escote, 2023; Metila et al., 2016).

Technology integration also received a very high rating, indicating that teachers utilized available technological resources to support instructional delivery. Professional development, although obtaining the lowest mean among the five coping dimensions, was likewise rated very high. These findings suggest that teachers employed multiple and complementary strategies to address the demands of multilingual instruction. Collaboration provided opportunities for exchanging experiences and instructional practices, while localized learning materials helped establish connections between lessons and learners' linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Similarly, instructional adaptation enabled teachers to respond to differences in learners' comprehension and classroom readiness (Aguasan et al., 2023; Bonifacio et al., 2024). Overall, the findings emphasize that effective implementation of MTB-MLE requires sustained teacher preparation, institutional support, and instructional practices responsive to learners' linguistic backgrounds (Adriano et al., 2021; Monje et al., 2021). Schools

should therefore institutionalize opportunities for collaborative planning, localized instructional material development, and continuous professional learning. Strengthening instructional leadership may further support these initiatives and promote the sustainability of school-based improvement practices (El Halaissi & Cariaga, 2026).

Table 3. Coping Mechanisms Employed by Teachers in Implementing MTB-MLE

Coping mechanisms	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Instructional adaptation	4.55	0.51	Very High
Professional development	4.52	0.58	Very High
Collaboration and support	4.57	0.54	Very High
Utilization of localized instructional materials	4.57	0.54	Very High
Technology integration	4.53	0.49	Very High

Pearson's product-moment correlation analysis was conducted to determine the relationships between the five dimensions of implementation challenges and the five categories of coping mechanisms. Table 4 presents the correlation coefficients and their corresponding significance levels. The results indicate positive and statistically significant associations between the identified challenge dimensions and coping mechanisms. The strongest reported association was between instructional materials and resources and professional development ($r = .632$, $p = .010$). Similarly, curriculum implementation and assessment were positively associated with instructional adaptation ($r = .604$, $p < .001$). These findings suggest that higher levels of perceived implementation challenges tended to correspond with greater utilization of coping mechanisms among teachers. The observed relationships may reflect teachers' efforts to respond proactively to the instructional demands associated with multilingual education. For instance, difficulties in accessing appropriate instructional materials may encourage teachers to pursue professional learning opportunities and collaborate in developing localized resources. Likewise, challenges in curriculum implementation and assessment may be associated with increased instructional adaptation as teachers modify learning activities to accommodate learners' varying linguistic backgrounds, comprehension levels, and educational needs. These responses highlight the importance of teacher adaptability and institutional support in addressing the practical demands of MTB-MLE (Atong & Ventura-Escote, 2023; Bonifacio et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, the correlational nature of the study does not establish causal relationships between implementation challenges and coping mechanisms. The findings demonstrate statistical associations rather than evidence that the challenges directly cause teachers to adopt particular coping practices. The results should therefore be interpreted in terms of the observed relationships within the specific research context. The findings underscore the need to establish sustainable institutional mechanisms that strengthen teachers' capacity to implement multilingual education. School administrators and educational authorities should prioritize continuous professional development, collaborative instructional planning, the provision of accessible and localized learning resources, appropriate technology integration, and stronger community engagement. These initiatives may help reduce teachers' dependence on individual coping efforts while promoting more consistent and responsive instructional support. Strengthening school-based collaboration and instructional leadership may further contribute to the sustainability of these initiatives (El Halaissi & Cariaga, 2026).

Table 4. Correlations Between Implementation Challenges and Coping Mechanisms

Challenge dimension	Instructional adaptation	Professional development	Collaboration and support	Localized materials	Technology integration
Instructional materials and resources	.533***	.632**	.281***	.281*	.384**
Language proficiency and competency	.488***	.468**	.382**	.382**	.533***
Learner-related challenges	.478***	.355*	.329*	.329*	.408**
Parental and community support	.595***	.505***	.448**	.448**	.538***
Curriculum implementation and assessment	.604***	.466**	.400**	.400**	.439**

Note. Values are Pearson correlation coefficients (r).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that public elementary school teachers in the District of Moises Padilla experienced a high level of challenges in implementing Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE), particularly in addressing learner-related concerns and curriculum implementation and assessment. Despite these difficulties, teachers demonstrated a very high level of utilization of coping mechanisms, particularly collaboration and support, the development and use of localized instructional materials, and instructional adaptation. Furthermore, the findings established significant positive relationships between the challenges encountered and the coping mechanisms employed, indicating that teachers' use of adaptive strategies was associated with the demands of multilingual instruction. No significant differences were observed in teachers' assessments when grouped according to their demographic and professional characteristics. These findings highlight the importance of strengthening institutional support systems to ensure that teachers are adequately equipped to address the instructional, linguistic, and contextual demands of multilingual education.

Based on these findings, the Department of Education and school administrators are encouraged to strengthen professional development programs, provide adequate and linguistically appropriate instructional materials, and institutionalize collaborative activities such as Learning Action Cell sessions, peer mentoring, and instructional planning. Teachers should be supported in developing localized learning resources, adapting instructional strategies, and integrating appropriate technologies to address learners' diverse needs. Furthermore, stronger partnerships among schools, parents,

and community stakeholders should be established to promote meaningful participation in multilingual education initiatives. Curriculum developers and teacher education institutions should incorporate context-responsive multilingual teaching approaches into instructional programs. Future researchers are encouraged to conduct similar investigations involving larger samples and multiple school divisions and to employ qualitative or mixed-methods approaches to obtain deeper insights into teachers' experiences and the effectiveness of institutional interventions.

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